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Lebanese Armed Forces: Problems and Prospects (U)

An Intelligence Assessment

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An Intelligence Assessment

*Information available as of 31 July 1981
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The author of this assessment is [redacted]
the Office of Political Analysis, [redacted] of
the Office of Strategic Research contributed to this
paper. Comments and queries are welcome and may
be directed to the Chief, Near East-South Asia
Division, Office of Political Analysis, [redacted]

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**Lebanese Armed Forces:
Problems and Prospects (U)****Key Judgments**

The 23,600-man Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) will not become an effective instrument of government until a political accord on the country's future is reached. The LAF is being rebuilt slowly after crumbling during the civil war of 1975-76, but continues to mirror Lebanon's confessional and political problems.

The LAF's growth has slowed over the past year because of recruitment difficulties. The government is unlikely to achieve its goal of 36,000 men by the end of 1983.

The government has made progress toward more equal representation of Muslims and Christians in the LAF. Christians still hold a majority of the officer positions, however, and the composition of units continues to reflect the confessional orientation of the areas to which they are assigned. LAF personnel still owe primary allegiance to their religious groups, and the military would again split along confessional lines in the event of major fighting between Muslims and Christians.

The LAF has been successfully deployed into some sensitive areas in Beirut and southern Lebanon, but it cannot act with authority without the acquiescence of the Syrians, Palestinians, or major Lebanese factions.

The main Christian factions favor an expansion of the LAF's security responsibilities, particularly if the Army replaces Syrian troops. Muslims, however, believe that the LAF has a Christian bias and oppose its widespread use until it is more thoroughly reorganized.

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Lebanese Armed Forces: Problems and Prospects (U)

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Introduction

The Lebanese Government has made rebuilding and reorganizing the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) a primary goal since the military split along confessional lines during the civil war of 1975-76. The central government, weak and challenged by other Lebanese and regional actors, needs a national army that can extend Beirut's authority throughout the country and help reestablish its credibility.

President Sarkis underlined his commitment to the LAF last year when he included the rebuilding of the LAF as one of his 14 principles for achieving a national accord. Rebuilding the Army has become a central factor in the government's presentation to the Arab Conciliation Committee¹ on national political reconciliation.

For the first few years after the civil war the rebuilding program progressed slowly. Army strength gradually grew from a few thousand after the war to about 18,000 by mid-1979. New training programs were initiated, and facilities destroyed or damaged during the civil war were repaired or replaced. Efforts were made to restore the Army's presence in outlying regions.

The Defense Law

The government also tried to remedy the confessional imbalance in the Army, which had long been a Muslim grievance and was a major factor in the Army's dissolution during the civil war. Recruitment of Muslims was increased in 1977, and a defense law intended to bring about a more equitable confessional balance at key command levels, traditionally dominated by Maronite Christians, was enacted in 1979.

¹ The Arab Conciliation Committee (ACC) was founded in 1976 as part of the Arab League effort to consolidate the cease-fire that ended the Lebanese civil war. Consisting of the Foreign Ministers of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Syria and the secretary general of the Arab League, it works under the direction of Lebanon's President. The ACC was reconvened this spring as part of a larger effort to end Syrian-Phalange tensions, to promote national reconciliation in Lebanon, and to set the stage for a resolution of the Syrian-Israeli missile crisis.

The law provided for the establishment of a confessionally balanced military council and a nine-member higher defense council. The military council consists of the Army commander and members representing the country's six major religious sects. It fulfills several duties previously reserved only for the Army commander—traditionally a Maronite—including the rights to approve the defense budget, promotions and transfers of senior officers, and to assign troops for internal security purposes. The higher defense council, which consists of the most senior members of the government, coordinates and implements defense policy. It also must concur in senior officer promotions and assignments.

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The defense law also contains language designed to restrict the authority of the Lebanese President—traditionally a Maronite—over the Army, ensuring that presidential directives to the military are countersigned by the Prime Minister—traditionally a Sunni Muslim.

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The law was approved by the Lebanese cabinet early this year, after more than a year of wrangling and the resignation of Salim al-Huss as Prime Minister. The major disagreement—concerning the status of the Army's directorate of intelligence—was resolved by a compromise that left the directorate under the Maronite LAF commander but required it to report to the chief of staff (a Druze) and limited its responsibilities solely to military intelligence. In exchange, Prime Minister Wazzan agreed to support the passage of a long-stalled promotion list that included Christian officers who had fought with the Phalange militia during the civil war.

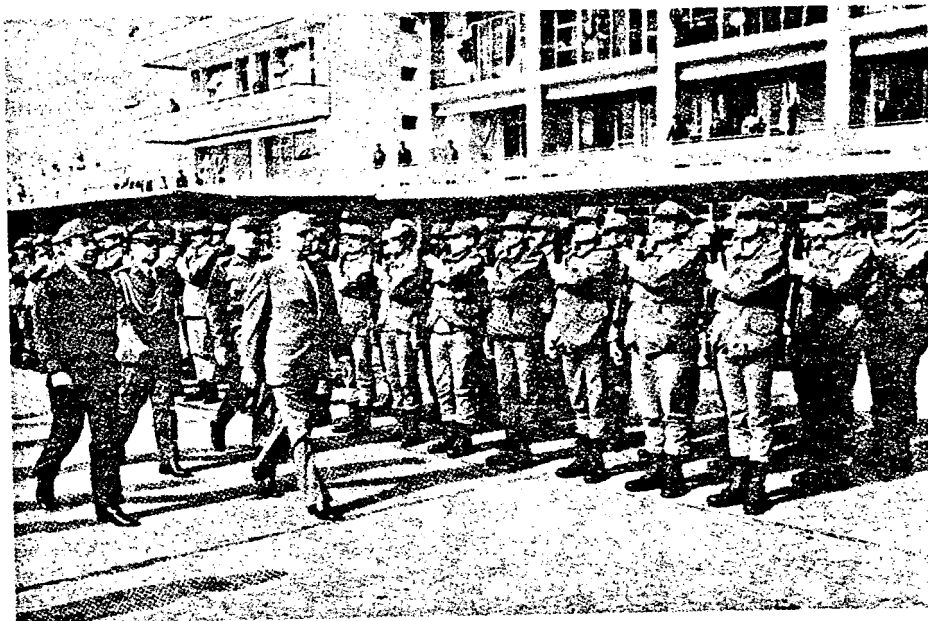
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Although welcomed by most parties as a basis for rebuilding the Army, the defense law has drawbacks. The councils and the decisionmaking process it established are cumbersome and subject to the veto of the confessional groups. The council process has already delayed promotions as a result of factional disputes.

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President Sarkis reviews honor guard at Beirut International Airport. (U)



Monday Morning ©

Moreover, it could be a major stumblingblock should the government try to purge the senior ranks of pro-Phalange Christian officers. Finally, in its effort to provide checks and balances the law created overlapping lines of authority that may hamper the government's ability to use the Army in crises.

Mission

The LAF's main mission is to perform internal security duties and protect the government's interests against Lebanon's private militias and the Palestinian fedayeen. It cannot defend Lebanon from attack by Syria or Israel.

The lack of an external mission is a source of several of the LAF's problems. Training and equipment requirements are still largely tailored to the needs of a military that expects to field multibattalion units against similar forces. The LAF's major foes, however, are not only less conventionally organized and equipped but are also more familiar with fighting in an urban milieu—the site of many of Lebanon's major internal security problems.

The LAF is presently no larger than either of the two major private militias in Lebanon—the Phalange and Palestinian fedayeen. The various Lebanese leftist organizations could probably muster a force roughly half the size of the LAF. Despite the Army's attempts

Table 1

Number of persons

Major Armed Groups in Lebanon

Lebanese Armed Forces	23,600
Syrian peacekeeping forces	28,000
Christian militias	30,000 ^a
Muslim militias	10,000 to 12,000 ^a
Palestinian fedayeen	20,000 to 30,000 ^a

^a Combined total of all factions.

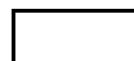
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to upgrade its equipment, the Phalange, the Palestinians, and even some of the smaller leftist militias are better armed.

Recruitment

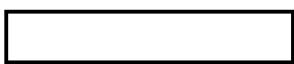
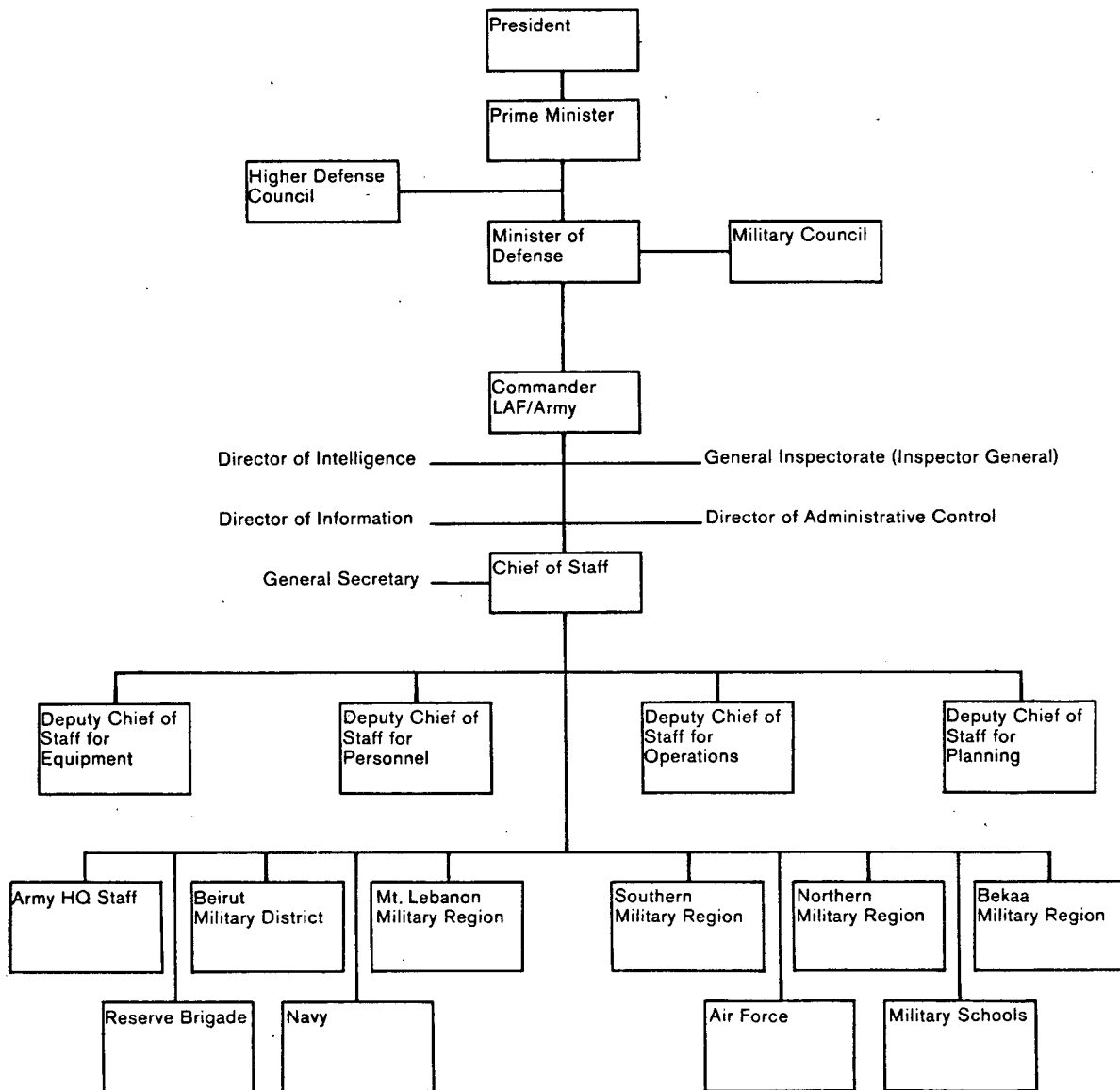
The government's goal is to increase the Army's strength to about 36,000, which it hopes will make it large enough to overcome its internal rivals. Recruitment, however, is proving to be a major difficulty. Although national conscription was established by the defense law, it has never been implemented. Poorer Shiite Muslims have been attracted to the Army, but many young Christians have shunned the military or joined the militias. Moreover, the often better educated Christians can enter the competing civilian job

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LAF Chain of Command



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market more easily than their Muslim counterparts. Although this pattern has helped the government to reduce the confessional imbalance between Muslims and Christians in the military, the basic capabilities of the LAF have decreased because the new recruits are less skilled []

The Army may soon be faced with the problem of having too few noncommissioned officers because over 1,000 are reported to have retired so far this year. A new noncommissioned officers' school is to be built in Hammama to replace one in Baalbak that was closed as a result of the civil war, but it will probably not be able to relieve the shortage for up to five years. []

Training

The LAF commander has launched a campaign to upgrade training by establishing a training directorate headed by a brigadier general. The program will be supported in part by an increase in US funding under the International Military Education and Training Program in the 1982 fiscal year. The program faces problems such as a lack of classroom facilities and training equipment as well as the current shortfall in recruitment. Moreover, much of the LAF's leadership has an outdated view of the Army's mission, preferring old training methods and highly visible weapons to the mundane requirements of internal security. []

The Confessional Balance

By mid-1980, Muslims comprised some 58 percent of the LAF's personnel—roughly equal to the percentage of Lebanese Muslims nationally. Most, however, were in the lower ranks. The officer corps is still Christian-dominated—about 55 percent. []

The confessional breakdowns vary considerably among the Army's five geographical sectors—four military regions and the Beirut Military District. In the largely Muslim Bekaa Military Region, which encompasses most of eastern Lebanon, all but one of five battalions had more Muslim officers than Christians. Units in the overwhelmingly Muslim Southern Military Region were only 25-percent Christian; only eight of the 68 officers assigned there were Christian. The officer corps in the Northern Military Region was divided equally between Christians and Muslims, but Muslims comprised more than two-thirds of the enlisted men there. []

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In contrast, seven of the nine battalions in the large Mount Lebanon Military Region, which encompasses the Christian Maronite heartland, are Christian-dominated—even at the enlisted level. The region's officer corps in mid-1980 was 83-percent Christian, and four of the nine battalions had no Muslim officers. []

Units in the Beirut Military District are more confessionally balanced than those in the outlying military regions, largely because the government has made greatest progress in reorganizing those units most directly under its control. Among newer units, such as the mechanized battalions currently deployed along the "Green Line" separating east and west Beirut, however, Christians still account for more than 70 percent of the personnel. []

The general pattern is repeated in the Air Force. The enlisted ranks are heavily Muslim, but Christian officers outnumber their Muslim counterparts by more than two to one. The 300-man Navy is almost entirely Christian, with fewer than 10 Muslims assigned to it. Neither service has a significant role to play, however, and the central government has paid little attention to reorganizing them. []

New Internal Security Duties

In 1978 the government began using the Army in an expanded internal security role and in peacekeeping functions previously carried out by the Syrian-dominated Arab Deterrent Forces (ADF). Deployment into potential trouble spots has been successful only when agreed to by all the major parties involved. The initial attempt to move the Army back into southern Lebanon in mid-1978 failed, for example, because militia-men from the Christian enclave of Israeli-backed Major Haddad resisted. []

From mid-1979 through 1980 the government's efforts to increase the Army's internal security responsibilities focused largely on Beirut. In June 1979 800 troops were sent into a Christian sector of the city to stop clashes between rival Christian militias. In March 1980 the Army began replacing departing Syrian troops in the Christian suburbs of east Beirut. Within a few months four army battalions had deployed along the Christian side of the "Green Line" in the city. []

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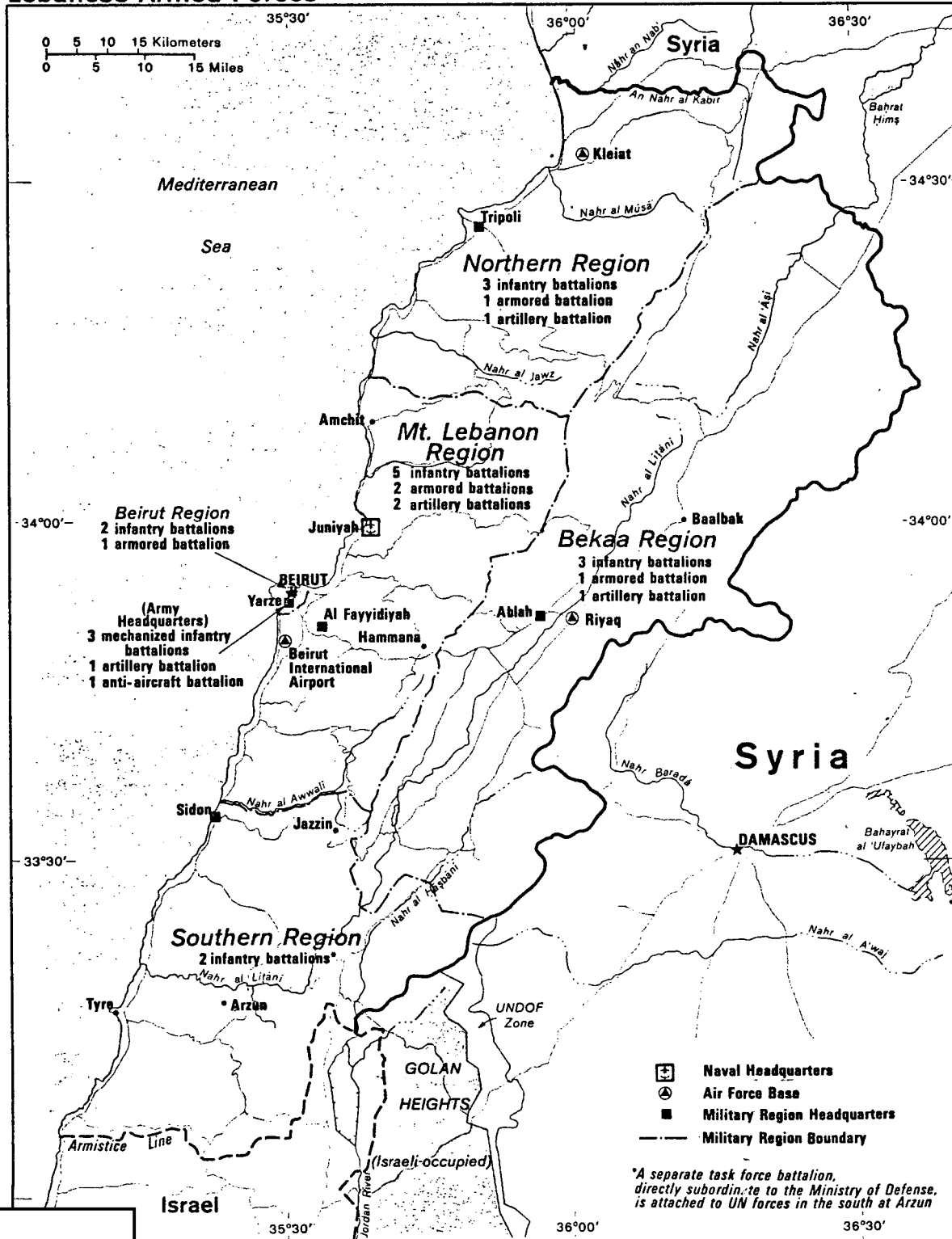
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Lebanese Armed Forces



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The value of the LAF as an instrument of government authority has been borne out most strongly along the "Green Line," where army units have survived several tests of their resolve and have maintained their positions when attacked. In early 1981, for example, LAF units repulsed attacks by Syrian-backed Palestine Liberation Army troops as well as Syrian tank and artillery fire. []

Old Problems Remain

Despite the progress in rebuilding the LAF since the civil war of 1975-76, the Army would probably again divide along confessional lines if major fighting between Muslims and Christians resumes. []

Many of the conditions that prompted the Army to fall apart still exist. The senior officers corps is still dominated by Christians, many of whom openly sympathize with the Phalange. Most units are lopsidedly Christian or Muslim. Pro-Phalange Christian officers maintain close contact with the militia leadership and exchange intelligence and operational information. Planning exists for contingencies under which Christian officers and troops would break off from the Army to aid the militias as well as to deter attempts by Muslim army members to help their coreligionists. When the security situation deteriorated this spring, pro-Phalange officers began transferring army equipment to depots in Christian-held territory. []

Lebanese Muslims. Lebanon's Muslims, especially the leftists, consider the Army to be still Christian-dominated. They support the defense law as a step toward a more balanced officer corps but believe these measures are insufficient. They look upon the status of the Army's several pro-Phalange officers as a bellwether of the government's willingness to depoliticize the Army. They will view the deployment of confessionally balanced LAF units into the Christian heartland as a further test of the government's determination. As long as they continue to perceive the Army as pro-Christian, Muslims will oppose efforts to deploy it into Muslim-held west Beirut or other sensitive areas. []

The Palestinians. The Palestinians view efforts to rebuild the LAF and expand its control as a potential threat to their position in Lebanon. Politically, however, they cannot afford open opposition to government efforts to expand the LAF's security role. They are likely to build up and support their largely leftist Muslim allies in the National Movement² to enable them to be in a better position to oppose government efforts to expand areas under Army control. []

The Phalange. The Phalange, not surprisingly, is favorably disposed toward the LAF. The LAF is generally considered to be an ally against the forces of the left, the Palestinians, and the Syrians. The Phalange will in most cases support Army deployments to replace the Syrians. []

The Phalange would oppose efforts to dilute the influence of their supporters in the Army by either Muslims or "neutral" Christians. It will resist an extension of LAF authority into areas of Phalange control. The Phalange will also be suspicious of Syrian or Lebanese Muslim-supported plans for further reorganization of the LAF or demands that the LAF have freedom throughout Christian sectors of Lebanon. []

Syrian and Israeli Views. The Syrians have long given formal support to the reorganization of the Lebanese Army along more confessionally balanced lines, maintaining that they would be willing to turn over a large part of their security duties in Lebanon to such a force. Nonetheless, the Syrians have done little to facilitate the program—indeed they have undermined the effort. []

Syria's mistrust of the LAF stems from the civil war when many Christian elements broke away to aid the Phalange militia, taking much of the Army's equipment with them. The Syrians believe that Lebanese Government efforts to reduce Christian influence and purge pro-Phalange officers have been insufficient. []

² The National Movement is a coalition of leftist, largely Muslim political parties formed in 1976 as a counterweight to the Phalange-dominated Christian coalition, the Lebanese Front. []

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The Syrians would like the Lebanese Army to be bound more closely to the Syrian military through a formal defense and security arrangement. They have proposed providing the LAF with advisers and integrating Lebanese officers into their own training programs. They believe they would thus gain a measure of long-term influence over the LAF and put an end to Christian domination. []

The Israelis believe the Lebanese Army is ineffectual and will not soon impose government authority over the Palestinian fedayeen in Lebanon. The Israelis doubt that progress toward rebuilding the LAF can be made so long as the Syrians and Lebanese Muslim leftists oppose granting it wider authority. They also believe that it will be difficult for the government to reduce Christian influence markedly in the Army without alienating the Christian community. They view efforts by the Syrians and Lebanese Muslims to induce the government to make the Army more confessionally balanced as a device to establish Syrian domination over the military. []

Israel has shown little concern about the use of the Army in areas outside southern Lebanon, and is apparently content to go along with whatever is acceptable to Tel Aviv's Christian allies. The Israelis, however, have resisted the Army's deployment into the area along their northern border controlled by their Christian ally, Major Haddad. They believe that the army units sent to the south would consist largely of pro-Syrian Muslims, pose a threat to Haddad, and restrict Israel's freedom of maneuver in the zone. []

Outlook

The Lebanese Army remains largely ineffective as an instrument of government authority. Its limited successes have been achieved mostly with the acquiescence of the militias—Palestinian and Lebanese—and the Syrians. It still must be cautious about engaging in security activities that might offend these groups. The prospects for a greater role for the Army are bleak, and it is likely to be limited to small-scale internal security actions. It will remain unable to cope with major intercommunal fighting or to challenge directly any of the large militias. []

The Army is likely to become a more effective government instrument only as part of a larger political accord in Lebanon. Until such time, the major Lebanese parties, the Palestinians, and the Syrians will be able to block unilateral use of the Army by the government and to undermine efforts to rebuild it that do not meet their approval. Their opposition to restructuring is likely to increase as the Army gains strength because they will see it as a threat to their own control. Recent arms buildups by the Lebanese and Palestinian militias, moreover, have given these groups the firepower and weaponry to challenge the Army more successfully. []

The Army can, nonetheless, make an important contribution to internal security. It can:

- Suppress small violent incidents before they have a chance to spread.
- Deploy along the confrontation line between the militias and the Syrians—as on the Sannin Ridge.
- Take on more security duties in Beirut. []

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Appendix

Force Structure and Equipment

Army

The Lebanese Army strength now stands at 22,000 men, of which about 15,000 are in combat units and the remainder in staff positions and support formations. The combat units are manned at only about 60 percent of authorized strength, however, and much of their equipment is old and in need of repair. The Army also officially controls Lebanese air and naval assets. []

The Lebanese military is seeking to create a new brigade structure that will facilitate more effective and larger scale operations. Plans call for the Army's 29 combat battalions³ to be organized into seven mechanized brigades—a general reserve brigade headquartered at Army Headquarters in Yarze, two brigades in the Mount Lebanon Region and one each in the remaining four military regions. To date, only two brigade headquarters have been formed—the 8th Brigade at Yarze and the 1st Brigade in the Bekaa Military Region. Because of the lack of armored vehicles, only the 8th Brigade has been mechanized. In the four regions that lack a formal brigade structure, each of the regional headquarters will continue to command all combat battalions in its area of responsibility. []

Equipment. Under the US security assistance program and FMS (Foreign Military Sales) provisions the Lebanese Armed Forces are receiving armored personnel carriers (APCs), jeep-mounted 106-mm recoilless rifles, small arms, communication equipment, and various support vehicles. They also are purchasing additional British armored fighting vehicles and have shown interest in French-built armored personnel carriers. The French and Jordanians have offered tanks, and the Lebanese Government has asked for US tanks, but no agreements have been worked out yet. []

³ Eighteen infantry, five armor, five artillery, and one air defense. In addition to these battalions, a 1,200-man contingent (drawn from units in the various military regions), headquartered at Arzun in southern Lebanon, operates in company and smaller size formations under the control of UNIFIL. []

Table 2

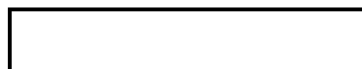
Lebanese Army: Major Combat Units

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Regional Command	Headquarters	Units
Beirut Military Region	Beirut	Two infantry battalions; one armored battalion
Mount Lebanon Military Region	Fayyadiyah	Five infantry battalions; two armored battalions; two artillery battalions
South Lebanon Military Region	Sidon	Two infantry battalions ^a
North Lebanon Military Region	Tripoli	Three infantry battalions; one armored battalion; one artillery battalion
Bekaa Military Region	Ablah	Three infantry battalions; one armored battalion; one artillery battalion
Army Headquarters	Yarze	Three mechanized infantry battalions; one artillery battalion; one anti-aircraft battalion

^a A separate task force, directly subordinate to the Ministry of Defense, is attached to UN forces in the south at Arzun.

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Training. The main training center for recruits, which is located at Hammana with smaller facilities at Fayyadiyah and Amchit, provides nine weeks of basic training, followed by another nine to 13 weeks of advanced, branch-oriented instruction. These facilities reportedly are capable of training up to 4,000 men per year. The new noncommissioned officers' school at Hammana will be capable of processing 3,200 men per year when completed. []

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The Army will be lucky to achieve 60 percent of its 4,000-man recruitment goal for 1981, as inductions have fallen considerably. Consequently, Lebanese units will continue to be seriously under strength. (c)

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Table 3 *Number of weapons*

Major Weapons

Tanks	46 ^a
Armored personnel carriers and armored cars	230
Artillery	36 (122 and 155 mm)
Mortars	237 (60, 81, and 120 mm)
Antitank guided missile launchers	19 (MILAN and TOW)
Recoilless rifles	49 (90 and 106 mm)
Air defense artillery	96 (23 and 30 mm)
Helicopters	32

^a Of the 46 tanks, not more than 10 are estimated to be fully operational.

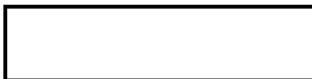


Table 4

Major Equipment Deliveries to Lebanon, by Supplier, 1980-81

Ground	
Portugal	23 APCs
US	28 APCs
	80 trailers
	343 trucks (¼ ton to 5 ton)
	17 155-mm howitzers
	18 106-mm recoilless rifles
487 TOW missiles	
Air	
France	10 helicopters
Italy	3 helicopters
Navy	
UK	1 patrol boat



Air Force

The 1,300-man Air Force, despite having an elite corps of skilled, professionally motivated officers, is basically a rotary-wing force, comprising 32 transport and utility helicopters in two operational squadrons based at Beirut International Airport. The Air Force is attempting to develop an airmobile/air assault capability using these helicopters

Its fixed-wing inventory includes some old, lightly armed aircraft at Riyaq Air Base—eight Hawker Hunters and nine Mirage IIIs. Only the Hawker Hunters are operational, but the Lebanese Government is considering signing an agreement with France to repair the Mirages.

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The Air Force has had growing problems with the overall quality of recruits being inducted, particularly Muslims. Consequently, its training program has had to be modified to provide new recruits with more basic education and skills needed to become qualified pilots.

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Navy

Lebanon's 300-man Navy, almost all Christian, belongs for all intents and purposes to the Phalange. Headquartered in the main Phalange harbor at Junyah, most of its few small patrol boats are old and frequently inoperable. The Navy has no real tasks, and most of its technical personnel have been reassigned to perform maintenance tasks for the Army.

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Internal Security Force (ISF)

The 7,500-man ISF is a police force that performs security and law enforcement functions in various parts of Lebanon. Its "emergency action squads" are capable of limited paramilitary security operations. The most important of these units, the 400-man Squad 16, is deployed in company-size formations in each of Beirut's major suburban districts.

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The ISF has been unable to recruit sufficient qualified personnel to fill existing vacancies. Nevertheless, it is requesting government permission to increase its manning level to 10,000 men by 1985. Equipment is limited to small arms and 30 wheeled armored personnel carriers, 20 of which are assigned to Squad 16. The force reportedly consists of an almost equal number of Christians and Muslims, and its commander is one of the more capable and respected officers in the Lebanese Armed Forces.

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