

LEBANON

WHAT HAPPENED?

The standoff between Lebanon's rival political camps over the investigation into the catastrophic August 2020 port explosion in the capital Beirut continued. The economic crisis, and notably the currency's diminishing value, **triggered unrest and protests** across the country.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Cabinet meetings have been suspended since 12 October, hampering the work of the government and further stalling critical reform efforts. The **ever-worsening economic crisis** remains a significant driver of unrest that has the potential to turn into deadly violence.

OCTOBER TRENDS

Disagreements over the official investigation into the catastrophic August 2020 Beirut port explosion **widened divisions** within the newly formed government and sparked a **street battle** when Shiite protesters marched through a Beirut Christian neighbourhood on 14 October, killing seven Shiites.

1 ➔ Political standoff continued over port explosion investigation

Shiite groups Hezbollah and Amal continued to demand the removal of judge Tarik Bitar from his role leading the investigation. With cabinet meetings still suspended due to political divisions, the Maronite patriarch attempted but failed to mediate a compromise.

The strategy applied by certain politicians under investigation to paralyse Bitar's work through procedural objections and counter-suits threatens to set a precedent that could **critically undermine the capacity of the judiciary** to function as an effective institution of accountability.

2 ➔ Currency collapse triggered protests across country

The government sought to alleviate the worst symptoms of the economic crisis, attempting to increase electricity supplies and distributing cash aid cards.

On 26 November, protesters broke into the ministry of social affairs in Beirut after the **currency reached a new record low** at 25,700 lira to \$1. On 29 November, **demonstrators set up roadblocks** in Beirut, the northern city of Tripoli and the southern city of Sidon, demanding the government address the crisis.

3 ➔ Diplomatic spat continued with Gulf states

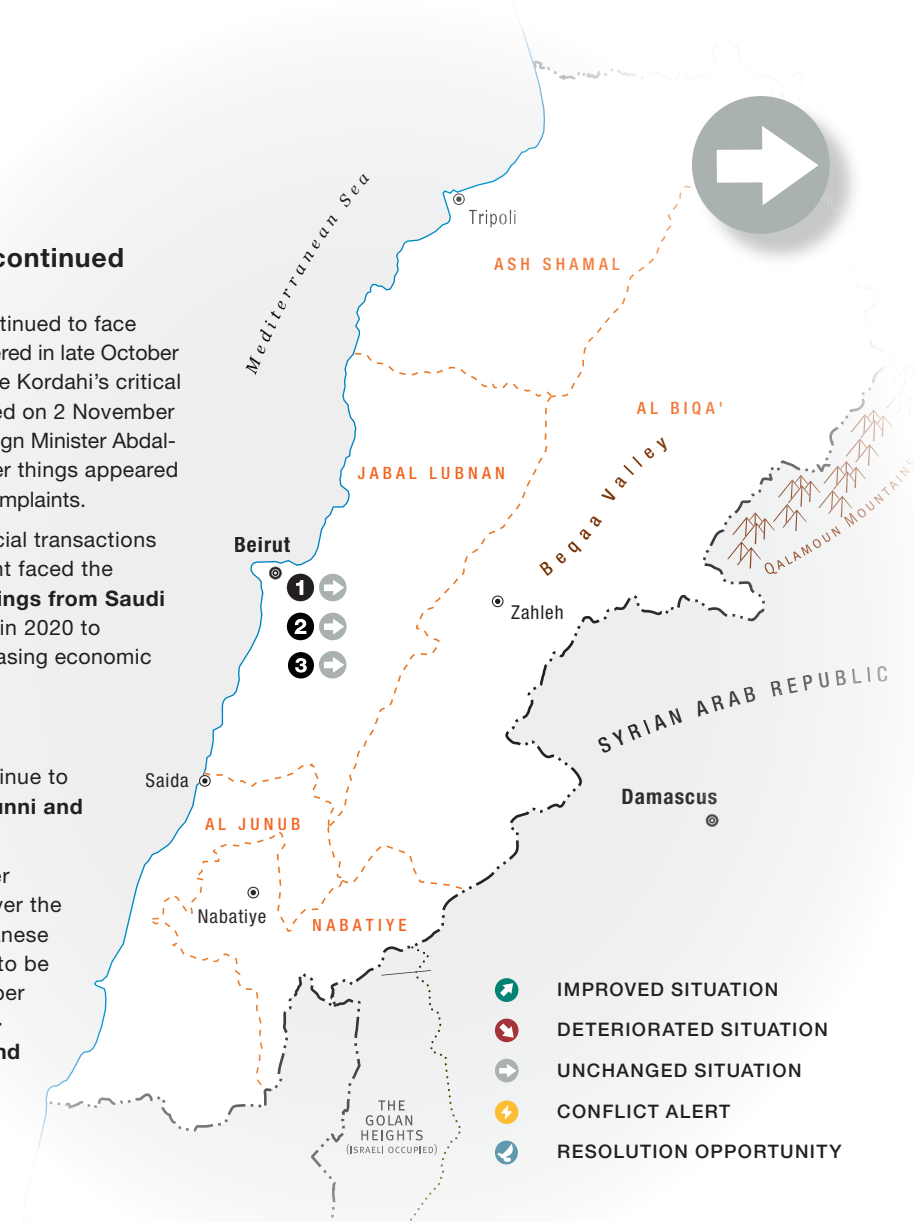
Relations with Gulf states continued to face strains following the spat triggered in late October by Information Minister George Kordahi's critical comments. The affair worsened on 2 November with leaked comments by Foreign Minister Abdallah Bouhabib that among other things appeared dismissive of Saudi Arabia's complaints.

After Riyadh banned commercial transactions with Lebanon, the government faced the prospect of **lost export earnings from Saudi Arabia** – down from \$250mn in 2020 to \$100mn this year – thus increasing economic hardship.

WHAT TO WATCH

The Kordahi crisis could continue to increase **friction between Sunni and Shiite** political camps.

The refusal of MPs and former ministers to be questioned over the Beirut port blast, and of Lebanese Forces leader Samir Geagea to be questioned over the 14 October incident, could further **undermine the pursuit of justice and accountability**.



TRENDS TIMELINE

