

# France's Macron Furious with Lebanese Politicians, Especially Hezbollah

by Hugh Fitzgerald



**French President Emmanuel Macron** has been to Lebanon twice since the August 4 blast in Beirut. During his last visit, he read the Lebanese politicians the riot act, saying that they had to institute reforms before they could expect any aid from abroad. On September 28, he raged on television against the Lebanese political elite, claiming that they had done nothing, made no effort, to begin that process of reform. He was especially hard on Hezbollah, the terror group that is the most powerful political and military force in Lebanon today. That story of Macron's outburst, and Hezbollah's angry reply, is [here](#).

*Lebanon's Hezbollah terror group rejected criticism from French President Emmanuel Macron on Monday after he panned its political machinations. And it vowed to remain committed to fighting Israel, as the country is paralyzed by its worst economic and financial crisis in decades.*

*Macron on Sunday accused Lebanon's political leaders of "collective betrayal" and choosing "to favor their partisan and individual interests to the general detriment of the country," after the resignation of Lebanon's prime minister-designate Mustapha Adib over the weekend.*

*Adib's resignation was a blow to Macron's efforts to break a dangerous stalemate in the crisis-hit country. Macron assailed the Hezbollah group and the entire Lebanese political class Sunday, and warned of a new civil war if they can't set aside personal and religious interests to unlock international aid and save Lebanon from economic collapse.*

While there is blame to go around for the mismanagement and corruption in Lebanon, most of the blame, as Macron understands, should be placed on Hezbollah. It is Hezbollah that has violently put down the protests of Lebanese people that exploded last October, preventing the forces demanding change to be heard. It is Hezbollah that controls the most important positions in the Lebanese cabinet; even the Maronite President, Michel Aoun, instead of standing up for Christian interests, has become the willing collaborator of Hezbollah.

*Lebanon's two main Shiite parties, Hezbollah and its ally Amal, led by Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri, had insisted on retaining the Finance Ministry in the new government and on naming all the Shiite cabinet ministers. Adib rejected those conditions and stepped down...*

Prime Minister Mustapha Adib, who was in office only from September 1 until he resigned, having failed to form a

government, on September 26, was stymied at every turn by Hezbollah and its ally Amal. The key cabinet post is that of the Finance Ministry; that is where the purse-strings are to be found, and Hezbollah naturally insists on keeping that post in Shiite hands. Unable to budge Hassan Nasrallah from his position, Adib resigned. Then, in Paris, Macron – who recognized the political paralysis in Beirut was not going away– went into his televised rage.

Macron noted pointedly: “Hezbollah can’t be at the same time an army at war with Israel, an unrestrained militia against civilians in Syria and a respectable party in Lebanon. Is it really a political party or does it proceed just in a logic dictated by Iran, and its terrorist forces? I want us to see if in the next few weeks something is possible. I’m not naive.”

*“The failure is theirs. I won’t take it on myself. I did the maximum I could,” he said.*

*Hezbollah’s Al-Manar TV blasted Macron in its main news editorial Monday night telling the French president that Hezbollah “is and will remain an army facing Israel and will keep supporting Syria and its people against extremists.”*

By declaring itself the “national resistance” against Israel, Hezbollah justifies its military buildup. It now has more conventional arms in Lebanon than 95% of the world’s armies. But those weapons are not just for use against Israel; they allow Hezbollah to intimidate all of its Lebanese rivals and enemies; the Lebanese Armed Forces have not dared to enter southern Lebanon, where Hezbollah fighters hold sway. Hezbollah now has 150,000 missiles and rockets, which have been hidden all over southern Lebanon. It constantly threatens to drag Lebanon into a war with Israel, as it did in 2006 – a war the Lebanese most definitely do not want. For they know that by hiding its weapons in civilian areas, Hezbollah will

in case of conflict force Israel, as it seeks out and destroys those weapons, to destroy civilian infrastructure, as happened in 2006.

*It [Al-Manar television] added that Hezbollah and its allies are not to blame for Adib's failure in forming a cabinet, saying that Macron's threats of possible sanctions in the future against politicians are "unjustified and unacceptable." It asked whether Macron wants Hezbollah and its allies, who have majority seats in Parliament, to give power to groups allied with the United States.*

But if sanctions are not imposed on individual politicians, especially financial sanctions, how else can Macron get them to deal with the massive corruption? Reforms should include annual financial statements, both of income and of property, from members of Parliament and the Cabinet. Political figures would have to list any family members employed in the government. The spoils system, whereby powerful politicians divvy up government jobs among their followers rather than choosing on the basis of merit, would end. Macron further wants the political class to be replaced en masse with technocrats and specialists – who are widely recognized as such – to fill cabinet-level posts.

*The European Union expressed "disappointment and concern" Monday about Adib's resignation and urged the country's leaders to do their best to form a cabinet that meets the demands of the people.*

*Lebanon's crisis was made worse by a massive explosion in Beirut in early August that killed and wounded many and caused widespread damage.*

*Macron has been pressing Lebanese politicians to form a cabinet made up of non-partisan specialists that can work on enacting urgent reforms to extract Lebanon from a devastating economic and financial crisis.*

But little can be done to reform the Lebanese political system until the power of Hezbollah can be diminished. France should declare its readiness to send large amounts of weapons to the Lebanese Armed Forces which would then, if sufficiently strengthened, be able to face down Hezbollah and reassert the power of the Lebanese state. Ideally, there would also be mass street protests demanding that Hezbollah surrender its weaponry, especially the missiles and rockets that are most likely to set off another undesired war with Israel, to the Lebanese Armed Forces, for safe-keeping or – better still – destruction.

President Macron has another arrow in his quiver that he has yet to employ. Even though the U.K. and Germany have now joined the U.S. in declaring that both “wings” of Hezbollah – the “political” wing and the “military” wing – form a single terrorist entity, one major European country (France) has still refused to follow suit. And because France has been recalcitrant, the E.U. as a whole also has refused to label Hezbollah a “terrorist group.” That allows Hezbollah to both recruit members, and to raise funds, in most of Europe. Macron should respond to Hezbollah’s refusal to engage in meaningful reform of the Lebanese system by doing the one thing that will immediately harm Hezbollah: declare that for France, too, Hezbollah’s two “wings” are now recognized as a single terrorist entity, and as such, now banned in the Hexagon. And with France, the U.K., Germany, and the Netherlands now in agreement, the E.U. will follow suit. And that, Macron has a right to hope, will tighten the noose around Hassan Nasrallah.

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