Currently, Lebanon is going through a difficult political crisis. Over the course of the past several months, members of the Lebanese Parliament cannot agree on the nomination of the President, the date to carry out a vote has been repeatedly postponed. And thus, the office of the president has been vacant since May 25. The problem is further complicated by the fact that all Lebanese political parties, in one way or another, are oriented to cooperate with one of the great powers. Thus, the Catholic Maronites are traditionally supported by France, whereas Shiite groups are supported by Iran, and the Sunnis by Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Qatar. It is quite natural for these countries to support a Lebanese party, and in doing so hope to achieve a position of dominant influence in Lebanon.

At the end of July, the Speaker of the Lebanese Parliament, Nabih Berri put off presidential elections for the ninth time, the Lebanese TV channel, LBC informs. Elections were postponed due to the absence of 59 legislators, and so the next attempt to elect a president is scheduled for August 12. It worth remembering that in order for the first round of elections to take place, one of the candidates in a secret ballot must gain two-thirds of the vote from deputies of the 128 seat local parliament; that is at least 86 elected deputies.

Under the constitution, the president of Lebanon can only be a Maronite Christian, elected by the parliament. Maronites belong to the Catholic Church and the majority of their population resides within Lebanon; followers of this particular religious group account for about 25% of the total population in the country.

As of May 24, 2014, the presidential term of Michel Suleiman expired, and since that date the office of the president has remained vacant. A previous attempt by parliament to elect a head of state was made on July 2, but it also failed due to the absence of legislators.

Moreover, the situation is exacerbated by conditions around the city of Arsal on the Lebanese-Syrian border. The district of Arsal, as the Lebanese media reports, is considered a rear base for extremists, and from here militants move in the direction of Damascus and Homs. In this area of the Lebanese-Syrian border, both the Lebanese and Syrian armies have repeatedly carried out operations in order to rid it of militants. Particularly fierce fighting began on August 2 between the Lebanese army and militants groups of “Dzhebhat en-Nusra” and the “Islamic State”, as well as with other groups after a few militants were arrested by the military in an area close to the town; among those arrested included the field commander, Imad Ahmed Jumaa. Angered by the arrest, fellow Islamists attacked checkpoints and attempted to infiltrate Arsal, but the army managed to repulse the attack and return all positions under its control. The commander of the Lebanese army in an interview with the newspaper, Al-Mustaqbal, said that the arrested warlord was preparing a major operation against the Lebanese army, and they “managed to put an end to his criminal plans”. At the same time, the Lebanese military command in a communique warned that “the army will not allow the conflict to move from Syria into Lebanon, and its answer will be the toughest and most decisive. Lebanon will not become an arena for crimes, terrorist attacks, killings and kidnapping”.

During the jihadist attack on Arsal, as per military estimates, 16 Lebanese soldiers were killed and 85 wounded. Another 22 soldiers were missing and are believed to be captured. There were also three civilians killed in the fighting and dozens of militants. In addition, it is known that the militants arrested 20 police officers. The newspaper Al-Anwar reported that three of them were later released, but negotiations for the liberation of the remaining police
officers continue. According to the TV channel, Al-Jadid, there are about 2500 armed men fighting in opposition forces near the Lebanese-Syrian border. Among them are not only militants of “Dzhebhat en-Nusra”, “Islamic Front”, “Free Syrian Army”, but also fighters of the “Islamic State”, a Sunni extremist organization that has captured a wide area of territory in eastern Syria and in neighboring Iraq.

The Lebanese government, which is headed by a moderate Sunni, Tammam Salam, said the all the countries forces will be mobilized in order to deal with the Sunni radicals. The Lebanese Prime Minister, Mr. Salam believes that there is no political solution to the problem of extremists who are interfering in Arab society under hostile religious slogans and dreaming of expanding its influence in Lebanon. The UN Security Council, concerned about the tense situation, on August 4, supported Lebanon in its fight against the militants in order to preserve national unity. “The members of the Security Council expressed support for the efforts of the Lebanese armed forces and internal security forces in their fight against the terrorists and in preventing attempts to undermine stability in Lebanon. It also confirmed the need for further efforts to increase the combat capability of the Lebanese security forces in order to combat terrorism and address other security issues”, said in a special statement by the international organization for Lebanon. However, the UN warned Beirut from further entanglement in the Syrian conflict and called for the country’s leaders to “refrain from any involvement”. Experts point to a large number of Syrian refugees, which now number about one million that is already making a difficult situation in Lebanon worse and contributing to the destabilization. Refugee camps become a breeding ground for extremists, who recruit mercenaries to carry out terrorist acts in Syria. In addition, one of the main consequences of the influx of Syrian refugees has been a significant increase in the proportion of the Sunni population of Lebanon, which violates the sectarian balance. In this case, one of the main political forces in Lebanon, the Shiite movement of “Hezbollah” opposes the Syrian camp fearing that they will turn into centers of resistance to government forces in Syria. A positive moment in such difficult conditions, according to many political analysts, was the return to the country of the head of a national unity government and the leader of “Al-Mustaqbal” movement, Saad Hariri. His appearance in Beirut after more than a three-year absence is more than likely due to the situation on the Lebanese-Syrian border and the attacks on the city of Arsal by gangs of armed extremists. According to local analysts, it is a serious threat hanging over Lebanon due to the fact that the Syrian conflict has begun spilling over and having an effect on the territory of Lebanon, prompting a leading Sunni politician to take such a step. The arrival of Saad Hariri from the Saudi city of Jeddah, where he has lived for the last three years for safety reasons, is due to more than just the consolidation of political forces at a critical moment for the country. It is expected that the appearance of the leader of the Sunni community in Beirut will contribute to a break in the deadlock regarding the issue of selecting a candidate to the office of the president. Saad Hariri, while still in Jeddah, had already begun working in the interests of his country. He, in particular, has established excellent relations with the Saudi King, which resulted in the Saudis releasing one billion dollars to the Lebanese Army. French news agency AFP quoted him in a statement on the matter: “King Abdullah has informed me of his generous decision to transfer to the Lebanese army and national security forces financial assistance in the amount of one billion dollars in order to increase their ability in securing the security of Lebanon”. Saudi Arabia is also financing the delivery of French military equipment to Lebanon. In December of last year, Riyadh agreed to provide three billion dollars for that purpose. In mid-June, the international conference in Rome agreed to support Beirut. However, up until now, it remains uncertain how that support will be expressed, as per the site Middle East Online.

Chief of Staff of the Lebanese Army, Jean Kahwaji, urgently appealed to his colleagues from France to accelerate the delivery of weapons which have been paid for by Saudi Arabia. In turn, the Saudi King called the former President of Lebanon, Michel Suleiman and promised he would do everything possible ensure that France will ship the necessary weapons and ammunition as soon as possible. It is known that a portion of the Saudi funds of the 3 billion dollars has already been transferred by the French defense industry.

For its part, Moscow regrets the current situation not only in Lebanon, but also in neighboring countries, and calls to fight against terrorism and those who take up its cause, directs it or finances it. Russia urges its partners in the international community to carefully and objectively evaluate an extremely dangerous trend that is clearly emerging in Lebanon, Syria and Iraq.

“We call on the international community partners to carefully and objectively evaluate an extremely dangerous trend that is clearly emerging in Syria, Iraq and Lebanon. It is necessary to abandon the practice of double standards and to refrain from taking steps that do not lead to deterrence, but rather to the capacity of terrorist and extremist threats in the turbulent region of the Middle East. Authorities in Damascus, Baghdad and Beirut are facing a common danger, the spread of international terrorism, which does not recognize international borders and seeks to subjugate new territories” the Russian Foreign Ministry said in a statement.
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