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SUMMARY

The United States and Lebanon continue to enjoy good relations. Prominent current issues between the United States and Lebanon include progress toward a Lebanon-Israel peace treaty, U.S. aid to Lebanon, and Lebanon's capacity to stop Hizballah militia attacks on Israel. The United States supports Lebanon's independence and favored the end of Israeli and Syrian occupation of parts of Lebanon. Israel withdrew from southern Lebanon on May 23, 2000, and Syria completed withdrawing its forces on April 26, 2005.

A large Lebanese-American community follows U.S.-Lebanon relations closely. Presidents Eisenhower and Reagan said the United States had "vital" interests in Lebanon, but others might describe U.S. interests in Lebanon as less than vital. At the invitation of the Lebanese government, the United States intervened in Lebanon to defend Lebanese sovereignty in 1958 and 1982. In a Beirut terror bombing in October 1983, 241 U.S. armed forces personnel died. From 1987 until July 1997, the United States banned travel to Lebanon because of the threat of kidnaping and dangers from the ongoing civil war.

Lebanon is rebuilding after the 1975-1990 civil war. Syrian armed forces, invited into Lebanon in 1976 to prevent a Muslim attack on the Christians, continued to occupy the northern and eastern parts of the country until April 2005. Israeli forces invaded southern Lebanon in 1982 and occupied a 9-mile-wide strip along the Israel-Lebanon border until May 2000.

Lebanon's government is based in part on a 1943 agreement that called for a

Maronite Christian President, a Sunni Muslim Prime Minister, and a Shi'ite Muslim Speaker of the National Assembly, and stipulated that the National Assembly seats and civil service jobs be distributed according to a ratio of 6 Christians to 5 Muslims. On August 21, 1990, the Lebanon National Assembly adopted the "Taif" reforms (named after the Saudi Arabian city where they were negotiated). The parliament was increased to 128 to be divided evenly between Christians and Muslim-Druze, presidential authority was decreased, and the Speaker's and the Prime Minister's authority was increased. President Ilyas Hirawi signed the constitutional amendment implementing the reforms on September 21, 1990.

Since the civil war, Lebanon has held elections for the National Assembly in 1992, 1996, 2000, and, most recently, 2005. The National Assembly elected Emile Lahoud President on October 15, 1998, and extended his term for three years by a constitutional amendment in September 2004. The assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri, who opposed Lahoud's extension, sparked a political crisis, realignments in Lebanon's domestic politics, and withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon. Since June 2005, an independent U.N. commission has been investigating the circumstances of Hariri's assassination, amid allegations of Syrian involvement, directly or through pro-Syrian Lebanese officials.

Other CRS reports on Lebanon include CRS Issue Brief IB92075, *Syria: U.S. Relations and Bilateral Issues*, by Alfred B. Prados.

MOST RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

On December 12, 2005, the U.N. commission investigating the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri submitted a report elaborating on its findings as covered in the initial report submitted on October 19. Statements by two of the suspects interviewed by the commission indicated that all Syrian intelligence documents concerning Lebanon had been burned, and a Syrian official told the commission that no material regarding the Hariri assassination had been found in Syrian archives. The report stated that “detailed information [from the additional statements and documents reviewed by the commission] points directly at perpetrators, sponsors and organizers of an organized operation aiming at killing Mr. Hariri, including the recruitment of special agents by the Lebanese and Syrian intelligence services.”

On December 15, 2005, the U.N. Security Council adopted Resolution 1644, which among other things, extended the mandate of the commission by six months until June 15, 2006. The original chairman of the Commission, German prosecutor Detlev Mehlis, resigned in early January 2006 and was replaced by Serge Brammertz, a Belgian prosecutor serving with the International Criminal Court.

BACKGROUND AND ANALYSIS

United States and Lebanon

Overview

The United States and Lebanon have traditionally enjoyed good relations, rooted in long-standing contacts and interaction beginning well before Lebanon’s emergence as a modern state. Factors contributing to this relationship include a large Lebanese-American community (a majority of Arab-Americans are of Lebanese origin); the pro-Western orientation of many Lebanese, particularly during the Cold War; cultural ties exemplified by the presence of U.S. universities in Lebanon; Lebanon’s position as a partial buffer between Israel and its principal Arab adversary, namely Syria; Lebanon’s democratic and partially Christian antecedents; and Lebanon’s historic role as an interlocutor for the United States within the Arab world.

Two U.S. presidents have described Lebanon as of vital interest to the United States, President Eisenhower in 1958 and President Reagan in 1983. (Public Papers of the Presidents, 1958, p. 550-551; Public Papers of the Presidents, 1983, vol. II, p. 1501.) Both statements were made in the context of brief U.S. military deployments to Lebanon to help Lebanese authorities counter rebellions supported by radical Arab states with ties to the former Soviet Union. Some would agree that a friendly and independent Lebanon in a strategic but unstable region is vital to U.S. interests. But others might disagree, pointing to the absence of such tangible interests as military bases, oil fields, international waterways, military or industrial strength, or major trading ties. In a broader sense, a ruinous 15-year

civil war that created turmoil in Lebanon between 1975 and 1990 and that periodically threatened to spill over into adjacent areas of the Middle East illustrated the dangers to U.S. interests posed by instability in this small country.

Lebanon: Demography and Politics

Political Profile

Sectarianism. Lebanon, with a population of 3.8 million, has the most religiously diverse society in the Middle East, comprising 17 recognized religious sects. “Confessionalism,” or the distribution of governmental posts by religious sect, is a long-standing feature of Lebanese political life, despite frequent calls to abolish it. Because of political sensitivities related to power sharing among the various communities, no census has been taken in Lebanon since 1932, when Lebanon was under a French mandate. According to current estimates by the Central Intelligence Agency as of 2005, Muslim groups comprise 59.7% of the population while Christian groups comprise 39.0%, with another 1.3% of assorted religious affiliations. A more detailed but less recent estimate by an expert on the geography and demography of the Middle East gives the following breakdown:¹

Table 1. Lebanon Population and Religious Sects

Sect	Number	Percent
Shi'ite Muslim	1,192,000	34%
Sunni Muslim	701,000	20%
Maronite Christian*	666,000	19%
Druze**	280,000	8%
Greek Orthodox (Christian)	210,000	6%
Armenian (Christian)***	210,000	6%
Greek Catholic (Christian)*	175,000	5%
Other	70,000	2%
Total (not exact, due to rounding)	3,506,000	100%

* Affiliated with the Roman Catholic Church but retain their own rituals.

** Grouped with Muslims; regarded by some as derived from Shi'ite Islam.

*** Armenians are the only sizeable ethnic minority in Lebanon; other Lebanese groups are all ethnic Arab.

Lebanese groups have developed political parties along religious, geographical, ethnic, and ideological lines and are often associated with prestigious families. Christian groups, especially Maronites, tend to be strong advocates of Lebanese independence and opposed to

¹ Colbert C. Held, *Middle East Patterns*, Westview Press, 2000, p. 262. Reflecting 1999 figures, Held uses an estimated total Lebanese population of 3.506 million, to which he applies the above percentages.

Syrian and other external influences. Christian parties include the Phalange led by the Gemayel family, and smaller parties led by the Chamoun, Frangieh, and Iddi families. Sunni Muslim parties, historically more Arab nationalist in orientation, include the Independent Nasirite group and a new group, the Futures Party, that has coalesced around anti-Syrian supporters of the recently assassinated Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri. Shi'ite parties include the more moderate Amal under Nabih Berri and the more radical Hizballah (see below), former rivals but now at least temporarily allied; Druze are largely associated with the Progressive Socialist Party led by the leftist yet feudally based Jumblatt family, now somewhat tenuously aligned with the Futures Party. A religiously mixed group, the Syrian National Social Party (SNSP), favors a union of Syria, Lebanon, and possibly other nearby states. Several of these parties and groupings formerly maintained militias, notably the Lebanese Forces, which were affiliated with the Christian Phalange Party, and Hizballah, which has both a political and a military wing. Most of the militias were disbanded after the civil war and Lebanese Forces leader Samir Geagea was jailed (he has just been amnestied), but Hizballah's militia continues to function.

Political Structure and Power Sharing. Post-civil war Lebanon retains the country's unique political system, based on power sharing among the diverse religious sectarian communities and political factions that comprise the modern Lebanese state. Under the constitution of 1926, Lebanon is a republic with a president elected by parliament for a non-renewable six-year term, a prime minister and cabinet appointed by the president, and a parliament, elected by universal adult suffrage for a four-year term. Composition of parliament varies in accordance with electoral laws that are promulgated before each election; current membership is 128. Unlike the President, the prime minister and cabinet must receive a vote of confidence from parliament.

In 1943, when Lebanon became fully independent from France, leaders of the principal religious communities adopted an unwritten agreement known as the National Covenant, which provided that the President be a Maronite Christian, the Prime Minister a Sunni Muslim, and the Speaker of Parliament a Shi'ite Muslim; parliamentary seats were divided on the basis of six Christians to five Muslims. Cabinet posts are generally distributed among the principal sectarian communities, notably Maronites, Greek Orthodox, smaller Christian sects, Druze (a small sect associated with Islam), Sunni Muslims, and Shi'ite Muslims. As time passed, the 1943 ratios, which had been based on the country's sole census conducted in 1932, became less reflective of Lebanese society as Muslims gradually came to outnumber Christians, while within the Muslim community, Shi'ite Muslims came to outnumber Sunni Muslims. Discontent over power sharing imbalances was a major factor in inter-communal tensions and civil strife culminating in the 1975-1990 civil war.

The Civil War and Taif Reforms. At stake in the civil war was control over the political process in Lebanon, the status of Palestinian refugees and militia, and the respective goals of Syria and Israel (see the section below on Foreign Presence in Lebanon). From 1975 to 1990, the civil war killed, wounded, or disabled hundreds of thousands and rendered comparable numbers homeless at one time or another during the fighting. At one point, a terror bombing in October 1983 killed 241 U.S. armed forces personnel, who were part of a short-lived multinational force attempting to keep peace among Palestinian refugees and Lebanese factions. From 1987 until July 1997, the United States banned travel to Lebanon because of the threat of kidnaping and dangers from the ongoing civil war. Lebanon continues to rebuild in the aftermath of the civil war.

The Lebanese parliament elected in 1972 remained in office for 20 years, since it was impossible to elect a new parliament during the civil war. After a prolonged political crisis near the end of the war, Lebanese parliamentary deputies met in 1989 in Taif, Saudi Arabia, under the auspices of the Arab League and adopted a revised power sharing agreement. The so-called Taif Agreement raised the number of seats in parliament from 99 to 108 (later changed to 128), replaced the former 6:5 ratio of Christians to Muslims in parliament with an even ratio, provided for a proportional distribution of seats among the various Christian and Muslim sub-sects, and left appointment of the prime minister to parliament, subject to the president's approval. It also addressed the status of Syrian forces in Lebanon, as explained in a section below. Parliamentary elections held in 1992, 1996, and 2000 resulted in pro-Syrian majorities, given the presence and influence of Syrian forces in Lebanon ostensibly as part of a peacekeeping force. Though supported by some Lebanese, including many Shi'ite Muslims, the Syrian presence was increasingly resented by other elements of the Lebanese population.

Political Upheaval of 2005

Assassination of Former Prime Minister. By 2004, tensions had increased between the pro-Syrian Lebanese President Emile Lahoud and the independent Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri, a self-made billionaire who had spearheaded the reconstruction of Lebanon after the civil war. Matters came to a head when the Lebanese parliament, apparently under Syrian pressure, adopted a Syrian-backed constitutional amendment extending President Lahoud's tenure by an additional three years. Hariri, who disagreed with the move, resigned in October 2004, and subsequently aligned himself with an anti-Syrian opposition coalition. Hariri's assassination in a car bombing on February 14, 2005, blamed by many on Syrian agents, led to widespread protests by an anti-Syrian coalition comprising many members of the Christian, Druze, and Sunni Muslim communities and counter-demonstrations by pro-Syrian groups including Shi'ites who rallied behind the Hizballah and Amal parties. Outside Lebanon, the United States and France were particularly vocal in their denunciation of the assassination and a possible Syrian role in it.

Resolution 1595. A statement by the President of the U.N. Security Council on February 25, although it did not mention Syria by name, condemned the assassination and requested the Secretary General "to report urgently on the circumstances, causes and consequences of this terrorist act." In accordance with this request, a U.N. fact-finding team visited Lebanon and concluded that "the Lebanese investigation process suffers from serious flaws and has neither the capacity nor the commitment to reach a satisfactory and credible conclusion."

On April 7, as domestic and international outrage mounted, the U.N. Security Council adopted Resolution 1595, under which the council decided to "establish an international independent investigation Commission ('the Commission' or UNIIIC) based in Lebanon to assist the Lebanese authorities in their investigation of all aspects of this terrorist act, including to help identify its perpetrators, sponsors, organizers and accomplices." Heading the Commission was Detlev Mehlis, described as "a 25-year veteran of the Berlin

prosecutor's office with a record of solving high profile terror cases.”² The resolution requested the Commission to complete its work within three months from the date it commences operations, authorizes the Secretary General to extend the Commission's mandate for another period of up to three months, and requests an oral update every two months while the Commission is functioning. The U.N. Secretary General informed members of the Security Council that the Commission was fully operational as of June 16, 2005. On September 8, 2005, the Commission requested a 40-day extension to complete its work. Upon submission of the Commission's initial report on October 19, the Secretary General extended its mandate until December 15 to enable the Commission to pursue further gaps it had identified (see “The Mehlis Commission,” below).³ On August 30, a U.N. spokeswoman announced that three former heads of Lebanese intelligence agencies and a former Lebanese member of parliament had been identified as suspects in the assassination of Hariri. A subsequent press report describes the suspects as Syrian proxies with close ties to President Lahoud.⁴

The Mehlis Report. Tensions mounted as reports circulated that Syrian and Lebanese officials would be implicated in the findings of the Mehlis Commission. After encountering initial resistance from Syria, from September 20-23, members of the commission visited Damascus, where they interviewed senior Syrian military and security officials including the last two Syrian chiefs of intelligence in Lebanon, who were widely regarded as the effective viceroys of Lebanon during their respective tenures: Generals Rustom Ghazali and Ghazi Kanaan. Kanaan, who was reassigned to Syria in 2002 and appointed minister of the interior apparently committed suicide in October 2005. Some observers speculate that Kanaan was killed or forced to commit suicide by Syrian authorities because of what he might reveal — or might have revealed — about Syrian involvement in the Hariri assassination or that he chose to take his own life because he feared that he would become the scapegoat for Syrian actions in Lebanon. In actuality, however, Kanaan is not mentioned in the Commission's report of October 19 (see below).

The 54-page report submitted by the Mehlis Commission represented four months of research in which Commission members interviewed more than 400 persons and reviewed 60,000 documents, identified several suspects, and established various leads. Two central conclusions reached by the Commission deal with the question of culpability, although they do not constitute a conclusive finding:

² Warren Hoge, “Bush Pushes U.N. to Move Swiftly on Syria Report,” *New York Times*, Oct. 22, 2005.

³ In its operative paragraph 1, Resolution 1595 “Decides ... to establish an international independent investigation Commission (“the Commission”) based in Lebanon to assist the Lebanese authorities in their investigation of all aspects of this terrorist act ...” The resolution requests that the commission complete its work within three months from commencement of operations. The U.N. subsequently announced that the Commission began its operations on June 16, 2005.

⁴ Hassan M. Fatah, “Lebanon's President Facing Growing Pressure to Resign,” *New York Times*, Sept. 6, 2005. The press report lists the four as the current head of security, the former head of security, a former military intelligence chief, and a former chief of police.

It is the Commission's view that the assassination on 14 February 2005 was carried out by a group with an extensive organization and considerable resources and capabilities.

...there is converging evidence pointing at both Lebanese and Syrian involvement in this terrorist act.... Given the infiltration of Lebanese institutions and society by the Syrian and Lebanese intelligence services working in tandem, it would be difficult to envisage a scenario whereby such a complex assassination plot could have been carried out without their knowledge.

The Commission report adds that the investigation is not complete and calls for further investigation; states that Syrian authorities, including the foreign minister, while extending limited cooperation, have provided some false or inaccurate information; and calls on Syria to help clarify unresolved questions. Syrian officials, including President Bashar al-Asad, have denied complicity in the Hariri assassination and said the Mehlis report was biased. On October 29, President Asad said Syria has set up a commission to investigate the assassination.⁵

Questions have been raised regarding the apparent exclusions in the report of the names of suspects who had been identified in earlier drafts of the report. The principal example appears in Paragraph 96 (page 29) of the report, in which a witness told the Commission that in September 2004 "senior Lebanese and Syrian officials decided to assassinate Rafik Hariri" and held several follow-up meetings in Syria to plan the crime. An earlier version reportedly listed the names of five of the senior officers, including President Asad's brother Maher al-Asad and the President's brother-in-law Asif Shawkat, chief of military intelligence and widely considered the second most powerful official in the regime. Some reporters questioned whether or not the Commission chief Detlev Mehlis had come under pressure to make the report less accusatory. At a news conference on October 21, both Mehlis and Secretary-General Kofi Annan denied this; Mehlis went on to explain that he suppressed the names of the officers when he found out that the Commission's report was to be made public, because he had only one anonymous source for the specific accusation.⁶ Maher al-Asad does not appear at all in the official copy of the report and Asif Shawkat appears only once (paragraph 178) when Shawkat allegedly forced an individual 45 days before the assassination to make a tape claiming responsibility for the crime, purportedly in an effort to hide Syrian or Lebanese complicity.

Resolution 1636. On October 31, 2005, the U.N. Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 1636, which requires Syria to cooperate "fully and unconditionally" with the Mehlis investigation into the assassination of the late Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri or face unspecified "further action." By dropping a threat appearing in earlier drafts of specific economic sanctions, the sponsors of the resolution were able to attract support from Russia and China while leaving the door open to the imposition of sanctions at a later date. U.S. officials noted that the resolution was adopted under Chapter VII of the U.N.

⁵ Warren Hoge and Steven R. Weisman, "U.N. Is Expected to Pass Measure Pressuring Syria," *New York Times*, Oct. 31, 2005.

⁶ Warren Hoge, "Bush Pushes U.N. to Move Swiftly on Syria Report," *New York Times*, Oct. 22, 2005.

Charter, which gives the Council power to impose penalties, including use of military force.⁷ After temporizing, Syria acceded to a request by the Mehlis Commission to make five Syrian officials available for questioning by the commission at U.N. offices in Vienna, Austria. The Syrians, whose names were not announced, were reportedly intelligence and security officials including the former Syrian intelligence chief in Lebanon Rustom Ghazali; meetings took place from December 5 to 7.

Possible Credibility Issue. In a related development, on November 28 a former key witness questioned by the Mehlis Commission stated on Syrian TV that he had provided false testimony to the commission after having been kidnapped, tortured, injected with drugs, and offered a \$1.3 million bribe by Lebanese officials who wanted him to implicate Syrian intelligence in the murder of Hariri. The witness, Hussam Tahir Hussam, describes himself as a Syrian intelligence agent. Mehlis and Lebanese officials have expressed doubts regarding his statement. Two other Syrian government employees have said another former witness, like Hussam, would soon recant his original testimony before the commission, in what some commentators think may be a Syrian-instigated campaign to undercut the credibility of the Mehlis report.⁸

More Violence. On December 12, 2005, a car bomb killed Gibran Tueni, a prominent Lebanese journalist and newly elected member of the Lebanese parliament, who had often criticized Syria's role in Lebanon. Several anti-Syrian Lebanese politicians have blamed Syria, which in turn denied complicity and said the crime was aimed at directing fresh accusations against Syria. Commentators note that the explosion occurred only a few hours before the U.N. investigating commission was due to submit an update of its report on the Hariri assassination to U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan. Other anti-Syrian Lebanese victims of recent major attacks or assassinations include journalists Samir Kassir (June 2, 2005) and Mai Chidiac (September 25, 2005) and politician George Hawi (June 21, 2005). Of these, Chidiac was critically injured and the others were killed.

The Mehlis Follow-On Report. On December 12, the Mehlis commission submitted a follow-on report which states that "[t]he Commission's conclusions set out in its previous report ... remain valid." According to the follow-on report, the Commission interviewed additional witnesses (for a total of 500 as of December 12), identified 19 suspects (reportedly including the five Syrian officers interviewed in Vienna), and reviewed additional documentation. Statements by two of the suspects indicated that all Syrian intelligence documents concerning Lebanon had been burned. Also, the head of a separate Syrian investigative commission informed the Mehlis Commission that no material regarding the Hariri assassination had been found in Syrian archives. The Mehlis follow-on report further expresses the view that Hussam, the witness who recanted his statement, "is being manipulated by the Syrian authorities." Analysts are reportedly reviewing the material in an attempt to find material relevant to planning for the assassination. The report stated that "[t]he detailed information [from the additional statements and documents reviewed by the commission] points directly at perpetrators, sponsors and organizers of an organized operation aiming at killing Mr. Hariri, including the recruitment of special agents by the

⁷ Warren Hoge, "U.N. Tells Syria to Stop Impeding Slaying Inquiry," *New York Times*, Nov. 1, 2005.

⁸ Michael Slackman, "Syria Attacks Evidence as U.N. Case Turns More Bizarre," *New York Times*, Dec. 7, 2005.

Lebanese and Syrian intelligence services.” The report recommended that the commission be extended by an additional six months.

Resolution 1644. On December 15, 2005, the U.N. Security Council adopted Resolution 1644, which extended the mandate of the Independent Commission for six months until June 15, 2006, as recommended by the Commission, and requested the Commission to report on its progress at three-month intervals. The Council acknowledged a Lebanese request that suspects be tried by “a tribunal of an international character” and asked the Secretary General to help the Lebanese government identify the nature of such a tribunal. The Council also requested the Secretary General to present recommendations to expand the Commission’s mandate to include investigations of other attacks on Lebanese figures. Mehlis, who wanted to return to his post in Germany, stepped down as Commission chairman in early January 2006 and was replaced by Serge Brammertz, a Belgian prosecutor serving with the International Criminal Court.

Further Developments. As of mid-January 2006, Syrian President Asad had not given a firm response to a Commission request to meet with him, although Syrian Foreign Minister Farouk Shar’*a* had indicated that he (Shar’*a*) was available for a meeting. The Commission met again in Vienna with two Syrian officials including a second meeting with former Syrian intelligence chief in Lebanon Rustom Ghazali on January 16. Meanwhile, former Syrian Vice President Abd al-Halim Khaddam, who had been a pillar of the Syrian Ba’*th*ist regime for over 20 years, alleged that Asad used threatening language with the late Prime Minister Hariri and asserted that the Syrian president had ordered Hariri’s assassination. Khaddam, who moved to Paris after resigning the vice presidency in 2005, further stated that he is forming a Syrian government in exile. Response has been cool, however, even from some anti-Syrian Lebanese factions and from Syria’s small opposition.

Elections of 2005 and Aftermath

As Syrian troops departed from Lebanon under U.S. and international pressure (see below), the Lebanese prepared to hold parliamentary elections without Syrian interference for the first time since 1972. Three principal groupings emerged to contest the multi-phased elections: a mixed coalition of supporters of the late Prime Minister Hariri (the “Bristol Gathering”), who rallied around his son Saad Hariri; a combined electoral list led by Hizballah and Amal; and the “Change and Reform Alliance” consisting of largely Christian supporters of the long exiled former armed forces commander-in-chief General Michel Awn, who returned to Lebanon in May.⁹ As a result of parliamentary elections held in four phases between May 29 and June 5, 2005, Hariri’s candidates (the Bristol Gathering) gained a majority of 72 seats in Lebanon’s 128-member parliament. The other two blocs, the Hizballah-Amal Movement and the Change and Reform Alliance, won 33 and 21 seats, respectively, plus two independents apparently unaffiliated with any of the three major blocs. On June 22, a statement by the President of the Security Council welcomed the Lebanese parliamentary elections and commended “the fair and credible character of the vote.”

⁹ General Awn, a controversial former armed forces commander and prime minister, rejected the Taif Agreement and fled to the French Embassy in Beirut after being besieged by Syrian forces. He was subsequently granted political asylum in France.

Despite Hariri's success, the strong showing by the Amal-Hizballah list among Shi'ite voters resulted in the reelection of veteran parliamentary speaker Nabih Berri, generally regarded as pro-Syrian. But an anti-Syrian Hariri supporter, former Finance Minister Fouad Siniora, gained parliament's endorsement for the post of prime minister and was appointed to this post by President Lahoud on June 30. On July 19, Siniora gained approval for a 24-member cabinet composed of 15 supporters of Saad Hariri's Futures Movement, five supporters of the pro-Syrian Shi'ite coalition, and others. Particularly noteworthy was the appointment for the first time in Lebanese history of a Hizballah official, Muhammad Fneish, to a cabinet position as Minister of Energy and Water Resources. The new cabinet received a vote of confidence on July 30, gaining 92 affirmative votes from the 128-member parliament, with 14 opposed, 2 abstaining, and 20 not attending the session.

Siniora will continue to face difficulties in working with this mixed government. First, pressure is reportedly mounting for the resignation of President Lahoud with the recent identification of several of his close associates in the Hariri assassination.¹⁰ Second, the role of the formerly exiled General Awn is uncertain: though long an opponent of the Syrian role in Lebanon, Awn formed tactical alliances with several pro-Syrian Lebanese politicians during the recent elections in an effort to defeat pro-Hariri candidates. On the other hand, Awn's grouping is not represented in the newly formed cabinet and Awn has said he will form the backbone of an opposition to Siniora's government. Some observers believe Awn has his eye on the presidency. Third, the inclusion of a Hizballah official in the cabinet raises further potential problems; for example, the U.S. State Department, while welcoming the new cabinet, has said it will not deal with an official of Hizballah, which the U.S. Government has listed as a foreign terrorist organization. In this connection, a major stumbling block for the new government will be a U.N. demand contained in Security Council Resolution 1559 that all militias be disbanded, which in effect refers primarily to Hizballah. This will be difficult to implement in view of Hizballah's strong block of supporters in parliament and inclusion of a Hizballah official in the new cabinet. In January 2006, a dispute between Druze leader Walid Jumblatt (allied with Hariri) and Hizballah spokesmen further exacerbated internal political tensions.

Recent or Current Foreign Presence in Lebanon

Syria

Thirty-five thousand Syrian troops entered Lebanon in March 1976, in response to then President Suleiman Frangieh's appeal to protect the Christians from Muslim and Palestinian militias; later, Syria switched its support away from the main Christian factions. Between May 1988 and June 2001, Syrian forces occupied most of west Beirut and much of eastern and northern Lebanon. Syrian forces did not venture south of a "red line" running east and

¹⁰ In early January an anti-Syrian Lebanese political figure described Lahoud's extension in office as "null and void." On the other hand, Shi'ite cabinet ministers reportedly refused to attend a cabinet meeting unless President Lahoud was present. Majdoline Hatoum, "Calls for Lahoud's resignation intensify," *The Daily Star* (Beirut), Jan. 4, 2006; Adnan al-Ghoul, "Hizbullah takes gloves off in row with Jumblatt," *The Daily Star* (Beirut), Jan. 16, 2006.

west across Lebanon near Rashayah, inasmuch as territory south of the line was considered to fall within the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) operating area.

In October 1989, as part of the Taif agreements, Syria agreed to begin discussions on possible Syrian troop redeployment from Beirut to the eastern Beqaa Valley two years after political reforms were implemented and discuss further withdrawals at that time. Then President Elias Hrawi signed the reforms in September 1990. However, the withdrawal discussions, which according to most interpretations of the Taif Agreement were to have started in September 1992, did not take place, in part because the Lebanese government said it needed more time to establish its authority over the country. Syrian officials maintained that they were waiting for the Lebanese government to complete rebuilding the army and police forces and assume security responsibilities in Lebanon before beginning the withdrawal discussions. In the meantime, Syria and Lebanon signed a treaty of brotherhood, cooperation, and coordination in May 1991, which called for creating several joint committees to coordinate policies. Although Syrian troop strength in Lebanon reportedly declined from 35,000-40,000 in the 1980s to approximately 14,000 by early 2005, Syria continued to exercise controlling influence over Lebanon's domestic politics and regional policies; moreover, its intelligence agents were active in Lebanon. U.N. Security Council Resolution 1559 adopted on September 2, 2004, called among other things upon "all remaining foreign forces to withdraw from Lebanon."

The Hariri assassination in February 2005 prompted strong international pressure on the Syrian regime, particularly from the United States and France, to withdraw its forces and intelligence apparatus from Lebanon in accordance with Resolution 1559. On April 26, the Syrian foreign minister informed U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan and the President of the U.N. Security Council that Syrian forces had completed their withdrawal from Lebanon. In his *first* semi-annual report on the implementation of Resolution 1559,¹¹ the U.N. Secretary General stated that as of April 26, however, he had not been able to verify full Syrian withdrawal; consequently, he dispatched a U.N. team to verify whether there had been a full Syrian withdrawal. On May 23, the U.N. Secretary General forwarded a report by a team he had sent to Lebanon to verify Syrian withdrawal. The team "found no Syrian military forces, assets or intelligence apparatus in Lebanese territory, with the exception of one Syrian battalion" deployed near the disputed village of Deir Al-Ashayr on the Lebanese-Syrian border. The team also concluded that "no Syrian military intelligence personnel remain in Lebanon in known locations or in military uniform" but added that it was "unable to conclude with certainty that all the intelligence apparatus has been withdrawn."¹²

On June 10, 2005, following reports of Syrian involvement in attacks on anti-Syrian Lebanese officials and journalists, Secretary General Annan sent the verification team back to Lebanon to see if Syrian intelligence agents were still in the country. The team returned on July 11 and subsequently submitted a report to Annan. In his *second* semi-annual report on implementation of Resolution 1559, submitted on October 26, 2005, Annan reported that "[o]verall, the team corroborated its earlier conclusion that there was no remaining visible or significant Syrian intelligence presence or activity in Lebanon, though the distinctly close

¹¹ U.N. Security Council document S/2005/272, Paragraph 17.

¹² Annex to U.N. Security Council document S/2005/331, Letter dated 23 May 2005 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council.

historical and other ties between the Syrian Arab Republic and Lebanon also had to be taken into account when assessing a possibly ongoing influence of Syrian intelligence in Lebanon.” He acknowledged that there were some credible reports that Syrian intelligence continued to influence events in Lebanon but said most of these reports were exaggerated. On the other hand, the Secretary General noted that other requirements of Resolution 1559 remained to be implemented, particularly disbanding and disarming Lebanese and non-Lebanese militia (notably Hizballah and several Palestinian groups) and extension of Lebanese government control throughout all of the country.¹³

Syria has long regarded Lebanon as part of its sphere of influence. Some international observers have expressed concern that Syrian leaders might try to circumvent the effect of the withdrawal by maintaining their influence through contacts they have acquired over the years in the Lebanese bureaucracy and security services.¹⁴ Attacks on and assassinations of several prominent Lebanese critics of Syria in June and July 2005 have accentuated these fears. Another remaining question concerns the ability of the Lebanese security forces to assume responsibility for maintaining order in areas vacated by Syrian forces. Lebanon’s ground forces number approximately 70,000 organized into 11 brigades and a few separate units and armed largely with obsolescent equipment, plus minuscule air and naval forces, each consisting of about 1,000 personnel.¹⁵

A related issue concerns the Lebanese-Syrian border. Since Syria’s withdrawal from Lebanon, some Lebanese have complained that Syria is obstructing commercial traffic across the Lebanese border, while Syrian officials say they have had to tighten border controls on security grounds. Also, members of Syria’s large expatriate work force in Lebanon complain that they have been victims of a backlash against Syria, and some have returned to Syria as a result, depriving Syria of worker remittances that have benefitted the Syrian economy. A joint Lebanese-Syrian commission started meeting in August 2005 to adopt procedures to handle movement of workers between the two countries.

Continuing Lebanese-Syrian frictions have led to proposals for mediation. In January 2006, after a visit to Egypt, Saudi Arabia’s foreign minister visited Lebanon, where he floated a joint Saudi-Egyptian proposal reportedly including the following principal provisions: an end to hostile media campaigns, a ban on provocative statements by politicians, exchange of diplomatic representation between Lebanon and Syria (the two countries have never established diplomatic relations), and coordination of foreign policy. Lebanese reactions have been mixed, and the Lebanese government has not officially responded to the Saudi initiative. One Lebanese deputy from the Hariri bloc said any agreement would have to include border demarcation, establishment of diplomatic relations,

¹³ Text of report is attached to U.N. Security Council document S/2005/673, Oct. 26, 2005.

¹⁴ Robin Wright, “Syria Moves to Keep Control of Lebanon,” *Washington Post*, March 31, 2005. Syria also has potential built-in assets through the continued presence of President Lahoud and parliamentary speaker Berri.

¹⁵ Recent estimates appear in International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance, 2004-2005*, London, pp. 129-130.

release of Lebanese prisoners in Syrian jails, and total cooperation with the U.N. commission investigating the Hariri assassination.¹⁶

Israel

In March 1978, Israel invaded and occupied Lebanese territory south of the Litani River, to destroy Palestinian bases that Israel believed were the source of attacks against Israelis. Israeli forces withdrew in June 1978, after the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) was placed south of the Litani to serve as a buffer between Israel and the Palestinians (U.N.S.C. Resolution 425, March 19, 1978). In June 1982, Israel mounted a more extensive invasion designed to root out armed Palestinian guerrillas from southern Lebanon, defeated Syrian forces in central Lebanon, and advanced as far north as Beirut. As many as 20,000 Palestinians and Lebanese may have perished in the fighting. Israeli forces completed a phased withdrawal in 1985, but maintained a 9-mile wide security zone in southern Lebanon from 1985 to 2000. About 1,000 members of the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) patrolled the zone, backed by a 2,000-3,000 Lebanese militia called the South Lebanon Army (SLA), which was trained and equipped by Israel. On its part, Israel continued its air and artillery retaliation against Palestinian and Lebanese Shi'ite militia and Lebanese armed forces units that attacked IDF and SLA positions.

In May 2000, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak fulfilled a 1999 campaign promise to withdraw Israeli forces from the security zone in southern Lebanon. Barak had hoped to do this in conjunction with a Syrian withdrawal, but the continued stalemate in Syrian-Israeli talks led Barak to decide to move unilaterally. Some 500 Hizballah militia moved into portions of the southern security zone vacated by the IDF and SLA. Israel gave asylum to approximately 6,700 SLA fighters and their families, while another 1,500 SLA were captured by Hizballah and turned over to the Lebanese Government to stand trial. Of the 6,700 exiles, many emigrated to Australia, Canada, and Latin America; approximately 2,000 remained in Israel as of mid-2005, where they were recently granted the right to Israeli citizenship but few applied.

Syria and the pro-Syrian Lebanese government asserted that the Israeli withdrawal was incomplete because it did not include a 10-square-mile enclave known as the Shib'a Farms near the Israeli-Lebanese-Syrian tri-border area. Most third parties maintain that the Shib'a Farms is part of the Israeli-occupied Syrian Golan Heights and is not part of the Lebanese territory from which Israeli was required to withdraw under a 1978 U.N. Security Council resolution (425). On June 16, 2000, the U.N. Secretary General informed the Security Council that Israel had withdrawn from Lebanon in compliance with Resolution 425.

Hizballah, on its part, claimed credit for forcing Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon, thereby boosting its credentials within the Arab world. Since May 2000, Israeli forces in the Shib'a Farms area have been the main focus of Hizballah attacks. Some analysts believe that Syria, the Lebanese government, and Hizballah raised the issue of this obscure enclave as a justification for continuing to put military pressure on Israel to withdraw from the Golan

¹⁶ "Saudis Wait for Reply to Syria-lebanese Peace Plan," *The Daily Star* (Beirut), Jan. 18, 2006.

Heights in the aftermath of its withdrawal from Lebanon.¹⁷ Syria denies this. It is not clear whether the new Lebanese government, which contains both pro- and anti-Syrian elements, will maintain Lebanon's former position regarding the Shib'a Farms.

U.S.-Lebanese Relations

U.S. Policy Toward Lebanon. The United States has enjoyed good diplomatic relations with Lebanon and has supported its political independence. During the 1975-1990 civil war, the United States expressed concern over the violence and destruction taking place there; provided emergency economic aid, military training, and limited amounts of military equipment; and briefly deployed military forces to Lebanon in the early 1980s, as noted earlier. The United States supported and participated in various efforts to bring about a cease-fire during the civil war and subsequent efforts to quiet unrest in southern Lebanon along the Lebanese-Israeli border. In 1996 the United States helped negotiate an agreement between Hizballah and Israel to avoid targeting civilians and is a member of a five-party force monitoring this agreement. The United States endorsed the U.N. Secretary General's findings in May 2000 that Israel had completed its withdrawal from southern Lebanon. The U.S. Administration reacted strongly to the assassination of the late Prime Minister Hariri in February 2005, criticized the Syrian presence in Lebanon, and demanded withdrawal of Syrian forces; following the assassination, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice recalled U.S. Ambassador to Syria Margaret Scobey to Washington for consultations.

The United States has welcomed the formation of a new Lebanese government following the withdrawal of Syrian forces. On July 22, 2005, Secretary of State Rice met with President Lahoud, Prime Minister Siniora, and other officials during a brief surprise visit to Lebanon. After a meeting with Siniora, Dr. Rice said, "I think that you cannot find a partner more supportive of Lebanon than the United States. This is a tremendous achievement for the Lebanese people; namely, to be able to control their future by themselves." She reiterated U.S. demands that Hizballah be disarmed, however, and criticized Syria for obstructing commercial traffic across the Lebanese border. (Syrian officials say they have had to tighten border controls on security grounds).¹⁸

Role of Congress

Congress has also shown considerable interest in Lebanon and Members have spoken frequently against Syrian domination of the Lebanese scene. For example:

On July 1, 1993, the U.S. Senate passed by voice vote S.Con.Res. 28, which stated that Syria had violated the Taif Agreements (see below) by not withdrawing from Lebanon in September 1992, urged an immediate Syrian withdrawal, and called upon the President to continue withholding aid and support for Syria.

¹⁷ Michael Slackman, "Shabaa [variant spelling] Farms at Center of Tension for Lebanon, Syria and Israel," *Los Angeles Times*, Apr. 28, 2001.

¹⁸ Saul Hudson, "Rice pledges support to Lebanon on surprise visit," *Reuters*, July 22, 2005. Also, "Lebanese premier, Rice hold news conference in Beirut 22 Jul," *BBC Monitoring Middle East*, July 22, 2005.

The House of Representatives added an amendment to the State Department Authorization bill, Section 863 of H.R. 1646, in mid-May 2001, which would have cut \$600,000 in International Military Education and Training (IMET) funds to Lebanon unless Lebanon deployed its armed forces to the border with Israel. Section 863 also called upon the President to present a plan to Congress to cut ESF funds if Lebanon did not deploy within six months.

Section 1224 of P.L. 107-228, the Security Assistance Act of 2002, stated that \$10 million of the funds available for FY2003 and subsequent years could not be obligated until the President certified to Congress that Lebanese Armed Forces had deployed to the internationally recognized Lebanon-Israel border and that Lebanon was asserting its authority over the border area. The amendment (popularly called the “Lantos Amendment” after its initial sponsor) was added to compel Lebanon to exercise control over the border area, displacing Hizballah forces. Lebanon refused to move to the border until Israel evacuated the Shib’a Farms disputed area. According to unconfirmed sources, the \$10 million was held in an escrow account pending negotiations among the United States, Israel, Lebanon, and Members of Congress.

On December 12, 2003, President Bush signed H.R. 1828, the Syria Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act (P.L. 108-175), which directs the President to apply economic and diplomatic sanctions to Syria if Syria does not meet several demands, including withdrawal from Lebanon and deployment of Lebanon’s armed forces in all parts of Lebanon.

Both houses have passed measures condemning the Hariri assassination, calling for a full investigation, and calling on Syria to withdraw from Lebanon (for example, H.Res. 91, H.Res. 273, S.Res. 63, and S.Res. 77).

Recent and Current U.S. Assistance to Lebanon

In December 1996, the United States organized a Friends of Lebanon conference, which resulted in a U.S. commitment of \$60 million in U.S. aid to Lebanon over a five-year period beginning in FY1997 and ending in FY2001, i.e., \$12 million per year mainly in Economic Support Funds (ESF). Congress increased this amount to \$15 million in FY2000 and \$35 million in FY2001, reportedly to help Lebanon adjust to new conditions following Israel’s withdrawal and cope with continuing economic strains. U.S. economic aid to Lebanon has hovered around \$35 million in subsequent years.

The Bush Administration requested \$35 million in ESF and \$700,000 in International Military Education and Training (IMET) for FY2006. H.R. 3057 (the foreign operations appropriations bill for FY2006), which was passed by the House on June 28, 2005, raises the requested ESF amount from \$35 million to \$40 million, of which \$6 million is to be devoted to scholarships and U.S. educational institutions in Lebanon. The Senate version of H.R. 3057, reported on June 30, contained \$35 million in ESF, of which \$4 million is for educational institutions. During floor debate on July 19, however, the Senate adopted Amendment 1298, which increased ESF to Lebanon by \$5 million and provided that an additional \$2 million of these funds would be available for scholarships and educational institutions, thereby aligning the Senate figures with those of the House bill. The Senate passed its version of the bill on July 20. (See **Table 2**, below, for annual U.S. aid to

Lebanon.) The conference report (H.Rept. 109-265) contained the \$40 million for Lebanon (including \$6 million for scholarships). The President signed H.R. 3057 as P.L. 109-102 on November 14, 2005.

According to the Administration's original planning (based on \$35 million in ESF), ESF for Lebanon in FY2006 is targeted toward three main objectives: economic growth, agriculture, and trade (\$22 million); promoting democracy and good governance (\$7 million); and protection of the environment (\$6 million). IMET programs are designed to increase military professionalism among Lebanese Armed Forces personnel, reduce sectarianism in a major national institution, foster personal working relationships with U.S. military personnel, and offer an alternative to training conducted by Syria and other countries less amenable to U.S. democratic ideals. IMET-funded maritime training will emphasize port security and search and rescue operations.

Table 2. U.S. Assistance to Lebanon
(millions of dollars)

Year	Total	Economic Aid (Grants)	Food Aid (Grants)	Military Aid (Loans)	I.M.E.T. (Grants)
1946 - 1980	332.7	120.2 ^a	86.2 ^b	123.3 ^c	3.0
1981	24.3	4.0	0	20.0	0.3
1982	21.8	9.0	2.2	10.0	0.6
1983	153.9	52.2	0	100.0	1.7
1984	44.0	28.1	0.3	15.0	0.6
1985	21.1	19.9	0.5	0	0.7
1986	17.6	16.0	1.1	0	0.5
1987	23.0	12.8	9.7	0	0.5
1988	12.3	5.1	6.8	0	0.4
1989	15.5	2.8	12.3	0	0.4
1990	19.4	8.3	10.7	0	0.4
1991	19.2	9.3	9.9	0	0
1992	16.4	9.2	7.2	0	0
1993	14.4	10.3	3.5	0	0.6
1994	2.0	1.7	0	0	0.3
1995	16.0	15.6 ^d	0	0	0.4
1996	2.5	2.0	0	0	0.5
1997	12.8	12.3	0	0	0.5
1998	12.6	12.0	0	0	0.6
1999	12.6	12.0	0	0	0.6
2000	15.6	15.0	0	0	0.6
2001	35.4	34.9	0	0	0.5
2002	35.6	35.0	0	0	0.6
2003	35.5	34.8	0	0	0.7
2004	35.9	35.2	0	0	0.7
2005	35.9	35.2	0	0	0.7
2006 ^e	40.7	40.0 ^e	0	0	0.7
Totals	1,028.7	592.9	150.4	268.3	17.1

I.M.E.T. = International Military Education and Training

Source: U.S. Agency for International Development, U.S. Overseas Loans and Grants

a. Of the \$120.2 million total, \$19 million was loans.

b. Of the \$86.2 million total, \$28.5 million was loans.

c. Of the \$123.3 million total, \$109.5 was loans and \$13.8 million was grants.

d. Includes about \$6 million from 1994.

e. Administration requested \$35 million in ESF, increased to \$40 million by P.L. 109-102.