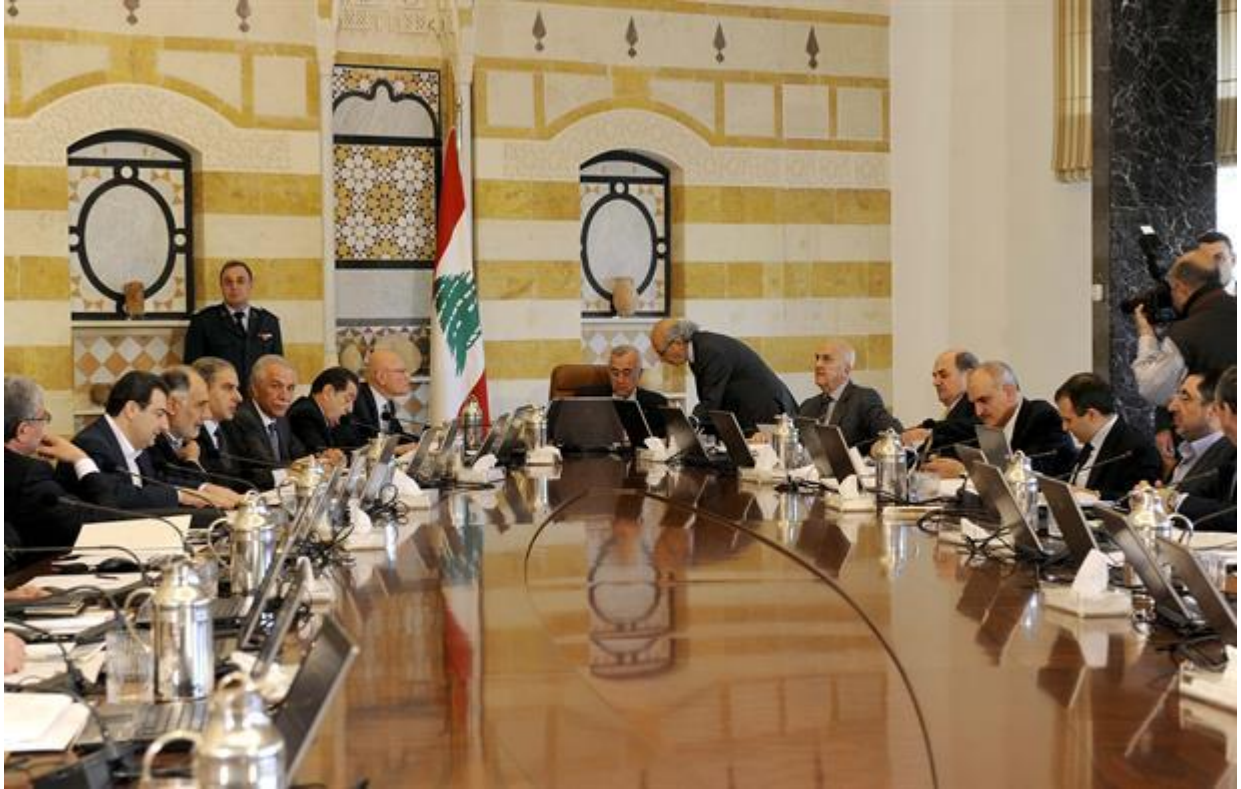


Cabinet forms committee to regulate oil exploration



BEIRUT – Lebanon’s government decided to form a committee on Wednesday tasked with studying the issue of offshore oil exploration and issuing decrees for its regulation.

The committee will be headed by Prime Minister Tammam Salam and will include several cabinet ministers as members: the deputy premier, the finance minister, the public works and transportation minister, the energy minister, the foreign minister, the environmental minister, and the health minister.

Gebran Bassil, the former energy minister, had called on the previous cabinet—which resigned in March—and the parliament to hold extraordinary sessions to approve the oil sector decrees.

The government must still pass two decrees – one laying out a model for the production sharing agreement that companies must sign, and another officially delineating blocks available for bidding – before bidding and negotiations can begin.

The cabinet’s Wednesday session, held at the Baabda Presidential Palace, also resulted in the confirmation of Brigadier General Ibrahim Basbous as the head of the Internal Security Forces and Judge Samir Hammoud as the public prosecutor, among other appointments.

A disagreement over security and judicial appointments had briefly halted a cabinet meeting on Monday evening.

According to the Lebanese newspaper *An-Nahar*, ministers affiliated with Hezbollah and the Amal Movement refused the appointments of Basbous and Hammoud for sectarian reasons.

Meanwhile, Justice Minister Ashraf Rifi commented on the implementation of the Tripoli security plan prior to the cabinet session.

“The implementation of the Tripoli security plan is very [reassuring].”

He added that there is a “penchant towards strongly reviving communication with Hezbollah...in order to protect the country, which is worn out by Sunni-Shiite tension.”

The Lebanese Armed Forces began implementation of a security plan drawn up by Lebanon’s Higher Defense Council to combat violence in Tripoli on Tuesday morning.

Residents of Bab al-Tebbaneh have frequently clashed with the adjacent neighborhood Jabal Mohsen. The recurrent disputes are triggered by sectarian differences, and also reflect a split in Lebanon’s political scene, as the March 14 coalition backs the Syrian rebels while the March 8 alliance, led by Hezbollah, supports the Damascus regime.

Lebanon’s cabinet. (NOW)