

The New Lebanese Government

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Nearly five months after his appointment as Prime Minister, Najib Mikati finally formed the Lebanese Cabinet on June 13, 2011. The 30-member cabinet, in which Hezbollah and its allies hold a majority, was formed following arduous negotiations between the new majority, constituted of the March 8 parties, and their allies.

The March 14 alliance had announced that it will not take part in the Mikati cabinet following the forced collapse of Hariri’s unity government. Furthermore, appointed Druze Minister of State, Talal Arslan, announced his immediate resignation from the government to protest not being given a portfolio.

Despite clearly [and exclusively] representing the Pro-Syrian camp, Prime Minister Mikati announced that his government is “a government for all Lebanese, no matter what party they support, be it the majority or the opposition.”

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The New Government – Statistics in Brief

Cabinet Members

Ministerial portfolio	Minister	Party Affiliation	Confession	Coalition
Prime Minister	Najib Mikati	Non-Affiliated	Sunni	Prime Minister
Deputy PM	Samir Moqbel	Non-Affiliated	Greek Orthodox	President
Admin Reform	Mohammad Fneish	Hezbollah	Shiite	March 8
Agriculture	Hussein Hajj Hassan	Hezbollah	Shiite	March 8
Culture	Gaby Layoun	FPM**	Greek Orthodox	March 8
Defense	Fayez Ghosn	Marada	Greek Orthodox	March 8
Displaced	Alaeddine Terro	PSP*	Sunni	Walid Jumblatt
Economy	Nicolas Nahhas	Non-Affiliated	Greek Orthodox	Prime Minister
Education	Hassan Diab	Non-Affiliated	Sunni	Prime Minister
Energy/Water	Gebran Bassil	FPM**	Maronite	March 8
Environment	Nazem al-Khoury	Non-Affiliated	Maronite	President
Finance	Mohammad Safadi	Non-Affiliated	Sunni	Prime Minister
Foreign Affairs	Adnan Mansour	Amal	Shiite	March 8
Health	Ali Hassan Khalil	Amal	Shiite	March 8
Industry	Freije Sabounjian	Tashnag	Armenian Orthodox	March 8
Information	Walid Daouq	Non-Affiliated	Sunni	Prime Minister
Interior	Marwan Charbel ⁺	FPM**	Maronite	President
Justice	Shakib Qortbawi	FPM**	Maronite	March 8
Labor	Charbel Nahhas	FPM**	Greek Catholic	March 8
Parliamentary Affairs	Nicolas Fattouch	Non-Affiliated	Greek Catholic	Independent
Public Works/ Trans.	Ghazi Aridi	PSP*	Druze	Walid Jumblatt
Social Affairs	Wael Abu Faour	PSP*	Druze	Walid Jumblatt
State	Ahmad Karami	Non-Affiliated	Sunni	Prime Minister
State	Salim Karam	Marada	Maronite	March 8
State	Panos Manajian	Tashnag	Armenian Orthodox	March 8
State	Marwan Kheireddine ^x	LDP****	Druze	March 8
State	Ali Qanso	SSNP***	Shiite	March 8
Telecom	Nicolas Sehnaoui	FPM**	Greek Catholic	March 8
Tourism	Fadi Abboud	FPM**	Maronite	March 8
Youth/Sport	Faisal Karami ^x	Non-Affiliated	Sunni	March 8

* PSP: Progressive Socialist Party;

** FPM: Free Patriotic Movement;

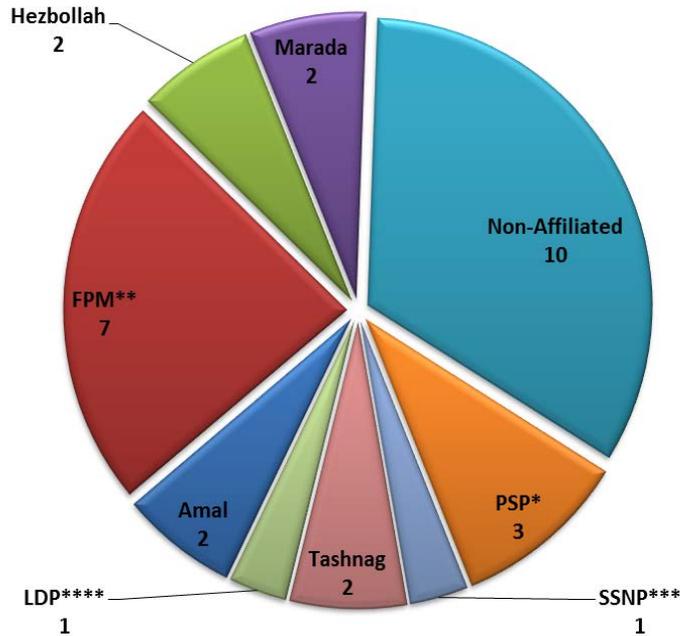
*** SSNP: Syrian Social Nationalist Party

****LDP: Lebanese Democratic Party

^x Chosen by Hezbollah

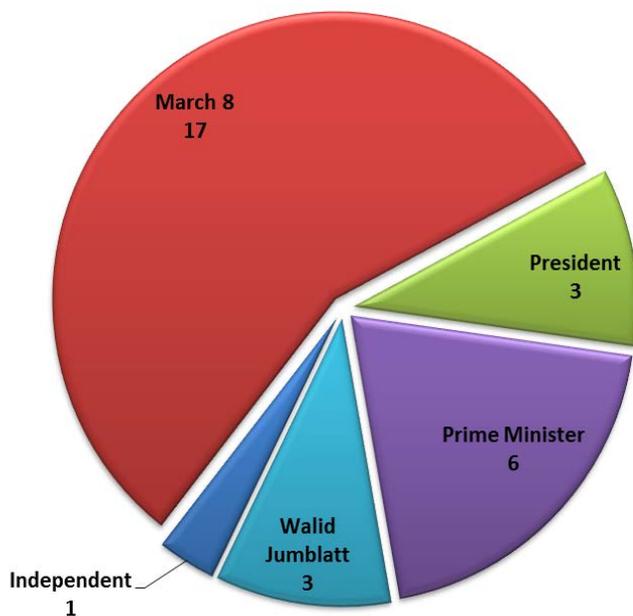
⁺ Chosen by Michel Aoun

Composition by Party Affiliation



Amal	Non-Affiliated
Adnan Mansour	Ahmad Karami
Ali Hassan Khalil	Faisal Karami
FPM**	Hassan Diab
Charbel Nahhas	Mohammad Safadi
Fadi Abboud	Najib Mikati
Gaby Layoun	Nazem al-Khoury
Gebran Bassil	Nicolas Fattouch
Marwan Charbel	Nicolas Nahhas
Nicolas Sehnaoui	Samir Moqbel
Shakib Qortbawi	Walid Daouq
Hezbollah	PSP*
Hussein Hajj Hassan	Alaeddine Terro
Mohammad Fneish	Ghazi Aridi
LDP****	Wael Abu Faour
Marwan Kheireddine	SSNP***
Marada	Ali Qanso
Fayez Ghosn	Tashnag
Salim Karam	Freije Sabounjian
	Panos Manajian

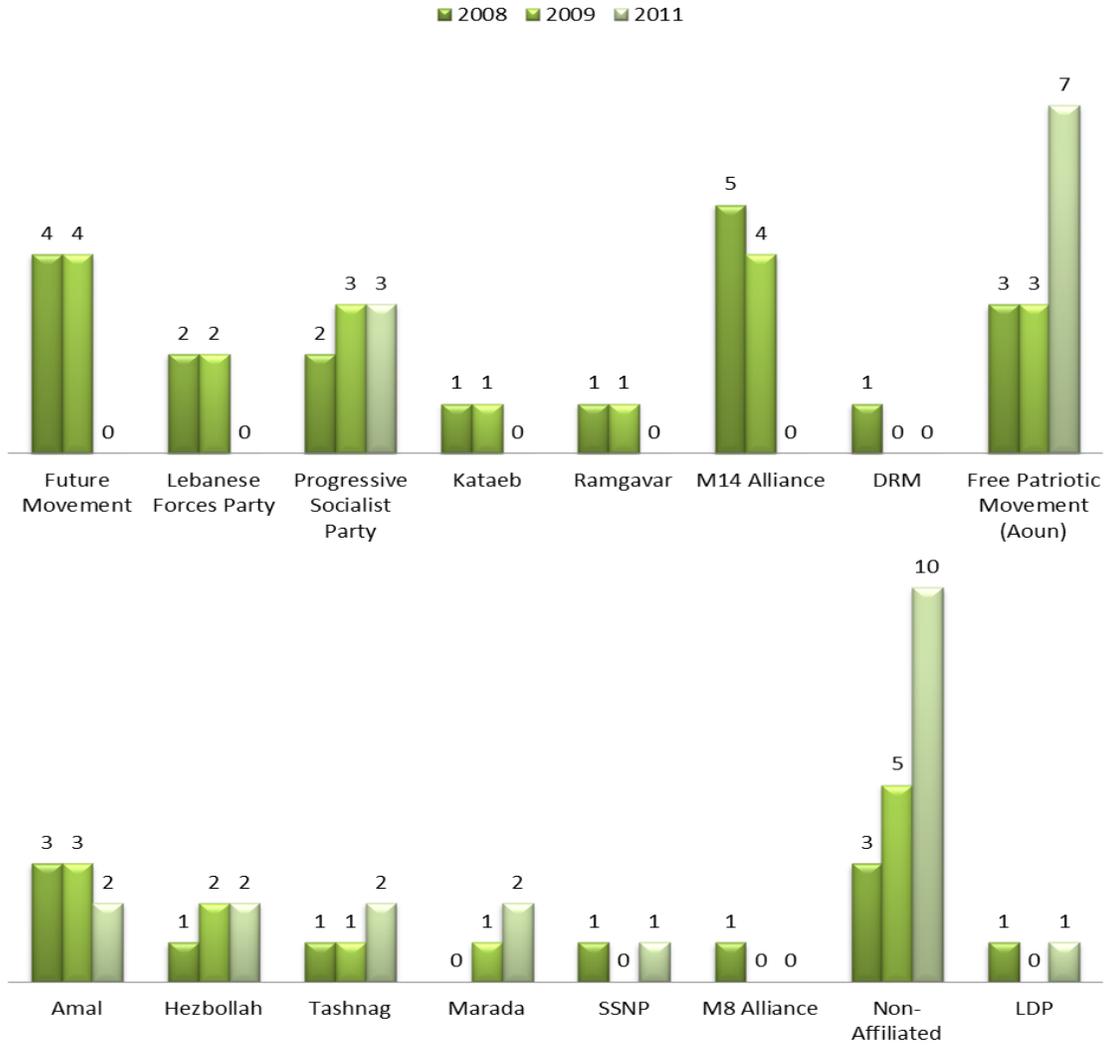
Composition by Coalition



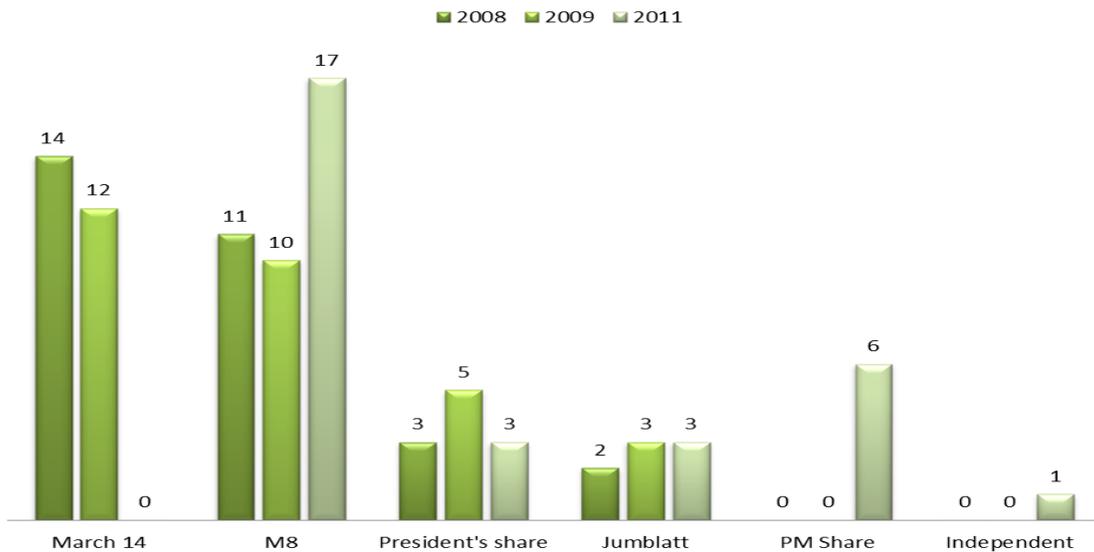
March 8	Independent
Adnan Mansour	Nicolas Fattouch
Ali Hassan Khalil	President
Ali Qanso	Marwan Charbel ¹
Charbel Nahhas	Nazem al-Khoury
Fadi Abboud	Samir Moqbel
Faisal Karami	Prime Minister
Fayez Ghosn	Ahmad Karami
Freije Sabounjian	Hassan Diab
Gaby Layoun	Mohammad Safadi
Gebran Bassil	Najib Mikati
Hussein Hajj Hassan	Nicolas Nahhas
Mohammad Fneish	Walid Daouq
Nicolas Sehnaoui	Walid Jumblatt
Panos Manajian	Alaeddine Terro
Salim Karam	Ghazi Aridi
Shakib Qortbawi	Wael Abu Faour
Marwan Kheireddine	

¹ Note: Marwan Charbel was chosen by Michel Aoun.

Changes in Composition by Party Affiliation



Changes in Composition by Coalition



The Formula

Mikati's cabinet has 18 ministers representing the Shiite militant group Hezbollah and its allies. The remaining 12 were chosen by Mikati himself, President Michel Sleiman and Druze leader Walid Jumblatt. The distribution of the seats for those that participated in the Cabinet formation talks is roughly proportional to each party's representation in parliament. This explains why Hezbollah emerged with two Cabinet positions, while Maronite leader Michel Aoun's Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) received seven.

Furthermore, an important development of note that occurred with the cabinet's formation is the break with the tradition that calls for allocating six ministers to each of the Sunni and Shia communities. In the new government, Sunnis have seven ministers, and the Shia community five, in response to an initiative by parliamentary speaker



Nabih Berri, which was designed to facilitate the government formation process. Amal and Hezbollah collected four seats, with the 5th seat going to the Syrian Social Nationalist Party.

A major point of contention in the negotiations over the new line-up was the interior ministry, which is now headed by retired army general Marwan Charbel, considered a friend to the president, while being affiliated with the FPM. The new foreign minister, Adnan Mansour, is a former ambassador to Iran which along with Syria is a major backer of Hezbollah. The defense ministry is now in the hands of Hezbollah's Christian allies.

Delay in the Cabinet Formation

The cabinet was formed following 5 months of arduous negotiations over (1) the nature of the cabinet: purely political, technocrats or a mix; (2) the size : 24 v/s 30 ministers; and (3) the political make-up: national unity with M14 participation or M8 with centrists and (4) the distribution of the portfolios.

M14 originally requested from Mikati clear commitments regarding the next cabinet's cooperation

with the Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL) and addressing Hezbollah's weapons. When unable to get these commitments, M14 opted out from participating in the government.

Mikati then resolved to form a centrist bloc with a blocking third in the cabinet alongside President Sleiman and Walid Jumblatt². Otherwise, Mikati was keen on forming a technocratic cabinet if he fails to reach a deal with March 8 on a "political" one.

But FPM leader Michel Aoun, negotiating on behalf of the March 8 camp, wanted otherwise. On February 7th, Aoun declared that he was in absolutely no rush to form the cabinet and his demands kept on escalating from requesting the blocking third to claiming the Ministry of Interior. Aoun's demands were initially refused by Prime Minister Najib Mikati, who cited the constitution and said that "no party is allowed to be the sole decision-maker in the cabinet," as well as by President Sleiman who insisted that the constitution does not guarantee portfolios for parties. In response to these statements, Aoun objected to President Sleiman's receiving any portfolio in the new cabinet. He further indirectly accused Prime Minister Mikati of basing the formation of the cabinet on the results of regional turmoil; this refusal to compromise with the Prime Minister and the President further stalled the formation process.

While the domestic power-sharing conflicts may be at the surface of the cabinet formation delay, it is widely believed that this government - whose sustainability is in doubt - was formed only after Syria gave its blessing. Indeed, Lebanese Druze leader Walid Jumblatt's visit to Damascus on June 9 and meeting with Syrian President Bashar al Assad was crucial to the formation of the Cabinet. Not surprisingly, al Assad was also the first to publicly congratulate Lebanese President Michel Sleiman on the newly-formed government. Damascus intended to use this political development to show its regional allies and adversaries that while the Syrian regime is struggling with an uprising that so far does not appear to be losing momentum, Syria's domestic preoccupation has not undermined its preponderance in Lebanon, a traditional bastion of Syrian influence.

Lebanese Reactions to the Cabinet Formation

New Opposition (March 14)

The March 14 coalition was outspokenly opposed to the new cabinet formation. "The country is now being held hostage by the Syrian regime and Hezbollah," declared March 14 General Secretariat Spokesperson, Fares Soueid.

"It is quite evident that the new Lebanese cabinet is that of Syrian President Bashar Assad", Kataeb Party MP Nadim Gemayel said of the new cabinet line-up.

Future Bloc MP Atef Majdalani echoed Gemayel considering that "the new government is a Hezbollah government which waited for the green light from external powers to form, as evidenced by the speedy congratulations that were offered by Syrian President Bashar al-Assad."

² Notably, Jumblatt was the first one to openly advance Mikati's name as PM.

New Majority (March 8 and allies)

The March 8 components were in favor of the new cabinet formation, which heavily represents their interests.

Speaker Nabih Berri's adviser, Ali Hamdan, considered the latest accomplishment as “a sacrifice to resolve the government deadlock and save the country from the crisis and its negative economic and social consequences”.

As for Progressive Socialist Party (PSP) leader MP Walid Jumblatt, new ally of the March 8 coalition, he thanked the March 8 parties for facilitating the formation of a cabinet headed by Prime Minister Najib Mikati. “We thank the parties of the new majority and we hope the cabinet formation will foster stability in the country,” Jumblatt said in a statement issued by the PSP. Al-Manar television also quoted Jumblatt saying that “all those who questioned our ability to form the cabinet are now upset.”

Prime Minister Mikati considered that “Lebanon's Arab and international obligations are among the constants in the government's policy, along with upholding the national decision and the country's highest interests.” He said the new government is a “government of all of Lebanon and will work for all of the Lebanese people, regardless of who supports it and who does not.”

Foreign Reactions to the Cabinet Formation

The announcement of the new government has stimulated mixed reactions on the international level:

Syria

As mentioned earlier, President Assad of Syria was the first to congratulate Lebanese President Michel Sleiman on the newly-formed government. The Syrian ambassador to Lebanon, Ali Abdel-Karim Ali, predicted that the new cabinet formation would strengthen Lebanon’s stability, which he said is in Syria’s interest.

Iran

Along similar lines, Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi congratulated Lebanon on the successful formation of the cabinet, which he described as “a manifestation of Lebanese national sovereignty against Israeli aggressions, and a significant leap toward the establishment of tranquility and stability in the Middle East.” Salehi pointed out that the formation of Lebanon's new government would enable Lebanon to face Israeli assaults. The Iranian foreign minister voiced his country's desire to further expand bilateral relations with the new Lebanese government.

The United States

On another hand, a different reaction was noted in Washington. In the US House of Representatives, the Ranking Member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Democratic Congressman Howard Berman, along with three Lebanese-American Members of Congress introduced the Hezbollah Anti-Terrorism Act (HATA). The congressmen say that foreign aid, including military assistance, is ending up in the hands of Hezbollah terrorists. Similarly, House Foreign Affairs Committee chair Ileana Ros-Lehtinen called for the suspension of all American aid to Lebanon because of Hezbollah's control of the Lebanese government.

The Administration took a softer position, as reflected by the State Department's statement that emphasized that the Cabinet will be held accountable on the basis its future actions.

France

The French government called the cabinet formation "an important step for Lebanon and the Lebanese," but highlighted that "It is essential that the government pursues the implementation of Lebanon's international obligations and commitments, particularly on the Special Tribunal for Lebanon and its funding".

European Union

The European Union welcomed the formation of the new cabinet, and claimed that it believed in Lebanon's ability to respect all international resolutions. The EU's ambassador to Lebanon did, however, lament the fact that there was no female representation in the new cabinet.

Israel

In Israel's first official comment on the new Lebanese Cabinet formation, the Foreign Ministry said Israel expects the Lebanese government to honor the U.N. Security Council resolution(1701) that ended the 2006 war.

United Nations

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon expressed his approval of Lebanon's creation of a new cabinet: "the cabinet formation is an important step toward establishing a functional, executive government in the country", Ban's spokesman Martin Nesirky said in a statement. "He expects the government of Lebanon to reiterate its commitment to the full implementation of Security Council Resolution 1701 and to all of Lebanon's international obligations," added Nesirky.

The UN special coordinator for Lebanon, Michael Williams, congratulated Mikati on the new government and said he hoped it upholds "its commitment to Lebanon's international obligations" in a statement released by his office.

Notably, no official statements were issued by either Saudi Arabia or Qatar.

Ministerial Statement

The much anticipated Ministerial statement of the new government was issued on the 30th of June, 24 hrs. after Lebanon officially received the STL indictments and warrant reports which included 4 high-profile members from Hezbollah.

The statement is overall very similar to the previous one with 2 main exceptions:

- 1- The language used in addressing the issue of the STL was very loosely framed and non-committing. This was addressed in Section 14 of the statement and reads “ ... The government will follow up on the progress of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon which was, in principal, established with the intent to achieve righteousness and justice, away from politicization or revenge, and without any negative impact on Lebanon's stability, unity and civil peace.”
- 2- The absence of any mention of the Lebanese border with Syria , be it demarcation or control.

Conclusion

In analyzing the above stated developments, the negotiating process and the composition of the new Lebanese Government, the following observations can be made:

- Syria, Hezbollah and their allies are the obvious main “winners” in this new government. They were able to oust the Hariri cabinet and control the new one.
- The March 14 camp is the obvious “loser” with no representation in the government and losing the parliamentary majority they had gained in the elections. It is, however, too early to predict whether the decision to move to the opposition will turn to their advantage or not
- PM Mikati has been successful in forming his cabinet and getting 5 ministers in addition to his seat as well as a potential, but unlikely, blocking third.
- President Sleiman proved that he would “fold” under pressure, accept a non-“National Unity Government,” and give up key ministries that had been the “President’s share” before.

Even though the Syrian- and Iranian-backed Hezbollah alliance control the new government, they still face numerous challenges such as the STL, the Syrian uprising, the maritime border dispute with Israel, the parliamentary elections in 2013, and a plethora of domestic challenges ranging from security to public services. Ultimately, what many believe, is that the survival of this new government will depend, primarily, on the survival of the Assad regime in Syria.