

*CH-file*

**SUBJECT: Lebanese Situation**

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DI/NESA/AI/L, [redacted] (28 Sep 88)

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Talking Points for the DCI

29 September 1988

Lebanese Situation:  
Continuing Tension, but No Major Fighting Yet

Lebanon now has two rival governments, making renewed violence more likely, and reducing prospects of electing a new chief of state.

- Both sides appear conciliatory in public, but neither is making any concessions. Time is cementing the partition.
- Muslim Prime Minister Huss is widely expected to order Christian Prime Minister Awn to return to his Army duties or be fired, an ultimatum that almost certainly would precipitate a showdown.

Syria: Key Actor

Syria is determined to see that the central government in Lebanon is responsive to Damascus' dictates and, specifically, that Lebanon does not become a base for anti-Syrian subversion by Iraq or Israel. The Syrians occupy 65 percent of the country and are well positioned to exercise influence.

- We believe Syria still wants to cooperate with the US but will use force ultimately.
- Damascus has 11-12,000 troops in the Beirut area (28,000 in all of Lebanon), but would need more to challenge the Christians and maintain security in West Beirut at the same time.
- At Syrian urging, Muslim Army brigades and pro-Syrian militias are moving artillery into the Beirut area and are otherwise preparing for a confrontation with the Christians.
- Syria has many options to pressure the Christians, including using intermittent shelling, car bombs, small scale military offensives on the periphery of the Christian enclave as well as political pressure.

## Christian Developments

Led by Army Commander Awn and Lebanese Forces militia chief Samir Ja'Ja, the Christians see themselves as increasingly isolated. Efforts by the Lebanese Forces to find new outside support could expand the problem. Christian hopes of Iraqi and Israeli support--however exaggerated--will stiffen their opposition to Syria.

--Iraq has been providing financial and military support to the Christians over the past few months. Although we believe arms deliveries have been limited, [redacted] Baghdad is going to deliver about 100 armored vehicles in the near future. [redacted]

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--Israel is keeping a low profile and is mostly concerned with the security zone in the south.

Awn is a weak personality and overly ambitious. The Embassy believes--and we agree--that he has no plan of action. Ja'Ja is more clever and better organized but is a fanatic opposed to compromise with Syria.

--Ja'Ja's militia has been conducting harassment operations aimed at Syrian personnel in West Beirut. Some have been quite deadly. We believe that his militia could expand and intensify them in response to Syrian actions.

--Ja'Ja has been recruiting supporters within Christian Army units for years, giving him enough influence to prevent Awn from making concessions on his own to the Muslims or Syrians.

## Implications for US Personnel

If major fighting breaks out, Syrian and pro-Syrian forces will shell the Christian enclave in which our Embassy is located. In addition, hard-line Christians who view the failed US-Syrian proposed presidential candidate as a US "sell out" could target our Embassy.

--The Embassy has reduced personnel strength to about 30 from about 50.

--All travel to and from Lebanon for the Embassy is by helicopter from the British Royal Air Force base at Akrotiri, Cyprus.

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--The Lebanese Army last week denied us use of the landing zone at the Embassy compound, requiring us to use one at a Lebanese Army base. The Lebanese did allow Ambassador McCarthy to use the Embassy facility last Saturday, however.