Lebanon: Background and U.S. Relations

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Summary

Lebanon is a religiously diverse, democratic state transitioning toward independence after a ruinous civil war and the subsequent Syrian and Israeli occupations. The United States and Lebanon have historically enjoyed a good relationship due in part to cultural and religious ties; the democratic character of the state; a large, Lebanese-American community in the United States; and the pro-western orientation of Lebanon, particularly during the Cold War. Current U.S. concerns in Lebanon include strengthening the weak democratic institutions of the state, limiting the influence of Iran, Syria, and others in Lebanon's political process, and disarming Hezbollah and other militant groups in Lebanon.

Following Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon in 2005 and the war between Israel and Hezbollah in the summer of 2006, the Bush Administration requested and Congress appropriated a significant increase in U.S. assistance to Lebanon. Since 2006, U.S. assistance to Lebanon has topped $1 billion total over three years, including for the first time U.S. security assistance for the Lebanese Armed Forces and Internal Security Forces of Lebanon.

Several key issues in U.S.-Lebanon relations could potentially affect future U.S. assistance to Lebanon. The scope and influence of foreign actors, primarily Syria and Iran; unresolved territorial disputes; concerns about extremist groups operating in Lebanon; and the strength and character of the Lebanese Armed Forces are among the challenges facing any new Lebanese government and U.S. objectives in Lebanon. These unresolved issues could become particularly sensitive as factions work to form a new government.

A political agreement among Lebanese parties in May 2008, brokered by the Qatari government and the Arab League in Doha, ended 18 months of political stalemate. That period was marked by cabinet resignations, political assassinations, labor strikes, a war between Hezbollah and Israel, an insurrection by foreign and Palestinian militants, and the worst sectarian fighting since Lebanon's 15-year civil war.

The March 14 coalition maintained a slim majority of parliamentary seats in the election on June 7, 2009. Since then, all Lebanese parties have been working to form a new consensus government, but the process has been significantly delayed, paralyzing government institutions. If these efforts continue to stall or fail altogether, U.S.-Lebanon relations could be challenged by political stalemate or an increase in sectarian violence. The Obama Administration and Members of the 111th Congress may also consider the regional and international struggle over Iranian influence in the Levant, the growing threat of radical Sunni movements, and Syria's efforts to move out of isolation, all of which weigh heavily on the Lebanese government and U.S.-Lebanon relations.

This report provides an overview of Lebanese politics, recent events in Lebanon, and current issues in U.S.-Lebanon relations and will be updated to reflect major developments.

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Parliamentary Elections 2009

On June 7, 2009, Lebanese voters elected 128 deputies—from 26 districts and 11 politically recognized religious sects—to Lebanon's unicameral legislature. The March 14 coalition won 71 seats to March 8's 57 seats, maintaining its slim majority in parliament.[1] The election took place without any major sectarian violence or substantial accusations of fraud by any party. The outcome shocked many observers who expected a closer outcome or a slight advantage for the March 8 coalition, or who expressed concerns about security and logistical challenges associated with holding the election on one day for the first time.

The somewhat unexpected outcome of the election led observers to speculate about what might have tipped the balance in March 14's favor. They cited President Obama's speech in Cairo, lingering anger toward Hezbollah for its May 2008 siege of Beirut, and last-minute political jockeying in contested districts on the part of March 14 parties, among other factors. Whatever the cause, many observers viewed the election results as a setback for Syrian and Iranian influence and a success for recent U.S. policy aimed at promoting independence and democratic reforms in Lebanon. Others cautioned against framing the results in such terms, in part because the March 8 coalition won the popular vote.[2]

Other analysts focused on the election process and prospects for democratic reform in Lebanon. Ahead of the election, Lebanon's Minister of Interior Ziad Baroud implemented a number of electoral reforms, including the formation of an election supervisory committee, campaign finance and media regulations, and accreditation of domestic and international observers. Many analysts believe that because the election took place without sectarian violence and credible accusations of fraud, Lebanon could be ready for further political reform.

Cabinet Formation Efforts

All parties now face the challenge of forming a government, a possibly protracted process that, if not resolved peacefully, could lead to a resumption of sectarian violence. According to the Lebanese constitution, the next parliamentary session was scheduled to begin on October 15, which was widely viewed as a de facto deadline for government formation. The date has come and gone, raising concerns about Lebanon's constitutional system. Cabinet formation now depends on the ability of March 14 and March 8 leaders, and their patrons in Saudi Arabia and Syria, to reach a consensus.

The debate over cabinet formation centers on the minority March 8 coalition's attempts to retain the veto power (one-third plus one or 11 of the 30 cabinet seats) that it attained in the Doha

[1] The March 14 coalition is led by Prime-Minister Designate Saad Hariri and his Sunni party Future Movement. The opposition March 8 Alliance is led by the Shiite party Amal and the Maronite Christian Free Patriotic Movement. It also includes Hezbollah.

[2] For official election results, see http://www.elections.gov.lb/. For a detailed analysis of the election outcome, see Richard Chambers, "Lebanon's June 7 Elections: The Results," IFES. Available online at http://www.ifes.org/files/IFES_LebanonReview060709Results.pdf.

Agreement in May 2008.[3] The March 14 ruling coalition is committed to a cabinet that reflects the election outcome and views the Doha Agreement as a temporary power-sharing arrangement that addressed a specific crisis. The March 8 coalition, on the other hand, views the Doha Agreement as a revision of the Taif Accord, which established the current power-sharing arrangement following the civil war. According to March 8 leaders, the Doha Agreement reversed years of underrepresentation of Shiites in the government. They argue that large Shiite voter turnout (the March 8 coalition won the popular vote in the face of lower turnout in districts carried by March 14) in the parliamentary elections supports this position.

Also at issue in cabinet formation discussions is the distribution of ministerial portfolios among the parties. Reports indicate that the March 8 coalition is currently vying to keep the Ministry of Telecommunications, which plays an important role in funding the treasury and in security matters involving surveillance and monitoring communications.[4] In his October 28, 2009, testimony to the Middle East Subcommittee of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Jeffrey Feltman stated that "expectations are currently high that a cabinet could be announced within the coming days."[5]

Tension along the Lebanon-Israel Border

Recent reports indicate that tensions along Lebanon's southern border with Israel have increased in recent weeks, owing to a number of alleged violations of UNSCR 1701[6] on both sides. The Israeli government has filed three official complaints with U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki moon since September for the following alleged violations of UNSCR 1701:

- On September 11, 2009, three Katyusha rockets were launched from Lebanese territory towards Israel and landed near Nahiriya in northern Israel. Israel retaliated with rocket fire.[7]
- On October 12, 2009, an explosion occurred in the southern Lebanese village of Tayr-Filsi at the home of Abdel Nasser Issa, an alleged Hezbollah operative. Israel claims that the residence was being used as an arms storage facility for Hezbollah. The Israeli government has further alleged that Iran and Syria are rearming Hezbollah. Following the October 12 explosion, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) released video footage showing what appeared to be Hezbollah

[3] The Doha Agreement was a negotiated resolution of 18 months of sectarian violence that preceded Hezbollah's May 2008 siege of Beirut. In the agreement, the March 8 coalition was granted a minority veto in the cabinet (one-third plus one seats).

[4] U.S. Open Source Center (OSC) Document GMP20091030644003, "Administrative Problems Delaying Cabinet Sleiman," *Daily Star Online*, October 29, 2009.

[5] The full text of Assistant Secretary Feltman's testimony is availabe online at http://www.internationalrelations.house.gov/111/fel102809.pdf.

[6] UNSCR 1701, adopted August 11, 2006, calls for a cessation of hostilities between Israel and Hezbollah, Israeli withdrawal from Lebanese territory, the disarmament of all groups in Lebanon other than the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), and an end to the sale or supply by an member state to any group in Lebanon other than the LAF, among other things. Full text available online at http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N06/465/03/PDF/N0646503.pdf?OpenElement.

[7] U.S. Open Source Center (OSC) Document GMP20090911966098, "Now Lebanon: IDF Holds Lebanese Cabinet Responsible for Rocket Attack," Beirut *Now Lebanon*, September 11, 2009.

operatives carrying a 4-meter-long missile from a depot to a truck that they then transported to a hiding place in a southern Lebanese village.[8]

- On October 27, 2009, a 107-millimeter rocket was fired from Lebanon and struck the area of Kiryat Shmona in northern Israel. The Israeli army returned fire with artillery rounds.[9]

Both the Lebanese government and the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) allege that Israeli over-flights of Lebanese territory continue in violation of 1701 and that Israeli retaliation to incidents of rocket fire from Lebanon has encumbered the ability of the Lebanese Army and UNIFIL to investigate the source of the attacks.[10] Secretary-General Ban has called for "maximum restraint" between Israel and Lebanon.[11]

Hariri Tribunal

After months of delay, the Hariri Tribunal at the Hague commenced on March 1, 2009. It is comprised of seven foreign and four Lebanese judges. The Tribunal will apply Lebanese criminal law, subject to the exclusion of the death penalty and forced labor, which are otherwise applicable under the Lebanese law. The issuing of formal charges and the start of an actual trial are expected to take place over the next several months.

On May 6, 2009, the Tribunal allowed the release of four Lebanese generals who had been held in Lebanon since 2005 on suspicion of involvement in the assassinations. [12] According to Robin Vincent, the court's registrar, the generals were released because the evidence against them was not sufficient to hold them. Vincent also reaffirmed his commitment to judicial integrity during all phases of the investigation and trials.[13] The release of the generals raised questions about the credibility of the Tribunal and concerns about the impact of its decisions on Lebanese politics. Some observers have expressed concerns that the timing of the Tribunal could fuel sectarian tensions in Lebanon or forestall the formation of a unity government after the June 2009 election.[14] Others have minimized these fears, citing statements by the court's registrar that formal charges and trials should not be expected before 2011.[15]

[8] " IDF: Syria Making Its Arms Available to Hizballah," *Ha'aretz*, October 14, 2009.

[9] U.S. Open Source Center (OSC) Document GMP20091027644018, "Lebanon: Unidentified Persons Fire Katyusha at Israel: Israeli Army Retaliates," *Lebanese National News Agency Online*, October 27, 2009.

[10] U.S. Open Source Center (OSC) Document GMP20091030966079, "NOW Lebanon: Salam Warns Against Israeli Preparation for Wide-Range Attack on Lebanon," Beirut *NOW Lebanon*, October 30, 2009.

[11] "Ban Urges Restraint After Latest Rocket Firing from Lebanon into Israel," *UN News Centre*, October 28, 2009. Available online at http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=32752&Cr=leban&Cr1=.

[12] The four generals were in charge of the country's police, intelligence service, and elite army unit at the time of the assassination, they are: Major General Jamil Sayyed, former chief of general security; Major General Ali Hajj, former head of the internal security forces; Brigadier General Raymond Azar, former chief of military intelligence, and Brigadier General Mustafa Hamdan, former commander of the presidential guard.

[13] Dalila Mahdawi, "Vincent Reassures Lebanese on Tribunal," *Daily Star* (Beirut), May 1, 2009.

[14] Rami Khouri, "The Four Generals and Mideast Impunity," *Daily Star* (Beirut), May 4, 2009.

[15] U.S. Open Source Center (OSC) Document—GMP20090225966018—"Lebanese will not be 'kept in the dark' during Hariri tribunal-Vincent," *Daily Star* (Beirut), February 25, 2009. See also U.S. Open Source Center (OSC) Document—GMP20090218966022—"Hariri Tribunal will have no impact on June 7 elections, analysts say," *Daily Star* (Beirut), February 18, 2009.

The Tribunal also might affect recent U.S. moves toward rapprochement with Syria. If the proceedings go as planned, then the charges and trials could cast a negative light on Syria. As a result, most observers expect Syria to attempt to forestall the court's progress, perhaps by denying all allegations against Syrian officials while maintaining the appearance of cooperation with the United Nations Security Council. Some have expressed concerns that the Tribunal could reignite tensions between Syria and Lebanon as well. The timing of the Tribunal comes after a period when Syria and Lebanon established formal diplomatic relations and many Lebanese, including the March 14-led government, appeared ready to accept, at least tacitly, Syrian-Lebanese rapprochement (for more information, see "Lebanon-Syria Relations," below).

U.S. Policy Toward Lebanon

The United States and Lebanon have historically enjoyed a good relationship due in part to cultural and religious ties; the democratic character of the state; a large, Lebanese-American community in the United States; and the pro-western orientation of Lebanon, particularly during the Cold War.

The American University of Beirut (AUB) was founded in 1866 by Americans in Lebanon and continues to receive the support of the United States Government and the Congress today. A large Lebanese-American community further strengthens the cultural ties and has supported U.S. assistance to Lebanon in various forms.

Despite longstanding contact and interaction between the United States and Lebanon, some might argue that Lebanon is of limited strategic value to the United States. Unlike many American partners in the Middle East, Lebanon has no U.S. military bases, oil fields, international waterways, military or industrial strength, or major trading ties with the United States. Others would disagree, pointing to Lebanon's strategic location as a buffer between Israel and Syria, Lebanon's large Palestinian refugee population, and its historical role as an interlocutor for the United States with the Arab world.

Background

During the 1975-1990 civil war, the United States expressed concern over the violence and destruction taking place in Lebanon and provided emergency economic aid, military training, and limited amounts of military equipment. In addition, the United States briefly deployed military forces to Lebanon in the early 1980's. The forces withdrew after a bombing at the U.S. Embassy in April 1983 and a bombing at the U.S. Marine barracks in October 1983 killed 272 civilians and members of the U.S. Armed Forces in Lebanon. 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.

The United States supported Lebanon in its reconstruction following the civil war with economic assistance aimed at rebuilding Lebanon's badly damaged infrastructure and political support for a democratic, independent Lebanon (see **Appendix A**). In 1996, the United States helped negotiate an agreement between Hezbollah and Israel to avoid targeting civilians and is a member of a five-party force monitoring this agreement. The United States also endorsed the U.N. Secretary General's findings in May 2000 that Israel had completed its withdrawal from southern Lebanon.

Since Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon in 2000, U.S. efforts have focused on countering terrorism and promoting democracy, two agendas that sometimes clash in Lebanon as Hezbollah maintains a political party, a militia wing, and an overseas terrorist capability. The United States also opposed the ongoing Syrian occupation of Lebanon as part of its policy to contain Syria as a state sponsor of terrorism.

The Bush Administration reacted strongly to the assassination of the former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri in February 2005, criticized the Syrian presence in Lebanon, and demanded the withdrawal of Syrian forces from Lebanon. The United States welcomed the formation of a new Lebanese government following the withdrawal of Syrian forces in April 2005. After a meeting with Lebanese Prime Minister Fouad Siniora on July 22, 2005, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said, "I think that you cannot find a partner more supportive of Lebanon than the United States."[16] The United States also supported the United Nations in establishing an independent tribunal to prosecute those responsible for Hariri's assassination.

Large-scale fighting between Israel and Hezbollah in mid-2006 complicated U.S. policy toward Lebanon. In a broader sense, the conflict jeopardized not only the long-term stability of Lebanon but presented the U.S. government with a basic dilemma. On one hand, the Bush Administration was sympathetic to Israeli military action against a terrorist organization—and President Bush spoke in favor of Israel's right to self-defense. On the other hand, the fighting dealt a setback to Administration efforts to support the rebuilding of physical infrastructure and democratic institutions in Lebanon.

Following the war, Hezbollah, emboldened by increased popular support, began to push for an increased role in the government in Lebanon, and internal government disputes led to a vacant presidency and 18 months of political stalemate. The United States watched cautiously while continuing assistance and support for the March 14 coalition until January 23, 2007, when Hezbollah called a general strike aimed at toppling the government. In response, then-Under Secretary of State Nicholas Burns called on Arabs and Europeans to throw their support behind Prime Minister Siniora against those who would try to destabilize his regime. Following the Doha Agreement in May 2008 that ended the stalemate, Secretary Rice reiterated U.S. support for the government of Lebanon and its "complete authority over the entire territory of the country."

The United States welcomed the new unity government in Lebanon following the Doha Agreement and supported the choice of Michel Suleiman to fill the vacant presidency. Lebanese President Michel Suleiman visited Washington on September 26, 2008 while in the United States to attend the U.N. General Assembly meeting in New York. He was the first Lebanese head of state to do so since 1996.

As the Obama Administration and the 111th Congress reevaluate U.S. policy in the region, the U.S. approach toward Lebanon could become a harbinger of a new direction or a continuation of the status quo. While the United States wants to promote stability and curb Iranian influence in Lebanon, there is a debate over how best to achieve these goals. The United States could continue its support for the anti-Syrian March 14 coalition government, promoting democracy and stability with economic and security assistance. Another alternative is to address the situation in Lebanon as part of a larger regional initiative, possibly one that centers on Syria, Israel, and the peace

[16] BBC Monitoring Middle East, Text of live news conference by U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Lebanese Prime Minister Fouad Siniora in Beirut, *Lebanese LBC TV*, July 22, 2006.

process. However, events may ultimately dictate a U.S. course of action in Lebanon, particularly if Lebanese factions fail to form a new consensus government and sectarian violence increases.

Recent U.S. Assistance to Lebanon

In recent years, the United States has pledged to devote more financial resources to reconstruction and military assistance for Lebanon. The withdrawal of Syrian forces from Lebanon and the coming to power of the more moderate March 14 government prompted the Administration and Congress to increase U.S. assistance to Lebanon. The summer 2006 war between Hezbollah and Israel heightened the need for additional economic aid, as the Lebanese government and its international and Arab partners vied with Iran and Hezbollah to win the hearts and minds of many Lebanese citizens who lost homes and businesses as a result of the conflict. From a military standpoint, the war also highlighted the need for a more robust Lebanese military to maintain law and order and to secure Lebanon's borders against smuggling and, in particular, against the flow of weapons to Hezbollah and other non-state actors.

The FY2007 Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act (P.L. 110-28, adopted May 25, 2007) provided more than $580 million in security and economic assistance to support Lebanon's recovery and to strengthen the Lebanese security forces (See **Table 1** below). The supplemental also provided $184 million in Contributions for International Peacekeeping Activities (CIPA) funding for Lebanon. Appropriations for FY2008, FY2009, and FY2010 support the continuation of these efforts, albeit at lower levels. For more information on U.S. economic and security assistance to Lebanon, see "U.S. Assistance to Lebanon," below.

Table 1. U.S. Assistance to Lebanon, FY2006-2010

regular and supplemental appropriations; current year $ in millions

Acct.	FY06	FY07[a]	FY08	FY09 Bridge	FY09	FY09 Supp. (Est.)	FY10 Request	Total
ESF	$39.60	$334.00	$44.64	—	$67.5		$109.00	$594.74
FMF	$30.00[b]	$224.80	$6.94	$32.5	$58.2	$74.00	$100.00	$426.44
INCLE	—	$60.00	$0.50	—	—		$15.67	$76.17
NADR	$2.98	$8.50	$4.75	—	—		—	$16.23
1206 (DoD)[c]	$10.60	—$30.60	$15.10	—	—		—	$56.30
IMET	$0.75	—$0.91	$1.20	—	—		—	$2.86
CIPA	—	$184.00	—	—	—		—	$184.00
DA	$2.00	—	—	—	—		—	$2.00
Total	$86.21	$843.85	$73.13	$32.5	$125.7	$74.00	$229.00	$1444.47

Source: U.S. Department of State, Congressional Budget Justification for Foreign Operations. Includes funds from the following accounts: Economic Support Fund (ESF), Foreign Military Financing (FMF), International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement Assistance (INCLE), Non-proliferation, Anti-terrorism, De-mining, and Related funding (NADR), International Military and Education Training (IMET),Contributions for International Peacekeeping Activities (CIPA) and Development Assistance (DA). Funding for '1206' refers to the Department of Defense Global Train and Equip program, authorized by Section 1206 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2006 (P.L. 109-163).

Notes

a. FY2007 numbers include regular and supplemental appropriations.

b. Includes reprogrammed funds. 'FY2009 Bridge' refers to the $66 billion in total request for the Defense Department included in the FY2008 Spring Supplemental Appropriations Act 2008 (P.L. 110-252, June 30, 2008), constituting a "bridge fund" sufficient to allow services to carry out day-to-day peacetime activities and military operations overseas until the middle of 2009.

c. Funding for '1206' refers to the Department of Defense Global Train and Equip program, authorized by Section 1206 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2006 (P.L. 109-163).

Political Profile

The Lebanese government, with support from the United States and the international community, constantly struggles to maintain the delicate political balance of its confessional system (see below) and ongoing sectarian tension. The legacy of civil war and foreign occupation left government institutions weak, and recovery has been difficult, particularly in the face of foreign interference from Iran and Syria through their proxies. Political parties and citizens of Lebanon express both a sense of dissatisfaction with the political system and a reluctance to alter it, possibly because of the national memory of the civil war and a fear that any attempt to alter the political system could reignite the tensions that led the country to fracture along sectarian lines in 1975.

Demography

Lebanon is the most religiously diverse society in the Middle East, with 17 recognized religious sects. The Lebanese government operates under a confessional system, or the distribution of government positions by religion. 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 Shiite Muslim. Parliamentary seats were apportioned between Christians and Muslims according to a ratio of 6:5, until 1989 when the ratio was evened. Cabinet posts are generally distributed among the principal sectarian communities.

The 1943 ratios were developed based on the sole Lebanese census conducted in 1932 and became less reflective of Lebanese society as Muslims gradually came to outnumber Christians. Within the Muslim community, Shiite Muslims came to outnumber Sunni Muslims.[17] As a result of this system, Lebanese political parties developed along religious, geographic, ethnic, and ideological lines and are often associated with prominent families. Discontent over power-sharing imbalances was an important factor in the inter-communal tensions and civil strife culminating in the 1975-1990 civil war.

[17] Because no census has been conducted in Lebanon since 1932, the proportion of Shiite to Sunni Muslims is uncertain. The latest CIA World Fact Book estimates state that Lebanon's population is 35% Shiite Muslim, 25% Sunni Muslim, 35% Christian, and 5% Druze and other groups.

Civil War, Occupation, and Taif Reform

At stake in the civil war were control over the political process in Lebanon, the status of Palestinian refugees and militia, and the respective goals of Syria and Israel. From 1975-1990, hundreds of thousands were killed, wounded, or disabled, and comparable numbers were left homeless at one time or another. The war was marked by foreign occupations, kidnappings, and terror bombings. In the aftermath, Lebanon's warring factions reached a precarious consensus, but sectarian divisions and a culture of distrust among Lebanon's various demographic groups persist.

Syrian and Israeli Incursions

Both Syria and Israel sent troops into Lebanon during the 15-year civil war. Syria sent troops into Lebanon in 1976 at the request of then-President Suleiman Frangieh. Israel invaded in 1978 following PLO attacks against Israelis that originated from southern Lebanon.

35,000 Syrian troops entered Lebanon in March 1976 to protect Christians from Muslim and Palestinian militias. From 1987 and June 2001, Syrian forces occupied most of west Beirut and much of eastern and northern Lebanon.

In March 1978, Israel invaded and occupied Lebanese territory south of the Litani River to destroy Palestinian bases that were being used as staging grounds for attacks against Israel. Israeli forces withdrew in June 1978, after the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) was deployed to southern Lebanon to act as a buffer between Israel and the Palestinians (U.N. Security Council Resolution 425, March 19, 1978). In June 1982, Israel mounted a more extensive invasion designed to root out armed Palestinian guerrillas from southern Lebanon. Israel defeated Syrian forces in central Lebanon and advanced as far north as Beirut.

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 to 3,000 member Lebanese militia called the South Lebanon Army (SLA), which was trained and equipped by Israel. Israel withdrew unilaterally from southern Lebanon in 2000, with the exception of its continuing presence in a small area known as the Shib'a farms, which remains disputed. For more information, see "The Shib'a Farms" below.

Taif Agreement

The Lebanese parliament elected in 1972 remained in office for 20 years because 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 Taif Agreement raised the number of seats in parliament from 99 to 108 (later changed to 128), replaced the former 6:5 ration of Christians to Muslims 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. In addition, Syria and Lebanon signed a treaty of brotherhood, cooperation, and coordination in May 1991, which called for creating several joint committees and coordinating policies. Although Syrian troop strength in Lebanon reportedly declined over time, Syria continued to exercise controlling

influence over Lebanon's domestic politics and regional policies. Syrian intelligence agents also were active in Lebanon.

Even after Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon in 2005, the Taif agreement continues to be the benchmark that the Lebanese people refer to in times of stress and sectarian violence. The consensus reached in Taif still guides the distribution of political power in Lebanon. For many in Lebanon, the Taif Agreement is still viewed as the compromise between Sunnis, Christians, and Shiites that keeps the country from falling back into civil war. At the same time, ongoing sectarian violence and political stalemate reflect deep tension over revisiting the core principles of the agreement and the absence of a political framework for reevaluating the distribution of political power in Lebanon.

Syrian Withdrawal and Parliamentary Elections of 2005

In 2004, tensions mounted between then-Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri, who favored more independence from Syria, and pro-Syrian President Emile Lahoud. On September 2, 2004, the U.N. Security Council adopted Resolution 1559, calling for "all remaining security forces to withdraw from Lebanon," among other things. The next day, the Lebanese parliament, under suspected Syrian pressure, adopted a constitutional amendment that extended President Lahoud's term by three years. Hariri, who disagreed with the amendment, resigned in October 2004 and aligned himself with the anti-Syrian opposition coalition.

Hariri was killed when his motorcade was bombed in Beirut on February 14, 2005. Many suspect Syrian involvement in the assassination. His death led to widespread protests by the anti-Syrian coalition including Christians, Druze, and Sunni Muslims and to counter-demonstrations by pro-Syrian groups including Shiites who rallied behind the Hezbollah and Amal parties. Outside Lebanon, the United States and France were particularly vocal in their denunciation of the assassination and of Syria for its suspected role in the bombing.

Syrian Withdrawal

The Hariri assassination 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, 2005, 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. The United Nations confirmed that all Syrian troops had been removed but acknowledged allegations that Syrian intelligence still operates in Lebanon and that close, historical ties between the two nations make evaluating the Syrian role in Lebanon difficult.[18]

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

[18] See U.N. Security Council Document S/2006/832, October 19, 2006 and U.N. Security Council Document S/2007/262, May 7, 2007.

bureaucracy and security services.[19] Attacks on and assassinations of some prominent Lebanese critics of Syria in addition to Hariri have accentuated these fears.

Parliamentary Elections of 2005

As Syrian troops departed from Lebanon under U.S. and international pressure, Lebanon prepared to hold parliamentary elections without Syrian interference for the first time since 1972. Parliamentary elections, held in four phases between May 29 and June 5, 2005, gave a majority (72 out of 128 seats) to a large, anti-Syrian bloc known as the Bristol Gathering or the March 14 Movement, headed by Saad Hariri, a son of the late prime minister. A second, largely Shiite and pro-Syrian bloc combining Hezbollah and the more moderate Amal organization won 33 seats. A third bloc, the Change and Reform Movement (also known as the Free Patriotic Movement), consisted of largely Christian supporters of former dissident armed forces chief of staff General Michel Aoun,[20] who returned to Lebanon from exile in France in May 2005. Aoun's bloc, which adopted a somewhat equivocal position regarding Syria, gained 21 seats.

Despite Hariri's success, the electoral pattern resulted in a mixed government, which complicated its ability to adopt clear policies. Hariri associate Fouad Siniora became prime minister, and the 24-member cabinet contained 15 members of Hariri's bloc. It also contained five members of the Shiite bloc, including for the first time in Lebanese history a member of Hezbollah. Other key pro-Syrians remaining in the government were President Lahoud and veteran parliamentary speaker Nabih Berri, who heads the Amal organization (Hezbollah's junior partner in the Shiite coalition). Berri has held the speakership since 1992.

U.N. Resolutions 1595, 1757, and the Tribunal

On February 25, 2005, the president of the U.N. Security Council issued a statement that condemned the assassination of Rafiq Hariri. On April 7, the U.N. Security Council adopted Resolution 1595 to establish an International Independent Investigation Commission (UNIIIC) 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." The Commission was fully functional as of June 16, 2005, but has requested multiple extensions for its work. The U.N. Security Council has passed a number of resolutions to extend the mandate of the commission, call for Syrian cooperation with the investigation, and facilitate the establishment of a tribunal to try suspects identified in the Commission investigation.[21]

Political instability in Lebanon delayed the beginning of the tribunal. On November 25, 2006, members of the Lebanese cabinet approved the U.N. Security Council proposal to establish the court, in the face of strong opposition from pro-Syrian elements.[22] Approval from the Parliament and pro-Syrian then-President Emile Lahoud proved all but impossible to obtain. Hezbollah and

[19] Robin Wright, "Syria Moves to Keep Control of Lebanon," *Washington Post*, March 31, 2005. Syria also has potential built-in assets through parliamentary speaker Nabih Berri.

[20] General Aoun (variant spelling: Awn), a controversial former armed forces commander and prime minister, fought against Syria in Lebanon, rejected the Taif Agreement, and eventually obtained political asylum in France.

[21] See U.N. Security Council Resolutions 1636, 1644, 1686, 1748, and 1815.

[22] The U.N. proposal for the international court is contained in U.N. Security Council Document S/2006/893, Report of the Secretary-General on the establishment of a special tribunal for Lebanon, November 15, 2006.

the opposition reportedly stated that they supported the principle of the court but did not want it to become a vehicle for attacking Syria.

Confronted with this impasse, supporters of the tribunal decided on a new approach that would circumvent the need for parliamentary approval and enlist the international community. On April 4, 2007, a U.N. spokesman announced that 70 members of the Lebanese parliament petitioned the U.N. Secretary-General, asking that the Security Council establish the court as a matter of urgency. Subsequently, on May 30, 2007, a divided U.N. Security Council voted 10 to 0 with 5 abstentions (Russia, China, South Africa, Indonesia and Qatar) to adopt Resolution 1757, which established a tribunal outside of Lebanon to prosecute persons responsible for the attack against Hariri.

Resolution 1757 has proven divisive in Lebanon and elsewhere in the region. Pro-Syrian elements have criticized it and Syria has threatened not to cooperate with the tribunal. Western countries, including France and Germany, praised this step. Opponents of the Resolution objected on the grounds that it was passed under Chapter VII of the U.N. Charter, which could include the use of force, and that it represented interference in Lebanon's internal affairs. The Russian delegate to the U.N. commented that "never before has the Security Council ratified agreements on behalf of a parliament of a foreign country."[23]

Preparations to establish the tribunal continued slowly. In December 2007, the U.N. finalized an agreement with the Netherlands to host the tribunal. In January 2008, Daniel Bellemare was named the prosecutor for the tribunal. On March 20, the U.N. appointed Robin Vincent to serve as registrar for the tribunal and oversee its management and budget. The United States has contributed $14 million for the tribunal. Lebanon is expected to fund 49% of its costs. [24]

Sectarianism and Stability

Despite the end of Israeli and Syrian occupation, and the coming to power of a more moderate Sunni coalition in March 14, Lebanon's struggle for stability has continued, largely due to a lasting environment of distrust between Lebanon's demographic groups left over from the civil war. As demographic groups have vied for a political stake in post-occupation Lebanon, the weaknesses of the Taif Accords have become more evident. The strong showing of the March 14 coalition in the 2005 elections and the prospects for stability in Lebanon were soon jeopardized by months of protracted political crises and renewed sectarian violence.

Political Stalemate

From mid-2007 until the agreement in Doha in May 2008, Lebanon's political environment was paralyzed by a number of interrelated disagreements. Preparations for a scheduled September 2007 presidential election went ahead, but were mooted by Lebanese leaders' inability to agree on a consensus presidential candidate and subsequent wrangling over the distribution of cabinet seats under potential candidate Michel Suleiman. As a result, a vote to elect a new president was postponed until October 23, 2007. Hezbollah and its allies boycotted the balloting and the

[23] Samar El-Masri, "The Hariri Tribunal," *Middle East Policy*, Fall 2008.

[24] U.N. News Service Press Release, "First Official of U.N. Backed Tribunal on Lebanese Killings Starts Work," April 28, 2008.

election was repeatedly delayed as a result. Parties failed to agree on a consensus presidential candidate prior to the expiration of President Emile Lahoud's term in November 2007.

The circumstances created an intricate set of possible outcomes and the issue of choosing a president remained mired in constitutional questions. Debates centered on requirements for a parliamentary quorum for a presidential election, with some constitutional scholars maintaining that attendance by two-thirds of the Members was needed before elections could be held.[25] Some observers believed that opponents of an election, a group that perhaps included pro-Syrian actors, were behind recent assassinations of anti-Syrian Lebanese members of parliament in an effort to derail the elections or shape their outcome by undermining the dwindling majority of the March 14 bloc.[26]

Renewed Sectarian Violence

The political stalemate in Lebanon lasted until May 2008, when the worst round of sectarian violence since the civil war broke out in Beirut. The violence and the resulting Doha Agreement ended 18 months of political stalemate in the Lebanese parliament that had been marked by cabinet resignations, a vacant presidency, political assassination, political demonstrations, and a general strike that paralyzed the city of Beirut. On May 6, 2008, Parliament voted to replace the pro-Hezbollah chief of security[27] at Rafiq Hariri International Airport and to dismantle Hezbollah's extensive telecommunications network following accusations that the organization was using these tools to monitor the movement of anti-Syrian politicians. At a press conference on May 8, Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah stated that the cabinet's position was "a declaration of war and a launching of war by the government ... against the resistance and its weapons." A week-long confrontation between Hezbollah and its opposition allies and militias loyal to the Siniora government followed. Shiite protestors burned tires in major thoroughfares, effectively closing the airport. Hezbollah seized control of March 14 coalition strongholds in West Beirut, looting and burning Future Movement media offices.

Doha Agreement

Fearing continued violence and possibly another civil war, the Arab League and the Qatari government facilitated negotiations between the rival factions. In the resulting "Doha Agreement," the factions committed to end the violence, fill the vacant presidency, arrange for a power-sharing agreement in the cabinet, and hold parliamentary elections in 2009 based on updated electoral laws. In a statement following the negotiations, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice stated that the Administration viewed the agreement as a "positive step toward resolving the current crisis" and added that "the United States supports the government of Lebanon in its complete authority over the entire territory of the country."

[25] "Lebanese Constitution Said 'vague' on Outgoing President's Last 10 Days," BBC Monitoring Middle East, November 15, 2007.

[26] Nadra Bakri and Hassan M. Fatah, "Car Bomb Near Beirut Kills Christian Lawmaker," *New York Times*, September 20, 2007; Nadra Bakri, "In Lebanon, Staying Alive in Order to Preserve the Government," *New York Times*, September 21, 2007.

[27] The chief of security at Beirut airport was a member of the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) accused by Druze leader Walid Jumblatt of assisting Hezbollah with monitoring the travel of anti-Syrian diplomats and government officials.

In accordance with the agreement, General Michel Suleiman, perceived as relatively neutral, was elected president on May 25, 2008. He chose Prime Minister Fouad Siniora to continue as the head of the government. Disagreements over the assignment of ministry positions in the cabinet delayed the formation of a unity government until July 11, 2008.

Unity Government

In the new government, Hezbollah and the opposition gained a blocking minority (one-third plus one) of cabinet seats. Eleven ministerial portfolios went to the opposition, including one to Hezbollah itself—the Ministry of Labor. Hezbollah and the opposition have repeatedly pushed for this veto power to block certain government decisions. In particular, Hezbollah has long sought to block any attempt by the government to disarm its militia, as called for in United Nations Security Council Resolution 1701.

Following the agreement, a committee of cabinet members set to work to draft a policy statement for the new government. The group met 12 times before an agreement was reached. The delay was caused by a dispute over language related to Hezbollah and its weapons. On August 1, the committee announced that it had unanimously agreed to a policy statement. On August 4, the government released the statement to the Lebanese News Agency. Paragraph 24 recognized "the right of Lebanon's people, army and resistance to liberate the Israeli-occupied Shebaa (alternate spelling: Shib'a) farms, Kfar Shuba Hills, and the Lebanese section of Ghajar village, and defend the country using all legal and possible means." On the other hand, the statement included the "commitment of the government to United Nations Security Council Resolution 1701 with all its clauses."

On August 12, the new unity government, with its policy statement, won the Lebanese parliament's vote of confidence. 100 of 127 members voted in favor of the new arrangement, allowing the cabinet to finally start work. The vote of confidence was met with by uncertainty among some members of Parliament. One member, Hussein Husseini, resigned from the parliament stating that the parliament could be described as "legal but illegitimate." Another Future Movement member stated that he refused to grant his vote of confidence because the "cabinet is one that only assembles odds" and expressed fears that the new government might not be what the Lebanese people were looking for.

The ministerial statement also reaffirmed the government's commitment to hold parliamentary elections in accordance with the Doha agreement. Parliamentary elections in 2009 were held based on a modified version of the 1960 electoral law, rather than the 1996 or 2000 electoral frameworks that were subject to pro-Syrian gerrymandering. The 1960 law was updated with specific provisions for modified voting districts in Beirut and the eastern Bekaa valley. Some analysts have argued that the amended law was unlikely to change the composition of parliament and that sectarian deadlock could persist even after the elections. Others expressed concerns that the new electoral districts would lead to a stronger showing for Hezbollah and its allies.[28] Despite these concerns, March 14 maintained a slim majority in the parliament following the June 7, 2009 elections. Long-term stability will depend on whether the factions in parliament can reach a consensus on the composition of a new government.

[28] Jean-Pierre Katrib, "Ending (or Deepening) the Crisis in Lebanon: The Role of Electoral Reform," *Policy Watch* #1378, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, June 6, 2008.

Current Issues in U.S.-Lebanon Relations

Current U.S. policy toward Lebanon centers on supporting the Lebanese government as it struggles to rebuild institutions and exert control over the entire territory of Lebanon. Years of civil war and foreign occupation have left several key issues unresolved. The scope and influence of foreign actors, primarily Syria and Iran, unresolved territorial disputes, concerns about extremist groups operating in Lebanon, and the strength and character of the Lebanese Armed Forces are among the challenges facing any new Lebanese government and U.S. objectives in Lebanon. These unresolved issues could become particularly sensitive for the next Administration and for the 111th Congress as factions work to form a new government. Rapprochement with Syria or negotiations with Iran also could alter the political landscape in Lebanon as well as U.S. objectives there.

Confronting Hezbollah

Syrian and Iranian backing of Hezbollah, an organization that has committed terrorist acts against U.S. personnel and facilities and has sworn to eliminate Israel, is perhaps the greatest obstacle to U.S. efforts to bolster the pro-Western forces in Lebanon. With Hezbollah deeply entrenched in Lebanese Shiite society, the movement has become a fixture in the Lebanese political system and a symbol of resistance against Israel for many in the region. This dual identity has benefitted Hezbollah, and there have been no recent indications that it is willing to renounce armed struggle against Israel and become solely a Lebanese political movement. There also is little evidence to suggest that Iran and Hezbollah's strategic relationship could be severed despite the fact that Hezbollah's agenda may be more nationalist while Iran's may be more revolutionary pan-Shiite. Though some analysts argue that Hezbollah has grown more independent of Tehran since the 1980s, Hezbollah still requires advanced weaponry and outside funding, while Iran requires a proxy to pressure Israel and the United States. Both parties have found this relationship to be mutually beneficial.

Hezbollah's claim of victory in the 2006 war with Israel and its swift humanitarian aid delivery following the conflict increased the organization's popularity among Lebanese, particularly the Shiite population. A prisoner exchange with Israel[29] and the gains Hezbollah made in the government during the May negotiations at Doha also might have served to further improve the organization's public image. Regardless, any new Lebanese government, along with the international community, will likely continue to struggle with Hezbollah's role in the government and the status of its militia wing.

[29] On July 16, 2008, Hezbollah and Israel completed a prisoner exchange brokered by German intelligence. In exchange for the remains of the two Israeli Defense Force (IDF) soldiers captured by Hezbollah at the outset of the 2006 conflict, Israel freed five Lebanese militants, all alive. The most controversial release was that of Samir Kantar (alternate spellings: Kuntar, Qantar), a Lebanese militant who had been convicted of the murder of an Israeli police officer and a young civilian and his four-year-old daughter during a Palestinian Liberation Front raid in the coastal Israeli town of Nahariya in 1979.Kantar and the other prisoners were greeted by Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah, Prime Minister Siniora, and a crowd of thousands in southern Beirut. The government declared a national day of celebration, closing government offices, schools, and banks. Despite government attempts to present the swap as a national triumph, analysts have expressed concerns that the exchange bolstered support for Hezbollah, and that national power in Lebanon appears to be in the hands of a non-state actor. On the other hand, some argue that the resolution of the issue of prisoners and a renewed dialogue about the disputed Shib'a Farms territory could undermine the legitimacy of Hezbollah's armed wing, which the organization maintains is necessary to support the "resistance" to Israeli occupation.

Israel has expressed concern about reports that Hezbollah continues to receive arms through unsecured borders and the fact that the government of Lebanon includes members of Hezbollah. In August 2008, Israel's security cabinet voted to reverse a longstanding policy that considers the government of Lebanon and Hezbollah separately, citing Hezbollah's role in Lebanon's new unity government and the ministerial statement of that government, which recognizes the rights of the "resistance."[30] This decision has led analysts to question whether Israel would refrain from targeting the Lebanese government, as it did in 2006, if faced with another military conflict with Hezbollah in Lebanon. In a statement to the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz*, the Commander of the Israeli Defense Force Northern Command, Gadi Eisenkot, said:

> We will wield disproportionate power against every village from which shots are fired on Israel, and cause immense damage and destruction. From our perspective, these are military bases. This isn't a suggestion. This is a plan that has already been authorized.[31]

On September 16, 2008, President Suleiman convened a "national dialogue" session to discuss a national defense strategy for Lebanon. The top item on the agenda was to define the role of Hezbollah's military force in Lebanon. The dialogue followed an incident on August 28, 2008, when a member of Hezbollah's militia force fired on an LAF helicopter, killing the pilot. Following the incident, Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah claimed that the militant thought he was firing on an Israeli helicopter. Nasrallah called the incident "regrettable," noting, however, that the shooter was behaving "naturally or instinctively." He also expressed condolences to the family of the pilot. Hezbollah turned over the shooter to the Lebanese government, but the incident raised questions about the role of Hezbollah's militant wing and its relationship with the LAF. So far, there is little indication that the dialogue will lead to government control over the entire territory of Lebanon or to Hezbollah's disarmament.[32] If an operational arrangement is formalized for national defense that includes a role for Hezbollah, U.S. policy options towards Lebanon, particularly military assistance, could face more constraints.

Hezbollah's Al Manar TV

Al Manar, Hezbollah's television station,[33] broadcasts via satellite throughout the Middle East and in most areas of the world with the stated mission of conducting "psychological warfare against the Zionist enemy." The station was added to the U.S. State Department's Terrorist Exclusion List (TEL) in December 2004 for inciting terrorism and providing material support to terrorists. Concurrent with this designation, Al Manar's satellite signal was banned from broadcasting in the United States.

On March 23, 2006, at the request of Congress, the Department of the Treasury named Al Manar a Specially Designated Global Terrorist (SDGT) entity. As a result, the U.S. government blocked

[30] Firas Miskad, "All of Lebanon is not Hezbollah," *Jewish Daily Forward*, August 21, 2008.

[31] Amos Harel, IDF Plans to Use Disproportionate Force in Next War," *Haaretz* (Israel), October 5, 2008.

[32] U.S. Open Source Center (OSC) Document –GMP20081007644002 –"Washington and Beirut Set Up Joint Military Panel," *Daily Star* (Beirut), October 7, 2008.

[33] Reports indicate that Al Manar is funded by Iran, but the station maintains that it complies fully with Lebanese TV licensing law, which prohibits stations from accepting foreign funding. Most suspect that Hezbollah funnels Iranian funds to the station. Hezbollah denies that it controls Al Manar, but it is widely accepted that the organization uses Al Manar as its mouthpiece in Lebanon and the Middle East.

access to the organization's assets and prohibited future transactions between U.S. companies and individuals and Al Manar.

These two designations have stopped Al Manar broadcasts in the United States and prohibited material support to the station in areas under U.S. jurisdiction. However, Al Manar continues to broadcast across the Middle East via Nilesat and Arabsat, two of the largest satellite providers in the region, and to many other areas of the world. Lebanese sources estimate that Al Manar is the third most popular station in the country, but often rises to number one during times of conflict or tension in southern Lebanon or the Palestinian territories. Israeli sources estimate that it is the second most popular station in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.[34] Al Manar also maintains a website featuring news, television programs, and other material that is available anywhere there is an internet connection. As a result, Al Manar still reaches audiences worldwide.

In the past, Congress has called upon the Lebanese government to revoke Al Manar's license and called upon the Arab Stations Broadcasting Union to revoke its membership. In H.Res. 1069, passed by the House of Representatives on September 9, 2008, Members of the 110th Congress called upon Saudi Arabia and Egypt, the primary shareholders in Arabsat and Nilesat, respectively, and all other Arab states that hold shares in Arabsat, to stop the transmission of telecasts by Al Manar. In the 111th Congress, H.R. 2278, introduced on May 6, 2009, if passed, would state as official U.S. policy the intention to designate as SDGTs satellite providers that knowingly contract with Al Manar. H.R. 2278 also considers "state-sponsorship of anti-American incitement to violence when determining the level of assistance to, and frequency and nature of relations with, regional states."

Critics of this proposed legislation argue that designating NileSat and ArabSat as SDGTs could lead to a deterioration in U.S. relations with Egypt and Saudi Arabia. In particular, they argue that conditions on U.S. assistance to Egypt that might result from the legislation could further complicate U.S.-Egypt relations, at a time when Egyptian cooperation on other areas of concern in the region, like Palestinian reconciliation and the smuggling of arms and other materials into Gaza through illicit tunnels along Egypt's border with the territory, are seen as a priority. On the other hand, proponents of such measures argue that recent developments, like the discovery of a Hezbollah cell operating in Egypt, might make Egypt more willing to cooperate.

Al Manar's programming, even if removed from NileSat and ArabSat, would still be widely available in Lebanon, where Al Manar is just one of many television stations affiliated with political parties and sectarian groups. Some analysts have argued that pressuring the Lebanese government to take action against Al Manar, through conditions for U.S. assistance or otherwise, could lead to instability ahead of Lebanon's parliamentary election, scheduled for June 7, 2009 (see "Parliamentary Elections 2009" above). In the past, Hezbollah has reacted strongly to government efforts to limit its influence or curtail its activities. In May 2008, Hezbollah besieged Beirut, leading to a month of political crisis that culminated in the Doha Agreement, which most analysts agree increased Hezbollah's ability to operate in Lebanon.

[34] Avi Jorisch, "Beacon of Hatred: Inside Hizballah's Al Manar TV," Washington Institute of Near East Policy, 2004, and "Anne Marie Baylouny, "Al Manar and Alhurra: Competing Satellite Stations and Ideologies," George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies Occasional Paper Series, October 2006.

Lebanon-Syria Relations

Most analysts agree that Syrian interference is the single greatest hindrance to Lebanon's independence and stability. A cornerstone of Syrian foreign policy is to dominate the internal affairs of Lebanon. For many hard-line Syrian politicians, Lebanon is considered an appendage of the Syrian state and, until recently, Syria never formally recognized Lebanon as a state. From a geostrategic standpoint, Lebanon is considered by the Syrian government to be a buffer between Syria and Israel. The Lebanese economy also is deeply penetrated by pro-Syrian business interests.

Syria is also criticized for its role as an intermediary between Iran and Hezbollah in Lebanon and emerged as a key, if indirect, actor in the 2006 war between Israel and Hezbollah, primarily through its role as a conduit for the delivery of rockets and other weaponry to Hezbollah units in southern Lebanon. Since 2006, both U.N. and Israeli sources have expressed concerns that Iran continues to arm Hezbollah via Syria in violation of U.N. Security Council Resolution 1701, and the international community has called upon Syria to secure its borders against the flow of weapons into Lebanon.

During a summit in Paris on July 13, 2008, at a meeting facilitated by French President Nicolas Sarkozy, Syrian President Bashar al Asad and Lebanese President Michel Suleiman discussed exchanging embassies in a move toward normal diplomatic relations, a marked departure from Syria's historical reluctance to recognize Lebanon's independence. Following a series of negotiations and discussions, on October 14, 2008, Lebanon and Syria established formal diplomatic ties for the first time since the two countries gained independence 60 years ago.

Syria's motivation for recognizing Lebanon's independence is questionable. Some believe that it is just one of many recent actions that indicate Syria's desire to come out of isolation. Syria and France reestablished diplomatic ties in July 2008, and Syria and Israel recently held indirect negotiations facilitated by Turkey (which are now on hold). Others speculate that Syria might use its diplomatic relationship with Lebanon as a front to cover continued meddling in Lebanon's domestic politics.[35]

Uncertainty about Syria's ongoing interests in Lebanon have raised concerns about the recent warming trend in U.S.-Syria relations and its impact on Lebanon. Some observers, including some Lebanese, argue that the warming trend in U.S.-Syria relations undermines U.S. support for an independent Lebanon. While Syria withdrew its occupation force from Lebanon in 2005, many analysts believe that Syria uses its intelligence service and other means to continue to interfere in Lebanon's internal affairs. On the other hand, some analysts argue that U.S. engagement with Syria and, most of all, peace between Israel and Syria are lynchpins of Lebanese independence and stability. Syria considers Lebanon a buffer between itself and Israel, and only if the tension between Israel and Syria were resolved might Syria feel secure enough to respect Lebanese sovereignty.

Others argue that by engaging with Syria, the United States is undermining the forces in Lebanon that it has previously supported. March 8 has taken advantage of changing regional dynamics to reinvent itself as the party of nationalism and Lebanese independence, pointing to U.S. and Saudi support for the March 14 camp as proof that March 14 represents a future under foreign tutelage.

[35] Sue Pleming, "U.S. Assesses Isolation Policy of Syria," *Reuters*, October 7, 2008.

Increased U.S. engagement with Syria and the normalization of relations between Syria and Lebanon, marked by the exchange of ambassadors and the opening of embassies, have left March 14 searching for a new message.

The Shib'a Farms

Israel's withdrawal from southern Lebanon in 2000, pursuant to U.N. Security Council Resolution 425, left several small but sensitive territorial issues unresolved. The most prominent example is a 10-square-mile enclave called the Shib'a Farms (alternate spelling: Shebaa) located at the Lebanese-Israeli-Syrian tri-border area (see **Appendix B**). Many third parties, notably the United Nations, 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 Israel was required to withdraw. Lebanon, supported by Syria, asserts that this territory is part of Lebanon and should have been evacuated by Israel. In a June 2008 interview, Prime Minister Siniora said that "the demand to restore sovereignty to Shib'a is a Lebanese demand."[36]

Hezbollah has consistently used Israel's presence in the Shib'a Farms as justification for retaining its weapons and refusing to disarm. Until recently, Israel refused to negotiate a withdrawal from the area. However, in June 2008, against the backdrop of prisoner exchange negotiations with Hezbollah and indirect peace talks with Syria, Israel shifted its position and, in mid-June, U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice stated that "the time has come to deal with the Shebaa Farms issue." The most recent report of the U.N. Secretary General to the Security Council on the implementation of Resolution 1701 stated that Syria and Lebanon have agreed to reactivate the taskforce charged with delineating their common border and that Syria recognized the Shib'a as part of the territory of Lebanon.[37]

In response to the changing discourse on the Shib'a Farms, Hezbollah Deputy Secretary-General Sheikh Naim Qassem welcomed international intervention "if the whole of the Shib'a Farms is returned to Lebanese sovereignty," but emphasized that "this does not mean, however, that we need to disarm. The question of our arms is not linked to the issue of Shib'a Farms or a prisoner exchange" with Israel.[38] Prime Minister Siniora appeared to embrace this view, saying "we must completely separate the issue of Israel's withdrawal from the issue of Hezbollah's weapons," adding, "there are two different issues: The Israeli withdrawal from the Farms and placing it under the supervision of the U.N. until Syria and Lebanon decide on the borders ... the debate on the defensive strategy, which is to be decided by the Lebanese amongst themselves."[39]

Extremist Groups in Lebanon

On May 20, 2007, Lebanese police conducted raids against suspected terrorist organization Fatah al Islam hideouts in Tripoli, reportedly in pursuit of bank robbers. Fighting between Fatah al

[36] U.S. Open Source Center (OSC) Document –GMP20080620644012, "Lebanon: Excerpt of Siniora's Remarks on Shab'a Farms, Hisballah Weapons," *Lebanese National News Agency* (Beirut), June 20, 2008.

[37] U.N. Security Council Document S/2008/715, "Report of the Secretary-General on the Implementation of Security Council Resolution 1701 (2006)," November 18, 2008.

[38] "Shebaa Moves into Local, International Spotlights," *Daily Star* (Beirut), June 22, 2008.

[39] U.S. Open Source Center (OSC) Document –GMP20080620644012, "Lebanon: Excerpt of Siniora's Remarks on Shab'a Farms, Hisballah Weapons," *Lebanese National News Agency* (Beirut), June 20, 2008.

Islam militants and Lebanese army and police units spread to the nearby Nahr al Bared Palestinian refugee camp and echoed in smaller clashes in the Ayn al Hulwah refugee camp in southern Lebanon. Prohibited by a 1969 agreement from entering Palestinian camps, the Lebanese Armed Forces besieged the camps and shelled militia positions in an effort to force the group out of Nahr al Bared. Fighting continued for three months until September 3, 2007, when the Army announced that it had taken control of the camp.[40] By the end of the hostilities, 168 Lebanese soldiers and 42 civilians had died in the fighting. The refugee camp itself was left badly damaged, and as many as 30,000 Nahr al Bared residents were displaced.[41]

During the fighting, the U.S. government, already supporting the Lebanese government and army against other internal challenges, notably Hezbollah, responded with assistance to the LAF including humanitarian supplies, ammunition, and lightweight weapons and equipment. Although most of these supplies had already been promised to the Lebanese government, the deliveries were accelerated to assist the LAF at Nahr al Bared.

Shakir al Absi, the leader of Fatah al Islam, is reportedly either dead or being held in a Syrian prison.[42] U.S. officials have described al Absi as a well-known Palestinian-Jordanian militant sentenced to death in absentia in Jordan for his involvement in the 2002 murder of U.S. diplomat Lawrence Foley. Although little is known about Fatah al Islam, U.S. officials describe the organization as a militant Islamic fundamentalist group. On August 9, 2007, Secretary of State Rice designated Fatah al Islam as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist Organization, citing the leader's role in the Foley murder, the unprovoked attack on Lebanese security forces in May 2007, and the use of civilian camp-dwellers at Nahr al Bared as human shields during the three months of protracted fighting with the Lebanese military. The designation, among other things, cuts Fatah al Islam off from the U.S. financial system, sanctions any of its property or interests in the United States, and block its members from entry into the United States. Fatah al Islam was believed by some to have fractured and dispersed after the siege at Nahr al Bared, but reports indicate that members of a cell associated with the group were arrested in Lebanon in October 2008.[43]

The siege at Nahr al-Bared called attention to armed groups operating in Lebanon, the problems associated with Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon, and the strengths and weaknesses of the Lebanese Armed Forces.

The Lebanese Armed Forces

The 2006 war, the siege at Nahr al Bared, and months of extended government crisis called attention to the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) and its role in stabilizing the country and countering Hezbollah. The LAF enjoys a positive image among a wide spectrum of Lebanese citizens. Observers say that most Lebanese, regardless of their affiliation, perceive the army as defending the country against foreign elements, particularly Israel. One experienced observer

[40] Tom Perry, "Lebanon Crushes Militant Group, but Threat Remains," *Reuters*, September 3, 2007.

[41] U.S. Open Source Center (OSC) Document – GMP20080925966005 – "Funds for Nahr Al-Bared Refugees Nearly Depleted," *Daily Star* (Beirut), September 25, 2008.

[42] U.S. Open Source Center (OCS) Document –EUP20081023177003 –"Fatah al Islam Leader Held in Syrian Jail," *Intelligence Online* (Paris), October 23, 2008.

[43] Ibrahim, op. cit.

described the Lebanese army as "the only national institution left in the country" and went on to say that the army has "credibility and respect in the country."[44]

The fracture of the Lebanese army along sectarian lines in 1976 was a key moment in Lebanon's collapse into civil war. Since the end of the civil war in 1990, the United States periodically has supplied arms and training to Lebanon's armed forces. Assistance levels increased dramatically after the 2006 war, when the LAF was deployed to southern Lebanon alongside UNIFIL. Undersecretary of Defense for Policy Eric Edelman stressed the "United States' commitment to enhancing the LAF's capabilities" when he met with President Michel Suleiman following the Doha Agreement in May 2008.[45]

The significant increase in U.S. assistance to the LAF (see "Security Assistance" below) has raised questions about the character of the institution. Some argue that weapons provided to the LAF might one day be used against Israel, particularly if they fell into the hands of Hezbollah militants. This argument is driven by concerns that the LAF leadership or members of the LAF are sympathetic to or even allied with Hezbollah. In the 2006 war between Hezbollah and Israel, Israel reportedly attacked LAF naval radar stations after it was discovered that Hezbollah used LAF radar to track an Israeli vessel that was struck by Hezbollah missiles. In May 2008, Prime Minister Siniora removed the chief of security at Beirut airport, a member of the LAF, following accusations that he was working on behalf of Hezbollah.[46]

Others have expressed concerns that U.S. support for the LAF has made the institution a target for attacks. LAF leadership has reassured the international community and Lebanese citizens that the force will not be intimidated by attacks against it. Following a September 29, 2008, attack against LAF soldiers in Tripoli, the LAF Commander Jean Qahwaji said that the attack "was intended to undermine internal security, confuse the army, and weaken its domestic role." He added that "the army succeeded, shoulder to shoulder with the people and the resistance, against Israeli attacks in the summer 2006 war, uprooted terrorism at Nahr al Bared, and safeguarded peace in the nation's darkest moment and will not retreat in the face of sporadic disturbances that are taking place here and there."[47]

According to some critics of the U.S. aid for the LAF, U.S. assistance has been slow to arrive and insufficient to counter the threats of internal instability facing the LAF. Timor Goskel, former senior advisor to UNIFIL, criticized U.S. assistance, stating that the U.S. government is "not helping its own cause because it is coming in bits and pieces," adding that "what [the LAF] needs is a bit more clarity, a bit more comprehensive package announced."[48] Criticisms that U.S. assistance to the LAF and the Internal Security Forces (ISF) falls short of the needs of the forces are sharply countered by U.S. officials. According to Defense Department officials, the equipment delivered in 2007 during Nahr al Bared included "the same frontline weapons that the U.S. military troops are currently using including assault rifles, automatic grenade launchers,

[44] Hassan M. Fattah, "Army Provides a Sense of Unity in Fractured Lebanon," *New York Times*, June 20, 2007.

[45] "Stronger Defense Ties with Lebanon Needed: DoD" *Agence France-Presse*, June 1, 2008.

[46] David Schenker, "The Future of U.S. Military Aid to Lebanon," *Policy Watch* #1407, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, October 3, 2008.

[47] U.S. Open Source Center (OSC) Document –GMP20081009966005 – "LAF Officers to Visit Pentagon for Talks on Aid," *Daily Star* (Beirut), October 9, 2008.

[48] U.S. Open Source Center (OSC) Document –GMP 20081021966009 – "U.S. Approach to LAF is Chaotic, Analysts Say," *Daily Star* (Beirut), October 21, 2008.

advanced sniper weapons systems, antitank weapons, and the most modern urban warfare bunker weapons."[49]

Since the siege at Nahr al-Bared, the Bush Administration reportedly received requests from the Lebanese government for Cobra attack helicopters to facilitate more effective counterterrorism operations. Reports indicate that the LAF has fewer than a dozen operational helicopters. During the fighting at Nahr al Bared in 2007, the LAF had to retrofit old Huey helicopters to target Fatah al Islam bunkers, resulting in limited accuracy in targeting and possibly causing civilian casualties. Some Israeli parties have expressed concerns about the potential for the transfer of more sophisticated equipment for the LAF.[50]

U.S. Assistance to Lebanon

The United States has long provided foreign assistance to Lebanon,[51] but following the Israel-Hezbollah war in 2006, the Bush Administration requested and Congress appropriated a significant increase in foreign assistance for Lebanon. The war heightened the need for additional economic aid as the Lebanese government and its international and Arab partners vied with Iran and Hezbollah to win the "hearts and minds" of many Lebanese citizens who had lost homes and businesses as a result of the conflict. The war also highlighted the need for a more robust Lebanese military to adequately patrol Lebanon's porous borders with Syria and prevent Hezbollah's rearmament.

Economic Assistance

The battle for political primacy in Lebanon waged by Prime Minister Siniora's March 14 government coalition and its U.S., European, and Saudi supporters against Hezbollah, its allies, and its foreign patrons in Syria and Iran has been fought on a number of different fronts, including in the economic arena. The summer 2006 war and the opposition's campaign to obstruct the government placed enormous financial strains on Lebanon's economy. In response, Prime Minister Siniora called upon the international community to provide financial support for his fragile government, Lebanon's economy, and the country's badly damaged infrastructure.

The United States has committed several hundred million dollars to Lebanon's rebuilding efforts. President Bush announced on August 21, 2006, that the United States would provide an immediate $230 million to Lebanon. At a January 2007 donors' conference in Paris, Secretary Rice pledged an additional $250 million in cash transfers directly to the Lebanese government. This U.S. economic aid was provided by Congress in the 2007 Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act (P.L. 110-28) under ESF assistance and was tied to certain benchmarks that the Lebanese government is required to meet. The benchmarks are aimed to encourage economic

[49] Schenker, op. cit.

[50] Yaakov Katz, "Jerusalem Worried the U.S. Will Sell Tanks to Lebanon," *The Jerusalem Post*, November 22, 2008.

[51] In December 1996, the United States organized a Friends of Lebanon conference, which resulted in a total commitment of $60 million in U.S. aid to Lebanon over a five-year period from FY1997 to FY2001 ($12 million per year mainly in Economic Support Funds (ESF)). Congress increased annual aid amounts to $15 million in FY2000 and to $35 million in FY2001, reportedly to help Lebanon adjust to new conditions following Israel's withdrawal from south Lebanon and to help Lebanon cope with continuing economic challenges. U.S. economic aid to Lebanon hovered around $35 million in subsequent years, rising to $42 million in FY2006.

reform and to lower Lebanon's crippling $43 billion public debt, up 2.7% from 2007.[52] The most recent IMF report on Lebanon states that despite large fiscal and external vulnerabilities related to the size of the public debt, prudent macroeconomic and financial policies strengthened the economy's ability to weather external shocks. Such policies have included the maintenance of fiscal primary surpluses, a cautious interest rate policy, and strict oversight of the financial system. These primary surpluses have contributed to lower the debt-to-GDP ratio by nearly 20 percentage points since 2006. Together, these policies have helped maintain confidence in the Lebanese economy and financial system, allowing for a steep build-up of international reserves, even during the global financial crisis.[53]

Security Assistance[54]

For the first time since 1984, the Administration requested and Congress authorized Foreign Military Financing (FMF) grants to Lebanon in the FY2006 foreign operations appropriations bill. Originally, the request included approximately $1.0 million in FMF for FY2006 and $4.8 million for FY2007 to help modernize the small and poorly equipped LAF following Syria's withdrawal in 2005. However, the summer 2006 war between Israel and Hezbollah spurred Western donors to increase their assistance to the LAF. Drawing from multiple budget accounts, the Administration reprogrammed funds to provide a more robust program of military assistance in order to:

> [P]romote Lebanese control over southern Lebanon and Palestinian refugee camps to prevent them from being used as bases to attack Israel. The U.S. government's active military-to-military programs enhance the professionalism of the Lebanese Armed Forces, reinforcing the concept of Lebanese civilian control. To foster peace and security, the United States intends to build upon welcome and unprecedented Lebanese calls to control the influx of weapons.[55]

The FY2007 Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act (P.L. 110-28, adopted May 25, 2007) included $220 million in FMF for Lebanon, a significant increase from previous levels. It also included $60 million in Non-proliferation, Anti-terrorism, De-mining, and Related Programs (NADR) funds primarily to train and equip Lebanon's Internal Security Forces (ISF). The FY2008 and FY2009 appropriations continued to support these objectives and programs, albeit at lower levels.

During a September 2008 visit to Lebanon, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State David Hale called the LAF an "institution with a special place in the heart of the Lebanese" and added that the LAF "has suffered a great deal from foreign intervention and bad weapons in the past." Hale went on to state that the United States wanted to "move on to the next phase and supply Lebanon with

[52] Adal Rafiq Mirza, "Special Report: Lebanon-Political Consensus Breeds Hope," *Middle East Economics Digest*, August 29-September 4, 2008.

[53] "Lebanon—2009 Article IV Consultation Mission—Mission Concluding Statement," International Monetary Fund, March 5, 2009. Available online at http://www.imf.org/external/np/ms/2009/030509.htm.

[54] For more information, see CRS Report R40485, *U.S. Security Assistance to Lebanon*, by Casey L. Addis.

[55] FY2008 International Affairs (Function 150) Congressional Budget Justification, U.S. Department of State, February 16, 2007.

equipment that are more effective and that meet its needs."[56] On October 6, 2008, the United States and Lebanon set up a joint commission to organize their bilateral military relationship.[57]

Recent reports indicate that Israeli officials disapprove of the sale of U.S. M60 tanks to Lebanon because they fear that the weapons could fall into the hands of Hezbollah.[58] In a recent interview, a U.S. Department of Defense official said that the United States does not provide assistance to Lebanon without "considering the concerns of Israel and Israel's qualitative edge," adding that U.S. military aid to the LAF is designed to "strengthen the army domestically, not regionally" and that M60 tanks would be "no match" for Israel's Merkava 4 tanks.[59]

Unexploded Cluster Munitions in Lebanon

The Israeli air campaign during the 2006 war against Hezbollah left unexploded ordnance from cluster bombs in Lebanon. The United Nations Mine Action Coordination Center (UNMACC) estimates that 30 to 40 percent of the estimated 1 million cluster bombs used by Israel failed to explode on impact. Israeli officials acknowledged that most of the weapons used were supplied by the United States. Humanitarian groups have criticized both Israel and the United States for the use of these weapons, which they argue caused extensive and unnecessary civilian casualties during and after the war.[60] Observers as well as some Members of Congress have questions whether Israeli use of cluster munitions purchased from the United States violates the Arms Export Control Act, and the U.S. State Department has said that it has talked with the Israelis about the matter and issued a preliminary classified report to Congress in January 2007 that Israel "may have" misused cluster munitions.[61] A final finding has not yet been issued. Israel has denied violating these agreements, saying that they acted in self-defense.[62]

The international community has contributed to U.N. efforts to clear unexploded ordnance in southern Lebanon. In support of these efforts, the United States contributed $2 million to the voluntary trust fund of the UNMACC. In FY2007 and FY2008, the Congress appropriated a total of $10.25 million in Non-proliferation, Anti-terrorism, De-mining, and Related funding (NADR) for Lebanon, which might also be used in part to support efforts to clear unexploded cluster munitions. Despite these efforts, recent reports indicate that the funding for demining in Lebanon is insufficient to sustain the clearance process through to completion.[63]

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[56] U.S. Open Source Center (OSC) Document – GMP20080925825001 – "U.S. State Department Official Says U.S. Will Supply Lebanon with Military Aid," *Al-Hayah* (London), September 25, 2008.

[57] U.S. Open Source Center (OSC) Document –GMP20081007644002 – "Washington and Beirut Set up Joint Military Panel," *Daily Star* (Beirut), October 7, 2008.

[58] Katz, op. cit., and "Israel Worried Over Proposed U.S. Tank Sale to Lebanon," *Israel National News Online*, November 23, 2008.

[59] Andrew Wander "U.S. Mindful of Israel When Aiding Lebanese Army," *Daily Star* (Beirut), December 3, 2008.

[60] Glenn Kessler, "Israel May Have Misused Cluster Bombs, U.S. Says," *Washington Post*, January 30, 2007. The United States has donated $2 million to support ongoing U.N. assisted efforts to clear munitions from southern Lebanon. More information available at http://www.maccsl.org/.

[61] See Transcript from the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Hearing on the 2009 Budget for the State Department, April 9, 2008.

[62] David S. Cloud and Greg Myre, "Israel May Have Violated Arms Pact, U.S. Officials Say," *New York Times*, January 28, 2007.

[63] Bassem Mrou, "U.N. Search for Bombs, Mines in Lebanon Runs Low on Money," *Associated Press*, October 18, 2008.

Appendix A. U.S. Assistance to Lebanon

Table A-1. U.S. Assistance to Lebanon, 1946-2003

(millions of dollars)

Year	Total	Economic Aid (Grants)	Food Aid (Grants)	Military Aid (Loans)	IMET (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
Totals	916.2	482.5	150.4	268.3	15.0

Source: U.S. Agency for International Development, U.S. Overseas Loans and Grants. Available at http://qesdb.usaid.gov/gbk/.

Notes: IMET = International Military Education and Training

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 million was loans and $13.8 million was grants.

d. Includes about $6 million from 1994.

Appendix B. Map of Lebanon

Source: Map Resources. Adapted by CRS.

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