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Lebanon: Confessionalism— A Potent Force (U)

An Intelligence Assessment

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Key Judgments

The massive Israeli invasion will alter the political complexion of Lebanon in ways that are not yet clear. The outcome will be strongly influenced, however, by sectarian ties which, despite nearly 40 years of statehood, remain the dominant force in Lebanon. These ties have been reinforced by the confessional system under which the Lebanese have been governed for generations. Although designed to minimize sectarian strife by apportioning power and prerogatives among the main sects, the system has discouraged the development of political forces cutting across sectarian lines.

The system has periodically come under intense strain in recent decades. Internal problems, particularly the feeling among Muslims that their interests were not adequately represented in the power structure, have usually been the root of the trouble. But factors such as the Arab-Israeli dispute and Jordan's expulsion of the Palestinians in 1970-71 aggravated the internal differences.

In the 1975-76 civil war the system broke down completely, and the authority of the central government has never been fully restored. The strife brought into Lebanese politics a new generation of leaders who seem less inclined to accept the rules of political compromise that the country's founding generation considered essential to the working of the system.

The decline of Lebanon's formal institutions has encouraged the Lebanese to strengthen their confessional ties. The Maronites increasingly look to the Phalange, the Druze to the Jumblat family, and the Shia to Amal and to their Imams for their social and security needs rather than to the government.

The increasing role in Lebanese politics of outside actors—the Syrians, the Palestinians, and the Israelis—has added another complicating dimension to the problems of confessionalism. Through their ties with Lebanese factional clients, these outside elements have been able to manipulate sectarian differences and advance their own interests. While the PLO at

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Information available as of 28 July 1982 has been used in the preparation of this report.

least temporarily seems to have been largely removed from the equation, the influence of Israel and Syria will persist even if both withdraw their forces from Lebanon.

While a growing number of Lebanese have become opposed to the concept of confessionalism, we believe some form of government in which the various sects are represented on a proportional basis remains the only workable alternative for Lebanon in the near future. There is no secular, nationalist alternative and no one faction or sect—even the Phalange—strong enough to prevail over the others, unless it is imposed by an outside power.

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Lebanon: Confessionalism—A Potent Force (U)

The Setting

Confessionalism was fashioned into the Lebanese political structure under the French Mandate in the 1920s and 1930s. The 1932 census (table 1), which showed a slight Christian majority, became the basis of the mandate's governmental system, in which Christians were represented in Parliament on the basis of six seats to every five for Muslims. To strengthen France's Maronite Christian allies and to allay Christian fears of being engulfed in the Muslim Arab world, it was agreed that the powerful presidency, based on the French model, should be held by a Christian. It became, and has remained, a Maronite preserve. The dominant Muslim sect at the time, the Sunnis, was given the prime minister's position, and the speaker of the Parliament was allocated to the Shia. The concept of confessionalism was also applied to the civil service and the army, with the Maronites receiving a disproportionate share of the key positions.

Nurtured by the French, the confessional system was formally acknowledged in 1943 by the leading Maronite politician, Bishara al-Khuri, and his Sunni counterpart, Riad Solh, in the so-called National Covenant. Representing their respective religions, the two men reached an understanding on Lebanon's political character that they hoped would restrict the excesses of sectarianism and provide a framework for the newly independent country. Khuri, reflecting Christian fears of being a minority in the Arab world, agreed to forswear Christian demands for ties to the West. In return, Solh, reflecting Muslim concerns that Christians would always serve Western interests first, acknowledged Lebanon's need to remain independent within the Arab world.

The confessional system worked for more than a decade, despite the corrupt nature of Khuri's presidency and his manipulation of the Constitution to extend his term. Khuri's eventual downfall in 1952 and other early political challenges to the system were contained by maneuvering within the loosely based structure of parliamentary alliances.

Table 1

Lebanese Politico-Religious Groups—1932 Census

Arab Muslims	333,165
Sunni	178,130
Shia	155,035
Arab Christians	364,754
Maronite	227,880
Greek Orthodox	77,312
Greek Catholic	46,709
Protestants; Syrian Catholic/Orthodox	12,853
Druze	53,334
Non-Arabs	41,973
Armenians	31,588
Jewish	3,588
Others	6,393
Residents in Lebanon	793,226
Lebanese Expatriates	254,387
Total	1,047,613

This table is Unclassified.

Under Khuri's successor Camille Shamun the system came under considerable strain. Muslim enthusiasm for Egyptian President Nasir and the lure of pan-Arab socialism gave rise to new fears among Christians that Muslims would abandon the pledges made in the National Covenant. The growth of pan-Arab influences among Muslims prompted heavyhanded attempts by Shamun to manipulate the political process and led to civil strife and the threat of wide-scale civil war. Shamun's successful plea to the West to intervene in 1958 was interpreted by many Muslims as a betrayal of the promises Christians made in the National Covenant.

Still, the confessional system survived the 1958 crisis and even regained some ground during the regimes of Presidents Shihab and Hilu, whose retreat from Shamun's overtly pro-Western stance and acknowledgement of Lebanon's Arab character and regional role

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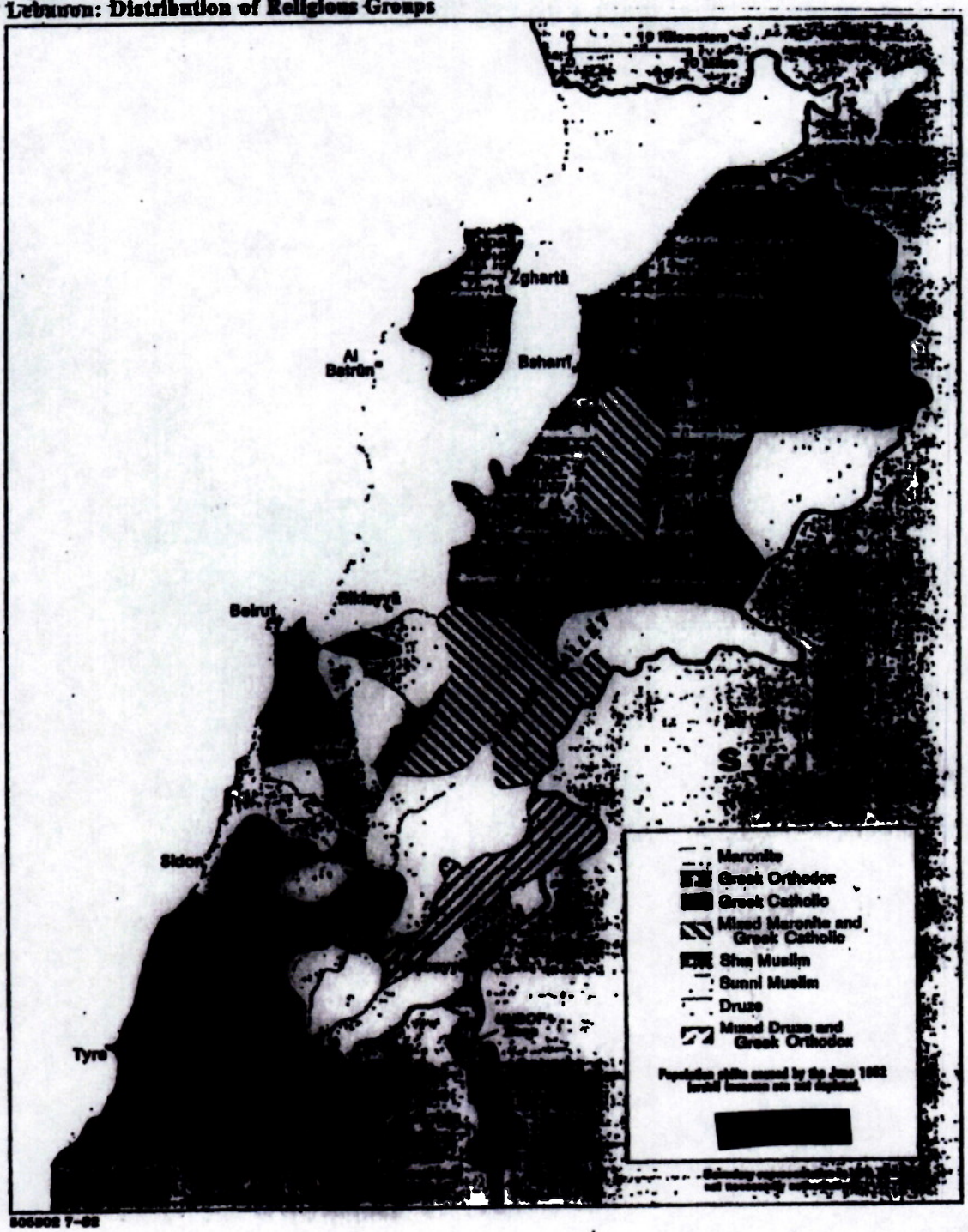
Figure 1
Lebanon: Distribution of Religious Groups



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helped mollify Muslims. Both Presidents also nurtured conditions in Lebanon under which the country's economy grew rapidly and the population began migrating to the cities—particularly Beirut—in large numbers.

Although the complex system for sharing power seemed to foster social change and economic expansion, it did not allow for the concurrent growth of modern political organizations. In fact, the confessional system did pretty much the opposite, reinforcing the largely sectarian political strength of traditional Lebanese powers like the landlords and the extended families and encouraging the growth of exclusive sectarian groupings. Because the route to political power and spoils was a function of religious affiliation, the confessional system inhibited the development of a nationalism that cut across sectarian lines.

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By the mid-1960s, the lack of political modernization in Lebanon was leading to strains in the confessional system. Young Muslims were turning away from the traditional Muslim political establishment toward radical and pan-Arab political themes based on secularism. Young Christians, particularly Maronites, were being attracted to the Phalange which, while vigorously defending Maronite interests, looked with some disdain on traditional semifeudal Maronite politics and was organized along the lines of a mass party determined to play more than a parochial role. These trends gave traditional leaders practiced in the art of confessionalism in both religions cause for concern.

Moreover, the confessional system came under increasing pressure in the late 1960s and early 1970s from external actors and events, such as the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, the advent of Palestinian-Israeli clashes along the Lebanese border, the growth of a large Palestinian community in Lebanon, and the Jordanian civil war. As Lebanon became increasingly drawn into Arab-Israeli disputes, the country's precariously balanced system was unable to respond to events and the central government lost control. This, along with the economic problems presented by large migration to the cities, hastened the growth of sectarian politics outside the bounds of the old confessional system, led to the collapse of Muslim and Christian adherence to the tenets of the National Covenant, and brought on the civil war in 1975-76.

The Effect of the Civil War

The war destroyed or scarred most of the country's carefully balanced institutions, led to the disintegration of the army along religious lines, and substantiated long-held Christian and Muslim suspicions of one another. It also gave rise to a new generation of leaders who were younger, more militant, and less willing to accept the need to compromise than their elders. Most of all, however, it unleashed the very sectarian energies and rivalries that Lebanon's founding fathers had tried to harness in the National Covenant.

As the confessional system disintegrated, political and military factions that had grown up outside of it began to flourish. This, in turn, encouraged political groups that had functioned within the system to develop new organizations, particularly militias, that also functioned outside the system. The weaker the government became, the more powerful forces acting outside the system grew until, in effect, the politics of de jure confessionalism established under the mandate and acknowledged by the National Covenant became the politics of de facto confessionalism enforced by arms.

Since the civil war, Lebanese politics have evolved almost entirely along sectarian lines. Even though several secular parties, such as the Communists, also have grown rapidly since the war, the country's two most dynamic politico-military organizations, the Maronite Phalange and the Shia Amal, are almost exclusively dedicated to the pursuit and protection of sectarian interests.

The Christians

The *Maronites* are the largest of the Christian communities (table 2). They are a Uniate sect affiliated with the Vatican. Making up less than 20 percent of Lebanon's population and slightly more than half of its Christians, the Maronites have always played an important role in Lebanese politics.

Table 2

Lebanese Politico-Religious Groups—1981 Estimates [a]

	Thousand Persons	Percent of Population
Lebanese		
Arab Muslims	1,150	44
Sunni	550	
Shia	600	
Arab Christians	750	28
Maronite	390	
Greek Orthodox	240	
Greek Catholic (Melkite)	52	
Protestant	68	
Druze	190	7
Non-Arabs	151	6
Armenian Orthodox/Catholic	150	
Jewish	1	
Palestinians (roughly one-third Arab Christian and two-thirds Arab Muslim)	400	15
Residents in Lebanon	2,641	100
Lebanese abroad (people holding Lebanese citizenship or dual citizenship abroad, mostly in Western Hemisphere)	1,250	
Total	about 3.9 million	

[a] US demographers derive these figures from the Lebanese Government's 1969 population estimate based on the 1932 census with adjustments for births, deaths, and emigration. The individual politico-religious groups have customarily inflated their population statistics to such a degree that US officials do not accept even "official" Lebanese Government figures without reservation. The Christians frequently report their population figures to include many of the Lebanese expatriates, many of whom are Christians, in order to maintain the traditional ratio between Christians and Muslims.

[redacted]

They migrated to the mountains of north Lebanon from present-day Turkey in the seventh century to avoid persecution from Orthodox Christians. Today, Maronite territory encompasses the region known as Mount Lebanon, which runs from East Beirut north along the coast to Batrun and extends inland toward the Sannin ridge line. The towns of Zgharta, Bsharri, and Bikfayya are traditionally Maronite as are the Beirut quarters of Ashrafiah and Ayn Rummanih. (U)

Maronite politics have traditionally been dominated by a number of prominent families who have rivaled one another for leadership of the community. Most notable among them are the Jumayyils of Mount Lebanon, the Shamuns of the Shuf, and the Franjiyahs of Zgharta. Each has established its own political party and militia[redacted]

The *Greek Orthodox* sect, which is the second-largest Christian community, representing a third of the Christians, have for the most part remained outside Maronite sway. With a more decentralized church structure and coreligionists living elsewhere in the Arab world, the Greek Orthodox have historically been more sensitive to Arab and Muslim concerns. Unlike other religious groups in Lebanon, the Greek Orthodox are not identified with one geographic region or one political group; they reside in almost all regions and are affiliated with a wide spectrum of political organizations ranging from the far right to the far left. A large number of Greek Orthodox belong to the Lebanese branch of the Syrian Socialist National Party and the Communist Party of Lebanon, both of which are secularist.[redacted]

Lebanon's 52,000 *Greek Catholics,* who make up about 2 percent of the population, have some independent political power bases, but usually ally with the predominant Maronite factions.[redacted]

The *Armenian* community has generally tried to steer a neutral course on Christian-Muslim issues, but largely supports the Maronites because of the community's proximity to Maronite territory held by the Phalange. The approximately 150,000 Armenians adhere strongly to their cultural origins and have chosen to maintain their own language and customs as a means of self-identification.[redacted]

With the exception of the Greek Orthodox, Lebanon's Christian community has, for the most part, been driven closer together since the civil war both by its collective fear of Syrian and Muslim domination and by the rise to power of the Phalange. Founded in 1936 by Pierre Jumayyil as a youth organization, the Phalange became a political party after France gave

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Lebanon its independence in 1945. It has since grown into a well-organized, disciplined political organization that is overwhelmingly Maronite and has a membership over 54,000.

Led by Pierre and his sons Amin and Bashir, the party has always held a prominent position in Lebanese politics—it controls several seats in Parliament, and several of its members, including Pierre, have served in the Cabinet. It also dominates the Lebanese Front, a loose coalition of Maronite groups, formed after the civil war to demonstrate Maronite solidarity against the Syrians and the Palestinians.

Although the Phalange was Lebanon's first major political entity to be organized along the lines of a mass party and, to some extent, might have been able to create the basis for a broader, transsectarian appeal, it has been almost exclusively directed toward preserving Maronite hegemony. The party's appeal to Maronites rests largely on its dedication to the ideal of an independent, Western-oriented Lebanese nation and to the prevention of Lebanon's absorption into a greater Syria or a unified Arab state.

The paternalistic attitude displayed by Phalange leaders toward Muslims is another key factor in the party's appeal to Maronites. Phalange leaders reflect the still widely held belief among Maronites that it is their right to govern Lebanon and to serve as benefactors for their politically and socially underdeveloped Muslim brethren.

The party's strength within the Christian community derives to a large extent from its control and protection of the Maronite heartland north of Beirut, where it enforces the law and dispenses justice, collects taxes, and provides administrative and social services in lieu of or in addition to the central government. It is difficult to gauge how popular the party would be if the Maronite community felt less threatened or if the central government were able and willing to reassume its civic responsibilities. The party has always been strongest among the Maronite blue collar and lower middle class rather than the professional and business class which, like some semifendal landowners, has traditionally viewed it with suspicion.

The Phalange's view of reconciliation in Lebanon rests on a basic faith in the confessional system defined by the National Covenant and the belief that Muslims would act in concert to rejuvenate the covenant if they were free of Syrian and Palestinian influence. With an eye on the country's tradition of alliances between the sects, the Phalange has sought to appeal to conservative Muslim and Druze leaders by playing on their fears of Syrian domination and growing radical influence in the Muslim community. Since the Israeli invasion, however, Embassy reporting indicates that Phalange strategists have also broadened contacts with Shia leaders, particularly in Israeli-controlled areas, in an effort to forge a political alliance with their large and increasingly powerful sect.

We believe the Phalange Party leaders would like to reestablish strong Maronite control over the government and the country. The reduction of Syrian and Palestinian influence as a result of the Israeli invasion has encouraged attempts to realize this goal. Faced with the realities of the current Muslim majority, however, some party leaders may advise splitting off the heavily Muslim areas of the Bekaa Valley and northern Lebanon that are still occupied by Syria from the sectors controlled by the Israelis and the Phalange, perhaps leading to a partitioned state. Those who oppose such drastic steps may argue instead for the creation of a Swiss-style cantonal system in which each sect would control its own area, while a weak central government would head the confederation.

Druze

The Druze community in the Middle East numbers around 300,000, divided mainly among Lebanon, Syria, and Israel with about 190,000 in Lebanon. The Druze are a heretical and occult sect that is an extremely secretive offshoot of Islam. They do not regard themselves as Muslims, nor are they considered such by Muslims. Only a small minority of the community is initiated fully into the religion's innermost secrets. This group (the Ujjal) is responsible for guiding the ignorant majority (the Juhal). (U)

The Druze are a close-knit, well-organized community that leads a life of relative isolation and self-sufficiency in the southern mountains of Lebanon. They are located primarily in the Shuf Region, although a significant number live around Hasbayya and Mt. Hermon near the Syrian border.

Traditionally, the Druze have been an agricultural community governed by large semifeudal landlords. Although the economic power of the landlord families has declined, politically they remain predominant. The two major Lebanese Druze factions are led by the prominent Junblat and Arslan families. The Arslans have traditionally accepted a limited role for the Druze in the confessional system and have lost some influence in Lebanese politics. The Junblats, on the other hand, have provided some of Lebanon's leading political figures since independence and through their leadership have attained a larger political role for the Druze in Lebanon than their numbers would warrant.

The most dynamic member of the family, the late Kamal Junblat, founded the Progressive Socialist Party (PSP), the primary political organization of the Druze community in 1949. Espousing a variant of socialism similar to West European social democracy, Kamal frequently attacked the confessional system and advocated the establishment of a secular state. He made no secret of his desire to be president of Lebanon, but knew that as a Druze he could not aspire to any position higher than minister under the confessional system.

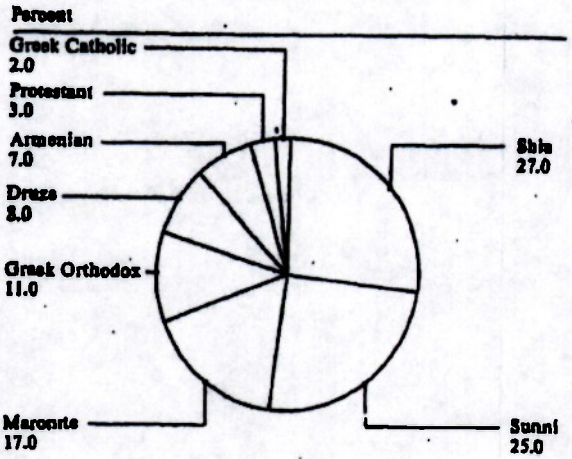
By the 1970s the PSP had become one of the most prominent leftist parties in Lebanon, largely because of Kamal Junblat's charismatic leadership. Junblat himself became leader and spokesman for the National Movement, an umbrella organization of all important Lebanese leftist parties, which emerged as a major protagonist during the civil war (table 3). When Kamal was assassinated in March 1977—presumably by the Syrians whose policies he opposed—his son Walid assumed the leadership of both the Junblati Druze and the PSP. He later became the President of the National Movement. (U)

Although Walid does not have the charismatic appeal or the intellectual dynamism of his father and has become more of a spokesman for his community than for the Lebanese left, he continues to vehemently oppose sectarianism and the confessional system.

He has repeatedly stated that he would prefer the establishment of a secular state and the election of a president by popular vote, but we believe he would probably accept a continuation of the confessional system if modifications were made giving Muslims parity with Christians and a greater role in the army than they have. He supports a strong central authority and opposes partition or other cantonal schemes that would strengthen sectarianism.

Figure 2

Lebanese Politico-Religious Groups[a]



[a]Excludes 400,000 Palestinians resident in Lebanon.

Shia Muslims

The approximately 600,000 Shia constitute Lebanon's largest single sect (figure 2). Long neglected by the central government, they are the least prosperous, least educated, and most resistant to change of the major religious communities. Most are low-income farmers, and those who have emigrated to the cities

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Table 3

Main Lebanese Political Groups— 1981

Muslims	Christians
Independent Muslims	*Moderate Christians*
Al Amal *Imam Musa Sadr, missing since September 1978, and* Nabih Berri; Shia	Independent Parliamentary Bloc Sim'an al-Duwayhi and Butrus Harb; Maronite
Islamic Coalition Sa'ib Salam and Rashid Karami; Sunni	**Pro-Syrian Christians**
Islamic Grouping Shafiq Wazzan; Sunni	Zgharta Front Sulayman Franjiyah; Conservative northern Maronite
Democratic Socialist Party Kamal al-Asaad; Shia	**Lebanese Front (primarily Christian right)**
National Movement (primarily Muslim left)	Phalange Party (Kataib) Pierre Jumayyil and Bashir Jumayyil (Lebanon Front Militia Commander); Maronite and Greek Catholic
Progressive Socialist Party (PSP) Walid Jumblat; Druze	National Liberal Party Camille Shamun (President of Lebanese Front); Maronite
Independent Nasirite Movement (Murabitun) Ibrahim Qulaylat; Beirut Sunni	Kataib Front (Order of Maronite Monks) Bulus Na'mun; Maronite Clergy extreme right
Communist Action Organization Muhsin Ibrahim; extreme left Shia	Guardians of the Cedars Etienne Saqr AKA Abu Arz; extremist Maronite
Communist Party of Lebanon Nicola Shawi and George Hawi; pro-USSR Greek Orthodox Christian	Al Tanzim George Adwan; extremist Maronite
Baath Party–Iraqi Wing Abd al-Majid Rafei; Sunni	**Independent Christian Right**
Nasirite Corrective Movement Ismail Arabi; extreme left Sunni	Maronite League Shaikh Abu Sulayman; Maronite
Syrian Social Nationalist Party (PPS or SSNP) Issam Naaman; left Greek Orthodox Christian	National Bloc Raymond Edde; Maronite, anti-Syrian
Popular Nasserist Organization Mustafa Sa'ati; Sunni	Free Lebanon Movement Major Sa'ad Haddad; Maronite/Shia, pro-Israeli
Baath Party–Syrian Wing Assim Qanso; Sunni, pro-Syrian	
Arab Socialist Union Abd al-Rahim Murad; Sunni	
National Front (pro-Syrian left)	
Nasirite Organization (Union of Working Peoples Forces) Kamal Shatila; Sunni	
National Confrontation Front Talal Marhabi and Affid; Tripoli-based Alawites	

This table is Unclassified.

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lack skills. The bulk of the Shia population is located in physically isolated regions of southern Lebanon and in the northern Bekaa Valley. (U)

The Shia community has traditionally played a minor role in Lebanese politics. Dependent on the political leadership of a small group of feudal ruling families, and respectful—in accordance with Shia traditions—of the religious authority and teachings of their Imams, the Shia had a rigid, conservative, and backward outlook that tended to reinforce their low level of political activism.

In the last decade, however, the Shia community has gradually become aware of its potential for influencing developments in Lebanon. A major catalyst was the emergence of Iman Musa Sadr, a religious leader and proponent of Shia self-development who opposed the traditional landowner leadership and began to unify and mobilize the community in the late 1960s. He organized the Higher Shiite Council in 1969 and a few years later established the "Movement of the Deprived."

Musa Sadr's disappearance in August 1978 while visiting Libya—never fully explained—provided a focus for the Shia community and another catalyst for its political mobilization. Moreover, the growing Shia role in Lebanon was given a major boost by the rise to power of a Shia theocracy in Iran.

The largest Shia organization in Lebanon is Amal, the military and political wing of the Higher Shiite Council. Since it was founded in the early 1970s by Musa Sadr, membership in Amal has grown rapidly, giving it increasing control over the Shia community. It recruits primarily among Shia concentrations in southern Lebanon and the Bekaa Valley as well as from areas in West Beirut where Shia refugees from the south have settled.

Amal was established largely to give Musa Sadr a base from which to challenge the traditional leadership of the community, thus creating differences that continue to divide the community today. As the Shia have grown more politically aware, however, the role of the traditional semifeudal landowning families in the community's political leadership has declined. Although the community's official representation in the Lebanese Government is still in the hands of the traditional leadership, largely because there have been no parliamentary elections since 1972, the Shia now look more to Amal leaders like Nabih Barri and Shaykh Shams al-Din of the Higher Shiite Council for guidance. The Shia also are increasingly attracted to Lebanon's two Communist parties, the Lebanese Communist Party and the Communist Action Organization.

The traditional Shia leadership clings to the confessional system despite its inequities toward their community because they would stand to lose most of their political power if changes were made. The Speakership of Parliament, for example, reserved for a Shia under the National Covenant, is one of the most powerful positions in the Lebanese Government, particularly during presidential elections. In this sense, the traditional Shia leadership are natural allies for the established Sunni elite and the Maronites in defense of the confessional system.

The emerging Shia leadership in Amal and the Higher Shiite Council is split between the proponents of secularism—like Nabih Barri and those who favor a strong religious role—like Shams al-Din. Perhaps more than any other group of leaders in Lebanon, the emerging Shia leadership favors a strong central government and opposes partition schemes. Although it is not clear how strongly some support secularism, even those who limit their views to favoring some adjustments to the confessional system would want their community to have a larger institutional role than it has had, one that would be commensurate with their status as the most populous sect.

[redacted] the rising tide of Shia politicization has prompted fears among other Lebanese sects, particularly the conservative Sunni elite and some Christians, about their potential role in spreading Islamic fundamentalism. This perception has been bolstered by the support Amal receives from Iran and from Syrian President Assad's minority Alawite regime as well as the group's willingness to confront Iraqi-backed Lebanese factions on behalf of Iran. It has also been underscored by Amal's general combativeness, which gives it the aura of an unguided missile. According to the US Embassy in Beirut, such fears have recently prompted radical Sunni Nasirite militias to combine forces to guard Sunni areas of Beirut as well as to join Palestinian and Lebanese leftist groups battling Amal.

If such perceptions continue and if secular Shia leaders like Nabih Barri are unable to persuade leaders of other Lebanese sects that the Shia desire to work within some type of balanced confessional system, the rise of Shia power will add yet another factor to Lebanon's already complex Christian-Muslim rift. Rising Shia power may also make for further sectarian and inter-sect strife. For now, the Shia remain

largely an unknown factor that is likely to play an increasingly important role in determining Lebanon's future.

Sunni Muslims

The approximately half million Sunni Muslims, who reside mostly in the coastal cities of Beirut, Tripoli, and Sidon, are the most urbanized and modernized of the non-Christian groups. Although they have traditionally been the dominant Muslim sect in the country, their status has been eroded in recent years by the growing population and political activism of the Shia. Sharp differences between older, conservative politicians and a new generation of leaders that emerged from the war have also split the community—possibly making it now the most internally divided of all religious sects in Lebanon. The Sunnis have not been able to develop a consensus on the appropriate means to achieve national reconciliation.

The Sunni conservative elite's power base was grounded in patronage dispensed both within and outside of the government's institutions. This base was eroded during the civil war and supplanted to a large extent by the growth of the leftist militias. Because of their weakened position, the old elite, like former Prime Minister Saib Salam, advocate retaining the confessional system established by the National Covenant, fearing that any change in that system will further reduce their personal power and Sunni representation in favor of the Shia. As is the case with the traditional Shia leaders, the conservative Sunni elite continues to be heavily represented in Parliament largely because there have been no elections since 1972.

The new generation of Sunni leaders represents a wide variety of leftist political parties that embrace Baathism, Communism, and Nasirism among other ideologies. Most of these groups are members of the leftist Muslim National Movement, which is opposed to confessionalism and advocates the establishment of a secular state. Some Sunni member groups like the Murabitun have insisted on a restructuring of the political system that would destroy the privileged positions of both the Christians and the traditional Muslim leadership.

We believe Sunnis of both conservative and leftist stripes are becoming increasingly concerned, however, about growing Shia politicization and the threat of Islamic fundamentalism. Recently this fear has muted calls for radical change among even leftist Sunni groups and, although most continue to claim publicly that the Israeli-supported Phalange constitutes their greatest danger, several Embassy reports suggest that many believe that the Shia threat looms larger in the long run.

Moreover, the Sunnis no longer have the kind of aggressive, proselytizing foreign patron that the Shia have in Iran. During the 1950s and 1960s, Nasirism provided such a force for Lebanese Sunnis, and Egypt served as the beacon for pan-Arab sentiment. Since then, however, leftist Sunni politics have fragmented into smaller, frequently competing groups. They receive foreign support from countries like Iraq and Libya, which are less interested in advancing their own ideologies than in offsetting Syrian, Palestinian, and Iranian influence among Lebanese Muslims. This factor, in addition to the continued allegiance of many in the Sunni elite to the Palestinian movement and to the Syrian presence in Lebanon, restricts the Sunnis' room for political maneuvering and inhibits their willingness to promote independent reform initiatives and entertain reconciliation schemes.

Foreign Actors and Confessionalism

The *Syrians* have frequently taken advantage of Lebanon's sectarian politics to advance their own goals, but the Assad regime supports the concept of confessionalism in Lebanon and would like to see the reestablishment of a balanced Christian-Muslim government with equal representation for Muslims. Damascus would oppose the establishment of a Maronite-dominated, Israeli-supported regime and probably will reject any formal partitioning of the country into sectarian regions. Syria's leverage has been weakened, however, by the Israeli invasion, and it is not clear whether Syrian troops will even be allowed to remain in the Bekaa Valley (figure 3).

Even if it is forced to withdraw its troops, we believe Syria will retain its influence with some of the factions. Damascus has long maintained ties with each Lebanese sect, particularly the Greek Orthodox, which dominates the leadership of the Syrian Socialist

Figure 3
Lebanon: Areas of Control

National Party in Lebanon, and the Maronites led by former President Sulayman Franjiyah in northern Lebanon. The Shia, however, have emerged over the last few years as Syria's most important Lebanese ally and Damascus has not only provided Amal with military aid but has used it frequently to carry out Syrian initiatives toward the PLO, other Lebanese Muslim and leftist factions, and Iraqi interests.

We believe the minority Alawite Assad regime also perceives the Shia and fellow Alawites in northern Lebanon as natural allies against the Sunnis in both Lebanon and Syria and as another factor in currying Iranian favor. Nonetheless, the secular Syrian regime would be wary of any upsurge of Islamic fundamentalism in Lebanon for fear that it would encourage fundamentalist Sunni opponents of Alawite rule in Syria.

The *Israelis* have emerged as the major regional actor in Lebanese politics and they will have considerable sway over the cast of Lebanon's governmental structure. Of paramount interest to Tel Aviv, however, will be the obtaining of security guarantees and the eventual signing of a peace treaty, and the Israelis can be expected to encourage the formation of a strong Phalange regime, probably working in concert with Lebanese Shia, to meet these requirements if the elements of a new confessionalist government do not come together soon.

The *Iranians* play an increasingly important outside role in Lebanon because of their special ties to Lebanon's Shia community. The relationship between the two predates the Iranian revolution. Imam Musa Sadr was Iranian and a relative by marriage of Ayatollah Khomeini. Iranian leaders opposed to the Shah lived in Lebanon and worked with Amal during their exile. Since the revolution Lebanese Shia have identified themselves with Iran not only because of their sectarian relationship, but also because of the ideological and social principles on which the Iranian revolution is based. Individual Iranians donate money to Lebanon's Shia, and the government supports the community both financially and politically. Several Embassy reports indicate that Tehran has also provided Amal with light arms, funds, and limited military training and uses Amal to carry out actions against Iraqi-backed Lebanese groups and Iraqi interests in Lebanon.

The Iranian regime would probably like to see the advent of a Shia fundamentalist government in Lebanon in place of the old confessional system and can be expected to work to undermine efforts to place sectarianism in Lebanon back into a confessionally balanced harness. The Iranian Government has taken advantage of the Israeli invasion to send troops into Lebanon and Syria, and its support for the Shia and the encouragement it probably will give to Lebanese Shia who advocate a religious state may well catalyze further sectarian strife.

Moderate Arabs like the Saudis have favored a return to the old confessional system in Lebanon, with adjustments permitting greater representation for the Muslims. In the aftermath of the Israeli invasion, we believe they will be primarily concerned about the

possible imposition of a Christian-dominated, pro-Israeli government. They will exert what limited influence they can muster on behalf of the Lebanese Muslims and will encourage hardline Maronites to reach all accommodation possible with Muslims and the Syrians. *Radical Arabs* would strongly oppose partition or any scheme that gave broad powers to the current Maronite leadership, but their ability to influence events in Lebanon will probably be quite limited while negotiations on the removal of foreign forces from Lebanon are taking place.

The influx of *Palestinians* into Lebanon after the Jordanian civil war in 1970 put increasing pressure on the country's already fragile confessional balance and their role in politicizing Lebanese Muslims was a major catalyst in bringing about the 1975-76 civil war. Although the PLO generally sought to stay out of Lebanese internal politics, radical factions saw the confessional system as a convenient target and played an active role in supporting the attempts of their Lebanese leftist allies' to overturn it.

The subjugation of the PLO in southern Lebanon and Beirut and the expulsion of its most effective leaders will reduce the Palestinians as a political factor. Even if they leave Beirut, however, we expect Palestinian leaders abroad will try to use their substantial financial assets and the large Palestinian community remaining in Lebanon, particularly in the north and the Bekaa Valley, to try to stage a gradual political comeback.

Outlook and Implications for the United States

Lebanon's old confessional system has been battered by the 1975-76 civil war, by the growth of factionalism in the six years since, and by the Israeli invasion. Nonetheless, while a large number of Lebanese have become opposed to the concept of confessionalism, some form of government in which the various sects are represented on a proportional basis remains the only workable alternative for Lebanon in the near future. There is no secular, nationalist alternative. And no one faction or sect—even the Phalange—is strong enough to prevail over the others, unless it is imposed by an outside power.

There are, however, several factors that will make finding a workable new confessional balance difficult. Muslims will resist any new confessional agreement that appears to have been dictated by the Israelis and will be reluctant to cooperate with Phalange leader Bashir Jumayyil if he appears to be doing Tel Aviv's bidding or if he seems bent on riding roughshod over their concerns. They will look to moderate Arabs like the Egyptians, the Saudis, and the Jordanians to press the United States to guarantee fair treatment for them from the Phalange and are likely to interpret any US reticence in doing so as a sign of Washington's approval for Israeli-Phalange designs to isolate Lebanon from the Arab world by establishing a Christian-dominated state allied with Israel.

Jumayyil and other hardline Christians will look to the United States to accept the realities of whatever confessional power-sharing arrangements they decide upon, including, if necessary, a Christian-dominated regime that has little or no Muslim participation. Jumayyil will argue, as will the Israelis, that it is ultimately more important for Western interests in the region to have a strong authority in Beirut that can guarantee an end to Palestinian activity in Lebanon and cast its lot with the Camp David process than to face the prospect of a weak government that continues to be paralyzed by confessional squabbling.

Moreover, the Israeli invasion and the subsequent diminution of Palestinian and Syrian influence in Lebanon, while encouraging the Phalange to reestablish the old, Maronite-dominated order, may give rise to aspirations beyond the former structure by other groups, like the Shia. The realization of these hopes would have to come at the expense of the other two major sects, the Maronites and the Sunnis, and could therefore lead to new sectarian wrangling, particularly between Sunnis and Shia.

Another factor that could inhibit efforts to rehamess confessional ties into a workable governmental structure is the continuing role of outside actors like Syria, Iran, and possibly the PLO, who will retain some

influence in Lebanese politics. While their ability to play a major role has been diminished by the Israeli invasion, they—particularly Syria—will be capable of disrupting the political basis for any settlement that does not take their basic interests in Lebanon into account.

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