

Macron Takes Advantage of Explosion to “Conquer Lebanon”

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Global Research, August 10, 2020

Region: [Europe](#), [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [Intelligence](#)

All relevant events on the international stage have some geopolitical effects. Terrorist attacks, natural catastrophes, accidents and other tragedies also have implications for the power game between nations. In fact, any atypical event can completely change the way of relations between states and generate major political, economic and diplomatic crises. The global pandemic of the new coronavirus itself is an example of how major tragedies can influence geopolitics and international relations. Now, with the recent explosion in Lebanon, we have a new example that tragedies can bring profound political and geopolitical changes.

The explosion in Beirut has generated many questions and controversies worldwide. While several experts are investigating the causes of the accident and thinking alternative explanations to the official reports, the political effects of the explosion are going unnoticed. The accident generated several immediate reactions, justifying protests across the country and international mobilizations. Currently, Beirut is experiencing a great wave of demonstrations that are supported by foreign states with an interest in Lebanese politics. In fact, the explosion has accelerated the creation of a scenario of political and social instability and collective dissatisfaction, where the possibilities are many and virtually any change is possible.

A curious detail in the current situation in Lebanon is the foreign attempt to influence national policy, taking advantage of the effects generated by the explosion, with great emphasis on the incursions promoted by France. French President Emmanuel Macron was one of the first heads of state to show his solidarity with Lebanon after the accident. Macron traveled to Lebanon almost immediately after the attack, aiming not only to show solidarity, but to show signs of binational cooperation for the Lebanese recovery. However, this “cooperation” soon proved to be a real attempt to violate Lebanon’s sovereignty and to impose interests and agendas.

Macron is an interesting character for his skills as head of state. His strategic intelligence and ability to predict results are notorious. Since the beginning of his mandate, Macron has maintained a conciliatory discourse in relation to the Middle East and specifically Lebanon, seeking proposals for international cooperation and mutual support, however, demanding, in return, democratic political reforms in the country. Macron does not try to approach Lebanon without reason: France has historical ties to the country. With the dismantling of the Ottoman Empire, the League of Nations – the UN’s precursor international organization – imposed on France the duty to administer and build Lebanon as a country. Due to the years of strong presence in Lebanon, a considerable part of the population continues to have strong ties with the European country, mainly the Christian portion of the population (almost 40% of the Lebanese population), who sees the western nation as an ally within a region of

Islamic majority. As a result, many Lebanese, especially among economic elites, tend to see France as a possible ally for their country – something that Macron will certainly explore in his favor.

When visiting Beirut, Macron called for an international mobilization to send financial and humanitarian support for Lebanon but demanded the implementation of several reforms in the country. The French president announced that a major investigation will be launched to ascertain possible negligence by the Lebanese state, which would make it “responsible” for the tragedy. According to Macron, France has demanded several reforms in Lebanon for years that have not been carried out. Macron believes that if these reforms had been carried out, the explosion could have been prevented.

Immediately after Macron arrived in Lebanon, a part of the pro-French Lebanese community initiated an online petition demanding that Lebanon undergo French intervention and remain under Paris’ rule for the next ten years. Despite the absurd and almost impractical content, the petition already counts more than 60,000 signatures, which shows the popular strength willing to support Emmanuel Macron’s neocolonialist plans. In fact, while Macron demands changes in Lebanon, a national economic elite sees the approach to Europe as a way of protection and development, leading an online movement for French sovereignty in their own country. On the other hand, protests in the country are increasing in size and reaching a worrying stage of violence, with official government buildings being invaded and public peace disrupted incessantly.

Protesters demand, among other things, an end to corruption and the same as Macron: reforms. Lebanon has been suffering for a long time with several popular demonstrations, but immediately after the explosion the intensity of the protests increased profoundly, driven mainly by the state’s blame speech, which seems to be a weak and unconditional rhetoric. After all, what evidence does the French government or the demonstrators have to conclude that something as abstract as “corruption” (a problem that exists in all National States) or the “lack of reforms” were in fact responsible for the explosion that destroyed the Lebanese economy? Still, in a time of humanitarian crisis and national emergency, is it ethical to endorse an anti-government discourse on the international stage driven simply by French interests in the country? Are these demonstrators acting in collusion with French interests in Lebanon? Is Lebanon undergoing a colorful revolution?

In fact, Lebanon was not chosen by France because of its “historical ties”, but because of its extreme strategic importance in the Middle East. The country was considered the safest in the region, being sometimes called “Arab Switzerland”, enjoying great economic stability. In addition, Lebanon is an important player in the geopolitical balance of the Middle East, mainly because of its historic and frontal opposition to the Israeli Army. Indeed, for the West, Lebanon is an important country to be controlled. What France is doing is simply taking the lead in the quest to influence Lebanon.

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This article was originally published on [InfoBrics](#).

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