**Forcing action in Lebanon**

**More fundam-ental transfor-mations will be needed to end the corrosive impact of sectarian-ism and corruption.**

**[Dr James J Zogby](https://www.nation.com.pk/columnist/dr-james-j-zogby)**

February 21, 2023

Several weeks ago, I wrote an article outlining a radi­cal proposal Ralph Nader and I put forward for discus­sion. The proposal called on Lebanon’s civil society to petition the United Nations to declare Lebanon a Chapter VII “failed state” requiring international intervention. Many readers commented favourably on the idea. Others thought the idea worth considering but be­lieved that it would never pass the Security Coun­cil. The point of the proposal, however, was not to present a fait accompli, but rather to spur exactly the type of discussion that ensued.

What’s clear is that Lebanon is broken, its people suffering, its governing institutions not functioning, and its traditional leadership incapable of meeting the country’s challenges. Evidence of this dysfunction is the failure of Leba­non’s Parliament to elect a president for the past four months.

In the face of this paralysis, a courageous and important step has been taken by some newly elected members of the Lebanese Parliament in their fourth week of a protest sit-in in Beirut’s parliament building. Led by Najat Saliba and Melhem Khalaf, two of the independent “Forces of Change” group of newly electeds, the protesters are calling on their colleagues to convene and fulfil their responsibility to elect a president so at least a semblance of a functioning govern­ment can be formed.

[PM to chair federal cabinet meeting](https://www.nation.com.pk/22-Feb-2023/pm-to-chair-federal-cabinet-meeting)

It’s important to acknowledge that seating a president and cabinet is at best a short-term fix that will not solve Lebanon’s multi-layered crises. At the same time, the MPs’ decision to sit in deserves support because it shines a light on the dysfunctional mess created by the sectarian cliques controlling the Parliament. By focusing on petty agen­das instead of national interests, these powerful sectarian elites have led the country to ruin.

In a letter appealing for support, MPs Saliba and Khalaf list­ed some of the unaddressed hardships confronting the Leb­anese people, particularly those brought on by the country’s economic collapse. Given the steady erosion of the Lebanese currency’s value, Lebanon’s average monthly income has plummeted from $450 to $10. As a result, almost 75 percent of the population are living in poverty. Three hundred thousand children are without schools. Patients with serious illnesses are without medical care or essential medications. And most damning, they write, “Cholera is spreading, 90 percent of the water supply is polluted, and over one million families cannot afford fuel.” This nightmare is the reality in the country whose capital was once heralded as the “Paris of the Middle East.”

[Mainly dry weather expected in most parts of country](https://www.nation.com.pk/22-Feb-2023/mainly-dry-weather-expected-in-most-parts-of-country)

In the face of this catastrophe and governing vacuum, the Lebanese Parliament has met 11 times since October and failed in its basic constitutional duty to elect a president. Some members of Parliament have approached their respon­sibility seriously and simply disagreed on the right candidate to support. Others have been purely obstructionist, preferring paralysis to electing a president who won’t protect their parti­san group’s corrupt control over ministries and budgets.

This inaction and obstruction have resulted in almost four months without a president or cabinet, no government minis­tries to implement policies, and the Parliament unable to pass laws. No authority can negotiate with international institu­tions for loans or grants to fund needed revenues and services. And members of Parliament cannot enact reforms to protect basic rights, address income inequality, ensure accountability for crimes against the Lebanese people, or challenge the en­demic corruption at the heart of the Lebanese dilemma.

[In year of war, US gives Ukraine $30B worth of weapons](https://www.nation.com.pk/22-Feb-2023/in-year-of-war-us-gives-ukraine-dollar-30b-worth-of-weapons)

That’s why, since January 19th, Saliba and Khalaf have been sitting-in, to force parliamentary compliance with the constitutional requirement to remain in open session until a president is chosen. They deserve support for their coura­geous challenge. A new president won’t solve Lebanon’s cri­sis—a far deeper problem than can be remedied by a new face at the helm. Rather, the formation of a government could help alleviate the hardships facing the long-suffering Leba­nese people. This protest action also exposes the dysfunc­tional state of the political system and empowers the newly elected independent reformists whose numbers must grow if Lebanon is to change. In the end, more fundamental trans­formations will be needed to end the corrosive impact of sec­tarianism and corruption, but this direct action by a handful of reformists is a first step on the long road forward

[Russia suspends its participation in New START nuclear arms treaty](https://www.nation.com.pk/22-Feb-2023/russia-suspends-its-participation-in-new-start-nuclear-arms-treaty)

Dr. James J. Zogby

The writer is the President of Arab American Institute.