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Imad Salamey's *The Government and Politics of Lebanon* is a laudable attempt to fill the lacuna of scholarship on Lebanese politics and government accessible to general readers. Throughout the book, Salamey emphasizes the nature and impact of Lebanon's unique system of consociationalism, the series of delicate and often fraught power-sharing arrangements negotiated between sectarian elites in Lebanon. He also explores the role of foreign powers and historical grievances in shaping Lebanese politics today. He does an admirable job at remaining fairly neutral in his account vis-à-vis Lebanon's myriad religious and political groups while also offering criticism and suggesting potential reforms to transform Lebanese politics from what he sees as an unstable and rigid system led by sectarian elites to one that is more secular, would allow for a more robust system of checks and balances, and would center its political disputes around actual issues rather than categories of identity.

In the first of three sections, Salamey introduces the history and nature of consociational politics in Lebanon. In chapter one, Salamey begins with a brief comparison of various types of democracy before turning his focus to Lebanese consociationalism, introducing the reader to what he sees as several flaws in Lebanon's political system, including the salience of identity politics, rigid state institutions, a class of powerful sectarian elites, and the systemic incentives for those elites to court foreign intervention. In chapter two, Salamey places the origins of Lebanese sectarianism in 1841, during the outbreak of violence between the Druze and Maronite communities, echoing the historical consensus that this violence and the subsequent sectarian violence in 1860 was due to a number of internal and external factors. Salamey continues his historical narrative through the relatively stable latter half of the nineteenth century, introduces the French mandate (1920-1943),¹ and ends with the formal establishment of Lebanon's sectarian power-sharing arrangement, first outlined in the National Pact (1943).² Unfortunately, at barely one dozen pages, this chapter omits or elides a number of key historical factors that shaped modern Lebanon, including the formative reign of Emir Bashir II (r. 1789-1840), the country's foreign missionary presence, and the nature of Ottoman administrative and modernization reforms.

In a somewhat confusing chronological pivot, chapter three returns to the French mandate, adding a few additional details about the mandate system, the National Pact, and France's role in exacerbating sectarian tensions in Lebanon. It ends with a brief discussion of the conflict of 1958 and the shift in religious demography caused by urbanization, the influx of Palestinian refugees after 1948, and the (predominantly Christian) Lebanese emigration, which began in the nineteenth century and continued into the twentieth century. Chapter four begins by explaining the causes of the 1958 conflict that had been alluded to in the previous chapter and continues through the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990). In Chapter five, Salamey describes the waning popularity and strength of paramilitary groups, which eventually led to the signing of the Taef Agreement in 1989, which formally ended the Lebanese Civil War and ushered in what Salamey calls the "Second Lebanese Republic" (1989-2008). He also explains the origins of the March 8 and March 14 alliances, as well as the changes made to the Taef Agreement by the Doha Agreement (2008), which ended fighting between rival factions, preventing another civil war from erupting. He concludes his historical overview in chapter six, with a fuller description of the Doha Agreement and its eventual collapse in 2011. Before turning to a description of the contemporary political system in Lebanon, Salamey sums up his account of Lebanese political history, framing each major development as a futile attempt to make a fundamentally

unworkable system workable: “The Doha Accord...was only the latest in a series of foreign-sponsored initiatives that have attempted, in vain, to undermine the splintering nature of sectarian consociationalism and its conflicting orientations” (p. 77).

Despite Salamey’s commendable efforts to synthesize and summarize Lebanese history for general readers in less than 80 pages, his brevity is sometimes problematic. In an effort to remind the readers of the government’s difficulty adapting to change, he points to the “Lebanese state’s immobility in responding to the increasing Palestinian power” brought about by the continual displacement of Palestinians during successive wars with Israel. What he fails to show the reader is that hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees had flooded into one of the smallest countries of the Middle East, permanently unable to return to their homes. State rigidity was hardly the only issue in the so-called “Palestinian question,” and it is doubtful that any of Salamey’s proposed reforms would have made a significant difference. Additionally, in an effort to emphasize sectarianism in Lebanon, Salamey occasionally ignores cross-confessional cooperation. For example, in chapter four, he describes tensions between Lebanese and Arab nationalists as primarily a conflict between Christians and Muslims, respectively, ignoring the fact that many Christians (including Michel ‘Aflaq and Antun Sa’adeh) had prominent roles in founding Arab nationalist movements. This continued even into the Civil War, with Christians such as George Habash and his organization called the People’s Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) remaining a key ally of the PLO.

The second of three sections focuses on Lebanon’s contemporary politics and its position in the realm of international affairs. In chapter seven, Salamey revisits the major political events that have occurred in Lebanon since its independence in 1943, with a particular emphasis on the Doha Agreement and the contentious issue of Syrian involvement in Lebanese affairs. Chapter eight introduces the reader to one of the great paradoxes of Lebanese politics, namely that it is a system which encourages sectarian groups to seek the “protection” of foreign powers, yet foreign intervention has contributed significantly to the destabilization of Lebanon. Most importantly, Salamey points to a shift away from the secular, nationalist politics of the mid-twentieth century, toward a more sectarian affinity for Saudi Arabia (among Sunnis), Iran and Syria (among Shi’ites), and the West (among Christians). He makes the case for this shift even more strongly in the final chapter of the book. He also includes a quick overview of Lebanon’s connections to Syria, Israel, Saudi Arabia, Iran, France, the US, Russia, Turkey, and the UN. Although these vignettes are unlikely to offer new insights to area experts, they could be extremely useful to students or interested laypeople who may be looking to contextualize these increasingly complex relationships. Chapter nine closes the second section with a fascinating discussion of Lebanon’s electoral system. In it, Salamey not only provides the reader with a descriptive textbook-style account of Lebanese electoral politics, but he also highlights a number of efforts to address the issues he raises throughout.

In the third and final section, Salamey explores Lebanon’s Legislative (chapter 10), Executive (chapter 11), and Judicial branches (chapter 12). In each chapter, he describes the roles and organization of the given branch, as well as its transformations since the independence period, such as legislative redistricting to bolster minority representation and the increasing power of the executive branch (particularly the Prime Minister and Council of Ministers) relative to the legislative and judicial branches. Throughout these chapters, Salamey argues for the need to reconfigure the present system of checks and balances and reiterates the importance of the electoral reforms outlined in chapter nine. The final chapter of the book deals with the phenomenon of sectarian populism in Lebanon, in which charismatic leaders rally together

members of their sects and create an atmosphere of distrust between different groups. Salamey ties this discussion into the early developments of the Arab Spring revolutions and appropriately leaves the possibility for reform as an open question.

One of the most glaring issues of the book is its repetitive structure. For example, in his discussion of the international effort to investigate the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, Salamey mentions the Hariri Special International Court, explains how tempers flared over accusations of Hezbollah's alleged involvement, and shows how tensions between the March 8 and March 14 alliances ultimately led to the collapse of the Doha Agreement (pp. 78-79). However, he omits the role played by the UN's Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL). Given the difficulty of providing a comprehensive yet brief account of such a controversial subject, one could forgive this, except that in the very next chapter, Salamey returns to the investigation of the Hariri assassination specifically to mention the STL (pp. 89-90) and retells the story of the dissolution of the government. Similar issues occur in his discussion of the French mandate, the Lebanese Civil War, and, in particular, the Taef and Doha Agreements, forcing the reader to piece together a more complete narrative from different, disjointed sections of the book.

Issues of oversimplification and organization notwithstanding, Salamey's work is an impressive contribution to the scholarship available for general audiences. Students and laypeople interested in one or more aspects of Lebanese politics can turn to his book for a succinct and informative synopsis. Even experts in the field will likely find his detailed descriptions of the various agreements and UN resolutions that have shaped Lebanon's recent history useful. As a whole, Salamey's work is a welcome reference for anyone interested in trying to understand one of the most complex, contentious, and interesting political systems in the world.

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¹ After World War I, Lebanon was designated a mandate territory and placed under French control until 1943. For more on French rule in Greater Syria, see: Peter Shambrook, *French Imperialism in Syria: 1927-1936* (Ithaca, NY: Ithaca Press, 1998). Susan Pedersen's, *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), contains an excellent overview of the mandate system. A wide-ranging collection of essays on the mandate system in the Middle East can be found in the following: Cyrus Schayegh and Andrew Arslan, eds., *The Routledge Handbook of the History of the Middle East Mandates* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

² The National Pact is an unwritten agreement negotiated between sectarian leaders of Lebanon in 1943. Most notably, the Pact stipulated that the president would always be a Maronite Christian, the prime minister would always be a Sunni Muslim, and the speaker of parliament would always be a Shi'a Muslim.