

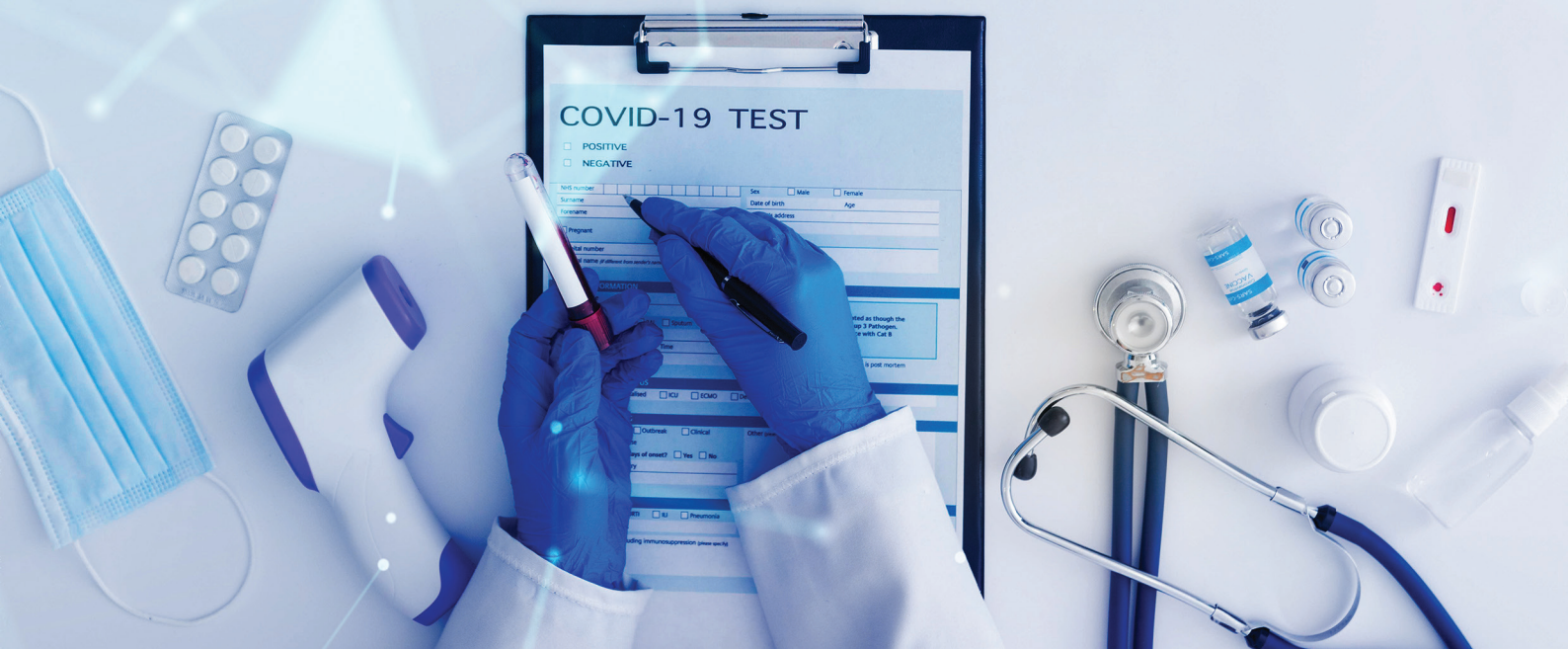


Middle East Forum  
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# Impacts of COVID-19 on Fragile States “Lebanon”

By Badria Al-Rawi

29/04/2020





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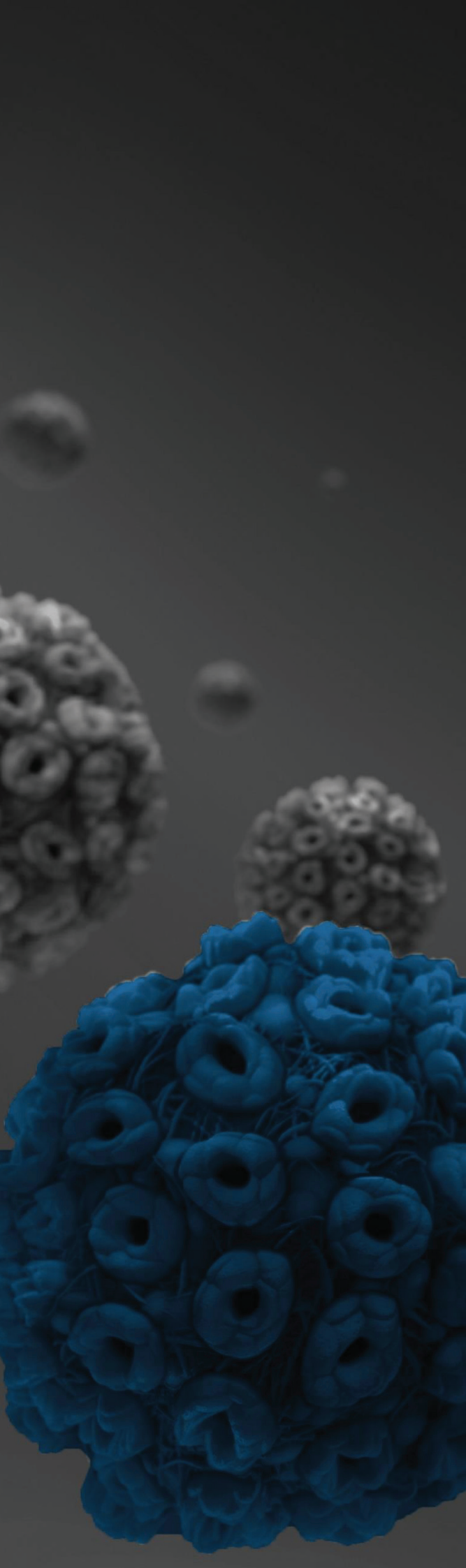
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# Impacts of COVID-19 on Fragile States (Lebanon)

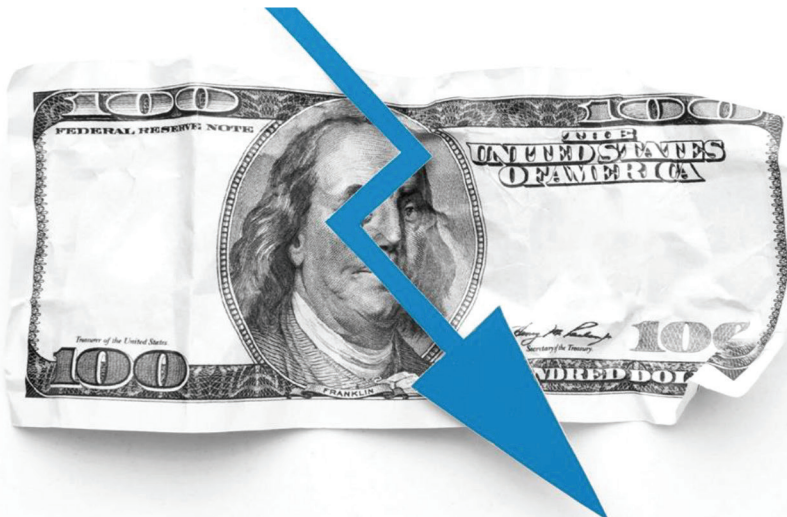
**By: Badria Al-Rawi**

Globalization has created an interconnected system, in which companies adopted the doctrine of supply chains that led to the emergence of a tangled web of production networks that work together to shape the global economy structure. It was believed that national economies were included and secured in this global network. But what COVID-19 has caused reveals the fragility of this globalized system. Some economic sectors can weather the crisis reasonably well, whereas other sectors can find themselves on the brink of collapse, especially the epidemic prevents the suppliers in a country from providing the necessary and widely used parts<sup>1</sup>. The same is the case with many countries in this world. If some of them overcome the ordeal with major losses compared to their abilities to recover, others may completely collapse, especially in fragile countries. So, how has COVID-19 affected such countries?



Initially, a Fragile State<sup>2</sup> is often defined in association with the weakness in the ability or willingness of the state to perform its main functions. However, we may find differences in the nature or measure of this fragility based on multiple definitions, The Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) defines it as “a state being fragile when its structures lack governance and the political capacity (or one of them) to provide the basic functions necessary for poverty reduction, development and maintaining security and preserving human rights of its inhabitants”. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) also uses the term “fragile state” to express in general a wide range of failed states, defining a failed state as “it is unable or unwilling to adequately assure the provision of security and basic services to significant portions of its populations”<sup>3</sup>.

Based on these definitions and according to the following indicators<sup>4</sup>, the fragility of these countries is measured and we can monitor the repercussions of COVID-19 on them in each indicator, and with a case study on Lebanon.



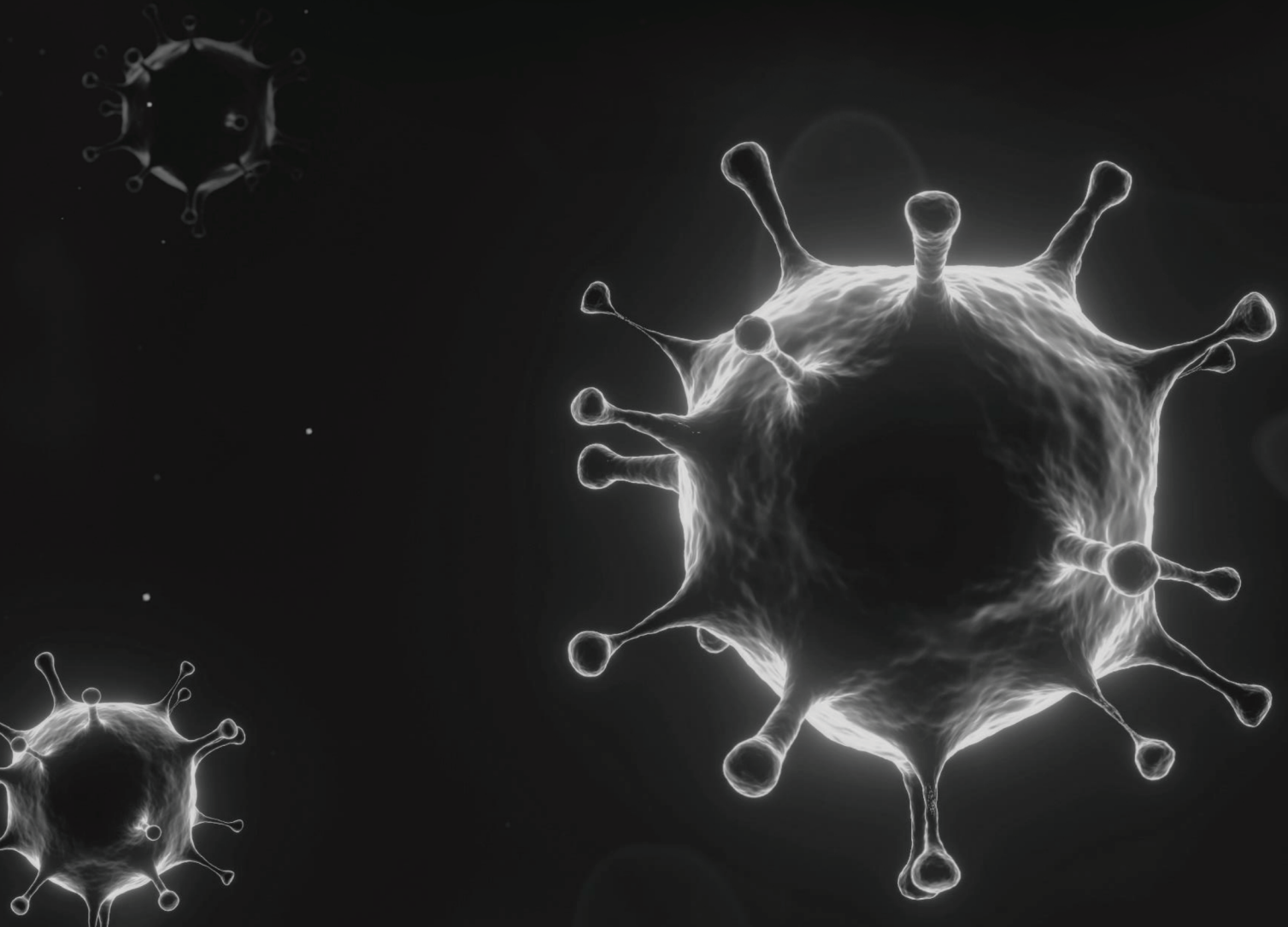
## First: The political impacts of COVID-19 on fragile states

Political indicators of state fragility include: legitimacy failures of the state, the gradual deterioration of public services, widespread abuse of human rights, and the security apparatus becoming “state within a state”, with the rise of partisan elites and the intervention of other states or external factors. We observe in developing states, especially Arab ones, that there is a problem of legitimacy that exists in the depth of the Arab country, so you find it worried about its imperfect legitimacy. And that the social and political contract that binds it to its citizens does not provide it with sufficient stability. Such countries always assume that there are conspiracies against it, and opponents are no more than traitors. As for social issues, in these countries, are usually dealt with by the security forces and armies.

In this sense, the COVID-19 (Coronavirus) pandemic was dealt with. Domestically, many dictatorships took advantage of the epidemic breakout and turned it into a unique opportunity to weaken democracy. Borzou Daragahi says in *The Independent*<sup>5</sup>: The White House is full of officials who support xenophobic policies and are using the spread of the Coronavirus to strengthen the border controls that the administration has always wanted to control. The same is the case in countries such as Israel and Iran, which took advantage of the epidemic by tightening control over mobile phones and population movements, or spreading their security forces throughout the country. Especially in light of ideological nationalist leaders who are trying to use the Coronavirus to impose measures they have always tried to enforce.



In the same context, the Chinese approach to concealing the news of the epidemic and its spread is not overlooked at first, as the Chinese people expressed their anger at the government's measures, as China seeking for protecting its reputation and imposing control over people, it has taken strict measures that affect public freedom. Anger increased a lot after the doctor who discovered the seriousness of the virus was transferred to the hospital as a result of the infection and died. The hashtag was shared by 670 million people demanding freedom of expression. This very incident was marked by a Western academy as a struggle between a simple citizen and the leader of the country, whose powers are not limited. It was revealed that this doctor had discovered the spread of the virus two weeks before he talked about it<sup>6</sup>. This indicates the seriousness of violating those freedoms and ensure human rights in these countries.





Internationally, it seems that no one will care about extending a helping hand abroad, until all countries take the basic and required actions. In a report published in the Foreign Policy<sup>7</sup>, by Richard N. Haass, he wrote about the emergence of more failed states in managing the crisis with poor external support. He said: “The desire and commitment to enter into global and regional crises will weaken, and I expect that it will be difficult for many countries to recover, with the weakness of states and the spread of the failed state”. This is what happened with a number of European Union states such as Serbia and Italy, in which waves of anger prevailed against the neighboring countries, and consequently, the Italians burned and lowered the European Union flag, while the Serbian president condemned the block’s failure to respond with emergency relief and said that European solidarity is merely imagined<sup>8</sup>.

John Allen added to the same report in the Foreign Policy: How each of those regimes, whether democratic or not, would present itself as the best alternate in managing the crisis: “Every country faces societal pressure from the epidemic in new and powerful ways.” Inevitably, those countries that keep working - thanks to their political, economic and health systems - claim success over different countries facing a disastrous outcome. Some will see it as a great and decisive victory for democracy, pluralism and global health care. Others will demonstrate the benefits of absolutism. In any case, this pandemic will unexpectedly change the structure of international powers, especially those ruling in fragile states.



In terms of addressing the political exploitation of this pandemic by the ruling regimes in fragile states, we could take the Lebanese regime as an example, which found it an appropriate opportunity to get rid of the manifestations of (October 17) uprising, so it worked first and through general mobilization to gain control over the security situation and then destroyed the few remaining tents in the city center on the 27th of last March. It is driven by the realization that the public is more willing to accept the government's control in times of crisis, and some leaders see the coronavirus time as an opportunity not only to censor cash, but also to undermine the checks and balances on their power, to the extent that the (war on terror) has been used to justify certain long-standing restrictions on civil liberties, so the fight against the coronavirus threatens to do long-term damage to democratic governance<sup>9</sup>. This is precisely what is feared in Lebanon today, especially if we look at the groups that are revolting in the face of this economic collapse and others who support the government of the current president and his prime minister, as well as their history of taking advantages from the file of fighting terrorism or chaos.

## In terms of addressing the political exploitation

AVIRUS



Noting that since last week, small demonstrations have erupted in Beirut and Tripoli where many are daily-wage workers that have disappeared amid the lockdown imposed to slow the spread of the pandemic. The lockdown has increased the poverty and unemployment that prompted many protesters to take the street in the first place<sup>10</sup>. Some of these moves were also against the Lebanese policy in the face and management of the Coronavirus crisis, which had showed clear indicators that such a policy was in favor of the ruling parties at the expense of all spectrums of Lebanese society. For example: the local authorities delayed closing the ports and did not even prevent flights from affected countries such as Iran, but continued to open airspace to them despite the announcement of the adoption of the closure law<sup>11</sup>.

Restricting fundamental freedoms and violating human rights are among the most prominent indicators of the fragile states' management of their crises. With the arrival of the epidemic in Lebanon, the pressure on refugees on the one hand, and the lack of consideration for the conditions of prisoners in light of the epidemic, has been the focus of many international humanitarian and human rights bodies.

As for the first file related to dealing with refugees, according to a Human Rights Watch report<sup>12</sup> "No cases of coronavirus were recorded among the refugees until the beginning of this April in Lebanon, however they were treated in a racist and disparate manner depending on under which municipal council they live". Some councils imposed on each Syrian family to choose one of them to meet the needs of the house, as is happening in Bar Elias, and others set a time to get out for refugees unlike to the rest of the Lebanese population, and even imposed legal measures that amount to confiscation of identity papers for refugees.



Syrian refugees also expressed their fear of increasing discrimination against them if they were infected with COVID-19. They said that such fears prevent them from seeking healthcare support, even if they feel symptoms<sup>13</sup>. Noting that international human rights law requires the authorities to secure the basic healthcare services for refugees in such cases, and that any restrictions on basic rights for reasons of public health must be legal, non-discriminatory, but necessary and proportionate. which did not happen, rather, the local security authorities overwhelmed the central security powers in the state.



The second file is more sensitive for the Lebanese people themselves, as the local authorities did not take measures to protect the prisoners who are held in the overcrowded cells, as protests took place inside a prison in the north this month (April 2020)<sup>14</sup>. Some of them also tried to escape through a tunnel inside Zahle prison for fear of the outbreak of the epidemic inside the prison's cells<sup>15</sup>. In addition, with all these bad conditions, the general amnesty law that has been suspended for merely political and sectarian reasons is supposed to end their suffering. The legal justifications for this amnesty have existed for years, and it just requires the political drive, as former Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri himself acknowledged<sup>16</sup>.





## Second: The economic impacts of COVID-19 on fragile states

The uneven economic development affecting segments of the populations is the most important indicator in measuring the economic fragility of countries. Today, with the pandemic of Coronavirus, we can see that the world market indices have reached a degree never seen before except in major historical crises such as the Great Depression in 1929. Rather, it is the major international crisis since World War II, and many economists expect that what the epidemic will do is much worse than what happened in the previous crises due to globalization and the mode of production today.

The International Monetary Fund expects global growth to contract this year, considering the crisis that was caused by the “Great Lockdown” is the worst since the Great Depression of the 1930s. The Fund warned that the decline may be severe if the outbreak of the Coronavirus is not controlled by the end of June. And in the event that containment measures extend to the second half of the year 2020<sup>17</sup>. According to For McKinsey & Company and under a study of the National Industrial Development and Logistics Program: The impact of the Coronavirus crisis reaches all elements of the economy: companies, individuals, financial systems and government financial systems<sup>18</sup>.



As announced by OXFAM<sup>19</sup>, that more than half a billion additional people are threatened with poverty due to the impacts of Coronavirus unless developing countries are helped, and it recommended in its report entitled “Dignity not destitution” the need to find a rescue plan for all to stop the economic devastation resulted from the coronavirus crisis and rebuild a more equal world, especially since between 6 and 8% of the world’s population will live in poverty, the consequences of which will reverberate on society and the world in light of this inequality.

The report suggests<sup>20</sup> that this briefing to present an economic rescue plan for all at the height of the crisis, as it mobilizes at least \$2.5 trillion to combat the pandemic and prevent a global economic meltdown. It prefers direct assistance to the people, in the form of cash grants to all who need it. This could be financed by the immediate suspension of debt repayment from poor countries, along with a one-time economic stimulus from the International Monetary Fund and increased aid and taxes.





In a briefed series of the report, the ILO examined how the pandemic is affecting the work of sectors such as public emergency services, health services, education, food retail, automobiles, tourism, civil aviation, agriculture, shipping and fishing, textiles, clothing, leather and footwear, and how these sectors are working to mitigate the effects of the pandemic. And that developing countries are hardest hit, and poverty is on the rise -- the International Labor Organization. It also reveals huge losses, both in terms of output and jobs in all sectors. It shows that developing countries are the most affected, and poverty is on the rise<sup>21</sup>.

Although the catastrophic and tragic effects of this pandemic are being felt around the world, the poorest and most affected countries - and people - are likely to be hit the hardest by this crisis. Countries that are eligible to borrow from IDA, where nearly two-thirds of the world's poor live in extreme poverty, will be severely affected<sup>22</sup>. Where the World Bank warned that more than 11 million people are threatened by poverty in Asia alone, due to the Coronavirus epidemic, and that its forecasts indicate that regional growth could slow to 2.1% in 2020, compared to the estimated growth of 5.8% in 2019. Only one in five unemployed people in the world receives unemployment benefits<sup>23</sup>.

The serious impacts for these countries are that millions of civilians living in conflict-affected countries, including many women and children, face a very real and serious risk of falling into famine<sup>24</sup>, and 265 million people in low- and middle-income countries may suffer from acute food insecurity by the end of 2020<sup>25</sup>.

## In a Briefed Series of the Report



World Bank President, David Malpass has also warned that the economic downturn caused by the coronavirus pandemic threatens to undo recent progress in poor countries. The Washington-based International Finance Corporation plans to raise \$160 billion in financing over the next 15 months for poor countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America, with the aim of strengthening their response to the health and economic crises<sup>26</sup>.

In a related context, in this medical sector of fragile states, we find that women are on the front line of fighting the epidemic, and are likely to be the most affected persons financially and in term of healthcare affairs. In a comparison between the absorptive capacity of the medical sector in rich and developing countries, the number of intensive care units' beds in American hospitals compared to the population is one bed for every 2,800 ones, while a similar comparison in Uganda refers to one intensive care bed per million people<sup>27</sup>.



Monitoring the economic impacts of the Coronavirus pandemic at the level of developing countries does not stop reading the impact of this on the political scene, but the imbalance will increase with developing countries and other countries, specifically with these huge numbers of people who will lose their work and suffer from hunger. Also, the international system in turn, will be subjected to severe pressure and destabilization.

In Lebanon, we indicate that Lebanon Republic as one of developing countries is included in data of the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund and officials of these institutions and other international organizations. And The International Monetary Fund has indicated that many countries in the Middle East will face great difficulties after the outbreak of the Coronavirus pandemic, especially those torn by wars, including Iraq, Sudan and Yemen<sup>28</sup> affected by these conflicts, especially that hosts the refugees.

The World Bank estimated that “the number of poor Lebanese in 2018 was about a third”<sup>29</sup>. How is the situation today? With a very high wave of prices following an economic recession, and a deterioration in the exchange rate of the Lebanese currency against the US-dollar, which nearly doubled (until the date of preparing this study, April 27, 2020)?





As well as Lebanon's inability to pay part of the Eurobond owed on it (The external debt that the state must pay to banks, the international community, the European Union, especially international financial companies), estimated at about \$1.2 billion<sup>30</sup>, as he suffers from a public debt of more than \$91 billion. This prompted experts to talk about the economic conditions that made about 55 percent of the poor, and half of them live below the poverty line, as their income is not sufficient to meet their food needs<sup>31</sup>. In fact, the rates have risen with the ban and closure caused by the Coronavirus epidemic, which is likely to rise to 70 percent, in light of the real bankruptcy of the state.


The general mobilization announced by the Lebanese government affected several sectors, especially transport and itinerant workers from the vendors who live on their daily earnings. The local losses as a result of the 15-day closure are estimated between 250 and 300 million dollars at least, might be increased in parallel with extendable General mobilization procedure<sup>32</sup>. In the same context, a Human Rights Watch researcher in poverty and inequality affairs commented: "The shutdown to slow the spread of the pandemic of COVID-19 has exacerbated the poverty and economic hardships that swept Lebanon before the beginning of the epidemic. Many have lost their jobs, and more than half of the population may be unable to afford food and basic needs if the government does not intervene<sup>33</sup>".

While the requests for consultation and termination of jobs contracts that have been submitted to the Ministry of Labor since October of 2019, have exceeded 4,000 requests in numbers that Lebanon has never ever witnessed, even in the most difficult crises it has gone through<sup>34</sup>, it is likely to be more requests and terminations these days, as is the case in most countries in which workers lose their jobs, including the United States of America.

As for international aid to Lebanon in this crisis, medical supplies have been provided, as the World Bank provides urgent assistance to Lebanon in the face of COVID-19, it is approximately \$40 million, allocated for three main areas: "surveillance and cases detection, cases management and protection of health workers, and multi-sectoral response to support multi-sectoral activities, including command room operations at central and regional levels, and the implementation of media campaigns aim at raising awareness about risks and the importance of community participation<sup>35</sup>. Therefore, most of the assistance is related to the fight against the epidemic itself, not its impacts which is no less than the virus itself.

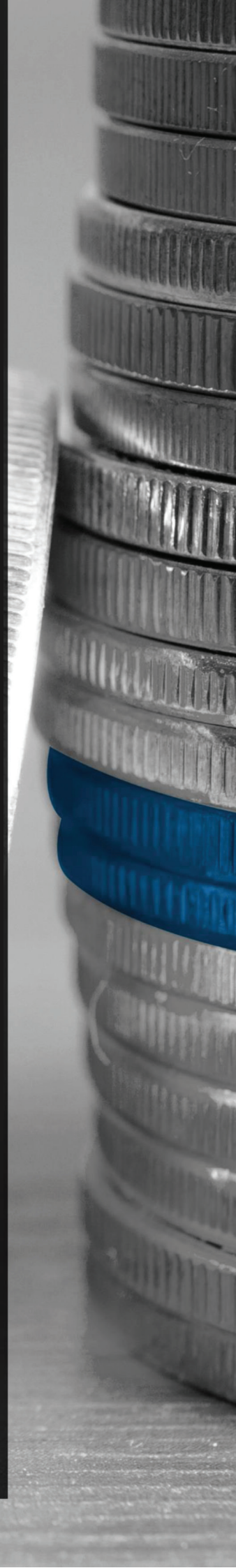
In spite of this accepted support - and the ones preceded it (Health System Strengthening Project in Lebanon) which is financed by a contribution of \$95.8 million from the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development and a grant of \$24.2 million from the Global Concessional Financing Facility (GCFF)<sup>36</sup> that has given to the Lebanese local authorities and their medical sector. Dozens of civil campaigns across major media and social media platforms rushed to save these grants, while just one single official hospital in the country that deals with hospitalized patients of COVID-19.





**No one knows for sure anything about the government's allocations for such cases, or how this allocated money to support the poorest countries, including Lebanon, has been spent.**

There are only about 2000 beds in the ICUs of Lebanon's hospitals and about 900 ventilators, and just 1,000 beds can be used for Coronavirus patients and 500 ventilators<sup>37</sup>, which reflects, the state's inability to provide healthcare services, that it can not secure free PCR tests and if you wish to buy it, you would pay 150,000 LBP so, it is very expensive, as millions of people can never afford. The government does not provide free testing in hospitals only if one suffers from the symptoms of the pandemic .



It is likely that this is one of the reasons that prompted the chief of the Israeli Mossad to say that: Iraq, Lebanon, Syria and Iran hide the true numbers of Coronavirus victims<sup>38</sup>, for security and political reasons, where he indicated that the number of deaths is much higher than the figures officially published. As for Lebanese Ministry of Health, it has announced 26 deaths and more than 700 infection cases (until the preparation time of this study)<sup>39</sup>.

and with inability of the Lebanese state to carry out its duties as a fragile state and under the deteriorating economic conditions, the bankers took the epidemic as an excuse to shut the doors of banks, and as a solution to control the ongoing crisis and because of the lack of liquidity, after the value of withdrawals of depositors' money from these banks reached 50 - \$100 a week. Besides, banks stopped working under the pretext of fear for their employees due to Coronavirus<sup>40</sup>. In such actions, they are not different from the local authorities which- in fact - is spending from the deposits of Lebanese and non-Lebanese people to finance its economic deficit and the interests of its internal and external debts.

The spread of the Coronavirus in Lebanon leads to the closure of educational institutions<sup>41</sup> like what the whole world countries do, as a preventive measure to protect students, teachers and professors from getting infected. But the worst as for Lebanon that these institutions largely were closed after the "October 17 Revolution", which threatens to miss the school year for students, in addition to the Internet crisis that is not available to a very large segment of the formal education students, which leads to deprive them of distance (online) education.



Coronavirus epidemic also revealed the inability and corruption rooted by the political class in state institutions, as the Lebanese state did not bring expatriates and stranded citizens abroad for free, not even at nominal prices, where this country does not operate a national airline, instead Middle East Airlines has doubled ticket prices. The company and the government were subjected to campaigns of protest to which the chairman of the company Mohamed Al-Hout responded, saying that his company is a commercial company and not owned by the Lebanese state, it happens that The Banque du Liban owns 99% of its shares<sup>42</sup>. A country that does not own an airline, how can it take care of its nationals living abroad, or improve its image internationally, after its former Foreign Minister visited the Davos conference with a private plane for one of his friends? Questions that are directly related not to the corruption of the ruling system, but to the existing political system.





## Third: The social impacts of COVID-19 on fragile states

Social indicators for fragile states address files such as demographic pressures, mass exodus of refugees and internally displaced persons, the legacy of collective injustice seeking revenge, well-being and quality of life. This is inseparable from the economic impacts on developing and fragile countries in general, as the International Committee of the Red Cross has warned that the repercussions of the pandemic may be more difficult than the disease itself, and that besides conflicts and violence, the states has to deal with the social repercussions of the pandemic which constitutes a grave humanitarian crisis in the Middle East<sup>43</sup>.



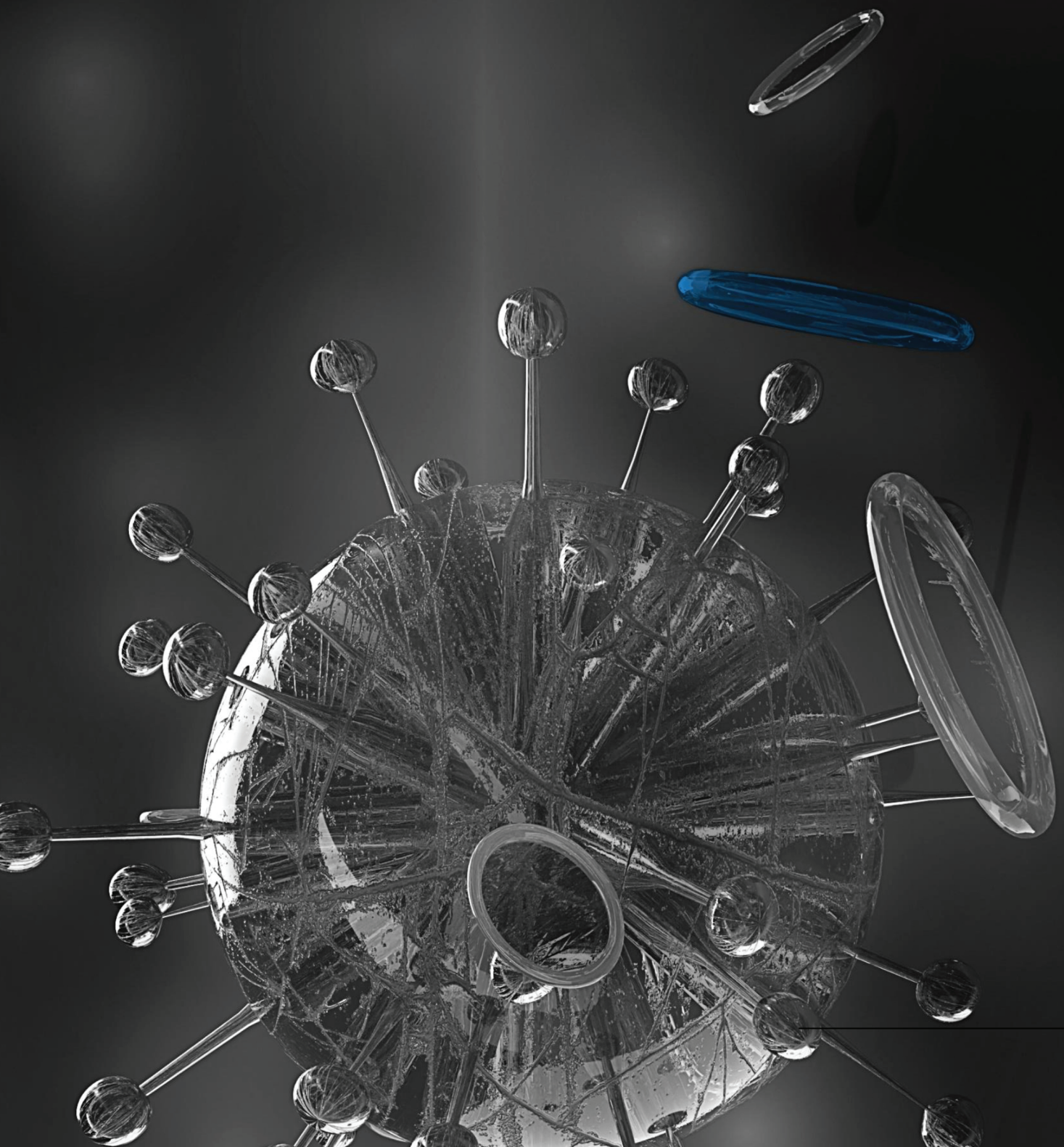
Also, the United Nations warned through its Secretary of the increase in cases of domestic violence due to the Coronavirus epidemic and the consequent health ban for long periods. He called for measures to be taken to counter this horrific increase in domestic violence. He pointed out that 87,000 women were deliberately killed in 2017, more than half of them were killed by intimate partners of family members. These numbers give some evidence of the magnitude of the problem, and only cover countries where reporting systems are in place: as the coronavirus spreads in countries with weak institutions, there is less information and data available, as the vulnerability of women and girls is expected to be higher<sup>44</sup>. It is feared that its rates will rise in Lebanon with these severe crises the sides of which we depicted (above). We warned about it and groups of the Lebanese people called for launching campaigns to raise awareness of these dangers and to protect women in particular<sup>45</sup>.

Moreover, socially the study at the outset, referred to the refugee crisis in Lebanon relating to the economic hardship, in addition to the racial discrimination in some areas, and all this leads to the bursting point socially and morally, that one of the Syrian refugee set himself on fire and died in the Bekaa<sup>46</sup>. Of course, this incident disproportionately affects every house in Lebanon, based on the numbers we mentioned in the economic part. With the announcement of general mobilization in Lebanon and sometimes with the imposition of a curfew, the Lebanese people and residents came under severe pressure<sup>47</sup>, one of the taxi drivers set his car on fire after he was fined for violating the general ban, while he was trying to earn his and his family's living on a daily basis<sup>48</sup>.

As for the food aid program for nearly 200,000 families, and local activities by municipalities, or what the Cabinet announced about plans to distribute 400,000 Lebanese pounds to the poorest families, but no details were provided regarding it, in addition to being inadequate in such circumstances. Human Rights Watch's poverty and inequality researchers have deemed these measures insufficient, and millions of Lebanese are threatened by famine due to the pandemic-related lockdown measures, unless the government urgently puts in place a strong, coordinated plan to provide aid (a very large proportion of a country with a population less than 7 million)<sup>49</sup>.



This hunger, of which hundreds of local and international reports warn of its consequences, erupted in the form of angry protests those are against the government and expenses, and demanding, literally, providing a loaf of bread as well as the depositors' money, until one of the protestors was shot dead by security forces in the north of the country<sup>50</sup>. This indicates that the protests gained a high momentum among people to take to streets.





## Conclusion



Certainly, the strategic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic are very complex, and it is difficult to predict its end, let its impacts alone. The shape of the post-coronavirus world cannot be predicted definitively, but in fact, we can find some features of this world in general, and its impact on developing countries, including Lebanon in particular.

Accordingly, the negative effects of this pandemic on the societies of developing and poor countries, politically, economically and socially are huge and terrifying. especially those that are witnessing armed conflicts, where the level of aid has decreased in light of the preoccupation of every country with its own affairs, and even the preoccupation of the international community with covering the needs of many nations, even European ones. Also, the major countries are engaged with their economic hardships and losses af-



affected by billions of dollars so far, and their societies that are witnessing a rise in the rates of workers losing their jobs, and the heavy losses of companies in multiple and major sectors, especially the oil sector, which is seriously affected for the first time in history in such a way, which led to the falling of the U.S. crude oil prices, below zero due to the impact of the global lockdown.

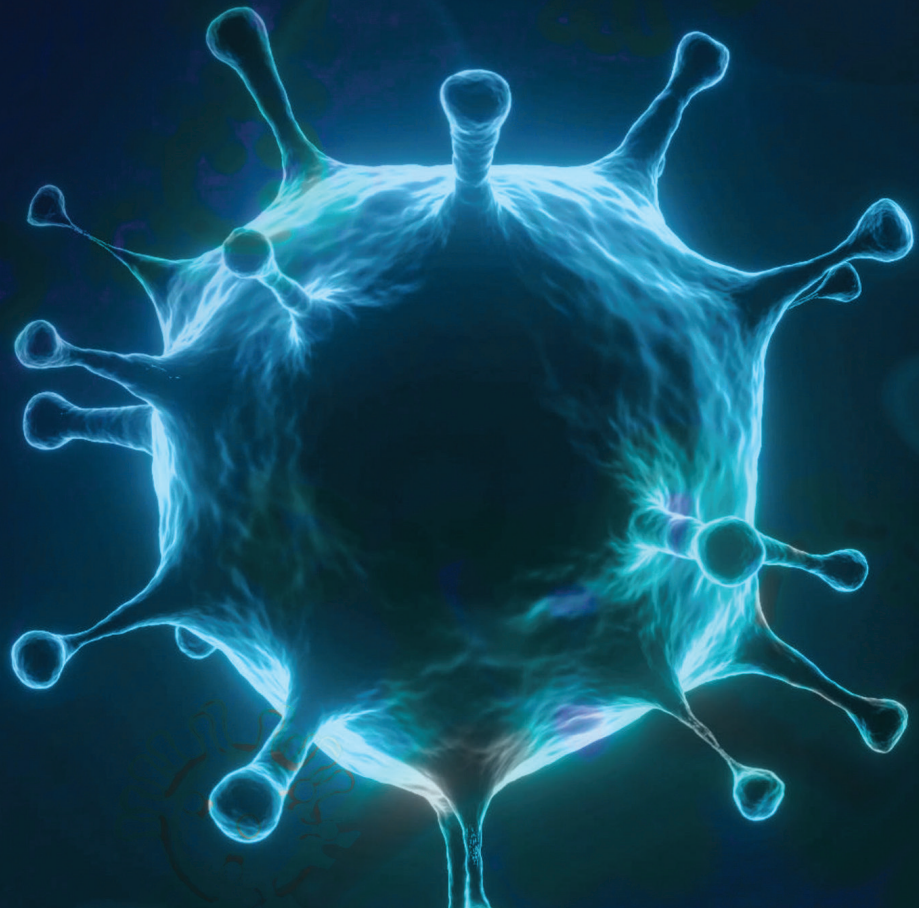
So, we can imagine the reality of the situation in which these societies will live the pattern and proportion of aid provided to developing countries, especially in Lebanon that suffers from a major economic downturn. What Lebanon needed before the Coronavirus crisis was a lot of international support, in addition to the conditional reform of this support in the first place. So, currently with this pandemic, the state economics get collapsed and it is very close to go bankrupt.

The Lebanese authorities at the level of the state as a whole failed to manage the crisis of Coronavirus, and confirmed it is paralyzed, so we see municipalities, parties and civil society groups taking charge of self-security in their regions, followed by partisan gains taking advantages of the Corona times. Even though there is no armed conflict in Lebanon to this moment, but it is experiencing a cold and harsh war between all parties. Not only that, but also Lebanon is experiencing impacts of the real wars.

Economic stagnation has led to unemployment, high prices and monopoly, and may even be accompanied by famine. which indicates that these skirmishes will turn into a real big explosion soon. A major revolution launched by the weak people against the entire ruling class and the existing system. so, we are facing one of the most important expected and likely scenarios. This requires great awareness and organized revolutionary arrangements. People do not take to streets randomly without managing the direction of the compass towards the corrupt class, and specifically recover the looted money from them, and nationalize it as it took place in the most successful radical revolutions in the world.

The driving causes of this revolution - or this expected scenario – have been reached in light of what Lebanon has achieved, but this does not prevent other scenarios that the ruling class may resort to, whether they are united against the will of the people or are in conflict with each other. In their dispute, one of the rivals claims that the others are corrupt parties and uses them as a scapegoat. In order to do this, all rivals try to get the affiliated groups involved and take advantage of their security influence or their weapons and their partisan organizations.

As for the other scenario, it is return to the option that is less in conflict with the people in the street, like maneuvering in the matter of the conditional international support and calls for reassurance and reform promises, it is likely that one of their tools is to resort to the International Monetary Fund, for getting rid of the current crisis temporarily, after Hezbollah and its allies provide more signs of submission to the wishes of the International Community, like what happened as they have released one of the Israeli occupation's agents in Lebanon Amer Fakhoury.





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