Lebanon: The situation is heating up

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
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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