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Lebanon's Maronite Christians: The Politics of Intransigence

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An Intelligence Assessment

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*NESA 85-10123
June 1985*

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An Intelligence Assessment

This paper was prepared by [Redacted] Office
of Near Eastern and South Asian Analysis. It was
coordinated with the Directorate of Operations. [Redacted]

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Comments and queries are welcome and may be
directed to the Chief, Arab-Israeli Division, NESA.

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**Lebanon's Maronite Christians:
The Politics of Intransigence**

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Key Judgments

*Information available
as of 7 May 1985
was used in this report.*

A decade of sectarian violence has eroded Christian political ascendancy in Lebanon and prompted Muslim demands for equality — if not supremacy. There is no consensus among Christians on how to accommodate the changing political and military realities of Lebanon, but most remain obsessed with parochial interests. Christian hardliners continue to oppose reforms that would give Muslims a share of political power commensurate with their demographic strength. Christian intransigence on this issue threatens to reignite the civil war and eliminate the last vestiges of Lebanese sovereignty.

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Christian behavior since the outbreak of the civil war paints a picture of a community so traumatized by its perception of Muslim ill will that common sense approaches to their dilemma rarely come into play. Hardline Christians will not voluntarily implement the political changes necessary for the continuation of a unitary Lebanese state and would rather court political disaster than see their opponents improve their political lot. Sustained Syrian pressure will be necessary before Christian extremists come to terms with their Muslim countrymen.

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The rebellion in March by the Christian Lebanese Forces militia against the leadership of President Amin Gemayel points up a longstanding dispute within the Christian community. Moderates believe their long-term interests are best served by cooperating with Damascus and permitting some political accommodation with Muslims. Hardliners, however, are prepared to see Lebanon divided rather than give in to Muslim political demands.

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Hardline Christians fail to recognize that the radicalization at work among Muslims is related to Christian political practices, and many deny that political equity is an issue. In their view, the maintenance of Christian hegemony is a defensive reaction to thwart the “eternal Muslim goal” of suppressing Christians. They believe that concessions would be construed by Muslims as a sign of weakness that would encourage Muslim militancy rather than increase prospects for dialogue.

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The current Christian proposals for a federal system in Lebanon represent the outer limits of their willingness to concede anything to an integrated Lebanese state. Extreme decentralization, while in fact evolving, is opposed

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by Syria and Lebanese Muslims, who see it as a disguised form of partition. Nonetheless, continued factional fighting probably will lead to the creation, either by accident or design, of territories that tend to be confessionally exclusive. The question for Lebanon now appears to be the extent and rigidity of evolving confessional separatism. [REDACTED]

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Syria probably is prepared to tolerate considerable political and administrative decentralization, but Syrian leaders apparently have not yet decided how far decentralization should go. They have stated publicly that they will not tolerate cantonization. Although Damascus cannot impose a lasting solution on the Lebanese factions, continuing Syrian predominance in Lebanon is necessary to avoid political collapse. [REDACTED]

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Prospects that Christian hardliners will adopt a conciliatory attitude toward Muslims are dim. Younger Christian leaders whose political awakening has taken place during the civil war show little inclination to compromise with Muslims. Nurtured on extremist rhetoric, they are cynical about reconciliation. In the near term, moves by hardline Christians to restart political dialogue would reflect a desire to preempt Syrian action rather than a genuine effort to pursue national reconciliation. [REDACTED]

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The rise of militant Islam will severely restrict the scope of US influence in Lebanon. Conspicuous US efforts to bolster moderate forces would draw fire from the radicals and could stall US initiatives. The burden of the Lebanese albatross, moreover, could limit the implementation of policies on other US interests in the area, particularly the broader Middle East peace process. [REDACTED]

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**Lebanon's Maronite Christians:
The Politics of Intransigence** [Redacted]

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**The Problem: The Immovable Object
and the Irresistible Force**

A decade of sectarian violence has seriously eroded Christian political ascendancy in Lebanon.¹ Muslim demands for equality—if not supremacy—have called into question the future political status of Lebanese Christians. Despite political and military reverses that have left Christians vulnerable to their Muslim and Druze opponents, they continue to resist serious political reforms that could alleviate growing hostility toward them. Christian intransigence has led to increasing militance among Muslims, particularly Shias. We believe that failure to accommodate at least some Muslim demands could reignite the civil war and eliminate the last vestiges of Lebanese sovereignty. [Redacted]

Christians, like other Lebanese factions, recognize that the old Lebanon that functioned according to deals worked out among political godfathers is over. [Redacted] however, there is no clear consensus among Christians on what the new Lebanon should look like. Christian proposals thus far tend toward arrangements designed to maximize their parochial interests without adequate concern for the consequences to the remainder of the population. [Redacted]

The rebellion in March 1985 by the Christian Lebanese Forces militia against the leadership of President Amin Gemayel points up a longstanding and bitter dispute between moderates and hardliners within the

¹ Lebanon's Christian community consists of a half dozen religious denominations. The Maronite sect is the largest and politically most significant. Throughout this paper the terms *Christian* or *Christian* community refer specifically to the Maronites and those non-Maronite Christians who identify with the political views set forth by the Lebanese Front—a coalition of Maronite political parties—and, particularly, by the Phalange Party or the Lebanese Forces militia, the two strongest institutions within the Maronite community. [Redacted]

[Redacted]

Christian community. Christian moderates believe their long-term interests are best served by cooperating with Damascus and permitting some political accommodation with Muslims. Hardliners, distrustful of Muslim and Syrian intentions, are determined to preserve their political dominance over other Lebanese factions and are prepared to see Lebanon divided rather than give in to Muslim demands. [Redacted]

Although the Lebanese Forces and the less militant Phalange Party are the best organized units within the Maronite community, neither represents the community as a whole. Lebanese Maronites, however, have few options for sources of leadership. The Lebanese Forces rebellion discredited Amin Gemayel's attempt to speak for all Christians and may force him to assume the traditional presidential role of broker among Lebanese confessional factions. Christian moderates have not been able to organize themselves into an effective political force. As a result, leadership of the community has gone to the hardline organizations by default. [Redacted]

We believe that a relatively stable, confessionally mixed, unitary Lebanese state can only be achieved if the Christian community drops its opposition to government reforms that would benefit Muslims and if Muslims acknowledge legitimate Christian fears. According to US Embassy reporting, the present hardline Maronite leadership believes that concessions would be construed by Muslims as a sign of weakness that would encourage Muslim militancy rather than increase prospects for dialogue. The inability of moderates to develop a political alternative has crippled the Christian community's ability to take actions that could reduce the appeal of factions like the radical Shia Hizballah movement that preach an end to all Christian privileges. [Redacted]

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Figure 1. Who Speaks for Christians? President Amin Gemayel, a political godfather (left); Samir Ja'Ja', a rebel leader and Christian zealot (middle); Elie Hubayqa, a Lebanese Forces chief and shrewd opportunist (right).

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The period during which potential concessions could have a meaningful effect on reducing confessional strife is ending. The demographic shift in favor of Muslims and the growing appeal of radical Islamic fundamentalism, if unchecked, will eventually place the Christian community in jeopardy.

Hardline Christians view the radicalization at work among Muslims and Druze as unrelated to Christian political practices, and many deny that political equity is an issue. In their view, the maintenance of Christian hegemony is necessary to thwart the "eternal Muslim goal" of suppressing Christians.

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The pattern of Christian behavior since independence and especially since 1975 reveals a community so traumatized by its perceptions of Muslim ill will that logic and common sense approaches to its dilemma rarely come into play. Hardline Christians are committed to the civil war ethic of mutual denial. They will not voluntarily implement the political changes necessary for the continuation of a unitary Lebanese state and would rather court political disaster than see their opponents improve their political lot.

The Maronite leadership, in our judgment, is operating on two levels. According to US officials, they relate in dramatic terms the desperate situation of the Christian community, which they perceive to be under constant threat from aggressive Muslims. Yet the political behavior of these leaders suggests they believe they can still manipulate the situation to Christian advantage.

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The rise of the Shia fundamentalist Hizballah (Party of God) has added a new dimension to the "traditional" Muslim threat to Christian supremacy in Lebanon. Hizballah adherents reject the Lebanese political process and are committed to fomenting an Islamic revolution in Lebanon. Central to this goal is the elimination of Western, especially US, influence in Lebanon and ending all residual Israeli presence in the south. Hizballah views Lebanese Christians, particularly Maronites, as agents of Western and Israeli influence.

Despite their challenge to Christian preeminence in Lebanon, we believe that mainline Muslim groups still regard Christians as an essential partner in the Lebanese political process. As long as a siege mentality prevails among Christians, however, a genuine return to political dialogue is unlikely.

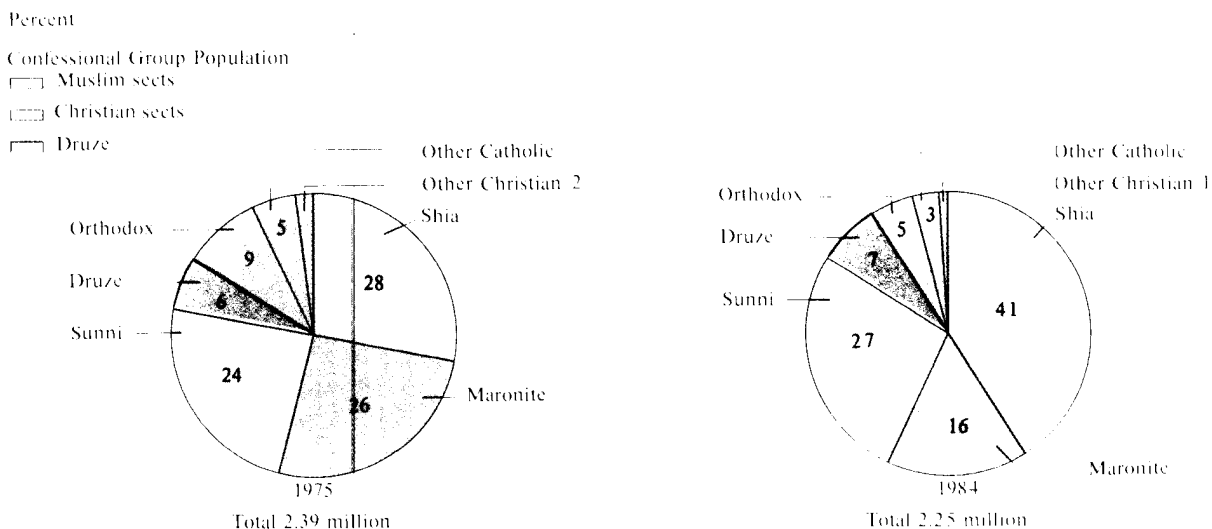
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We believe the eventual emergence of a new power structure will be determined by Syria, the predominant political force in Lebanon, and by the forces

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Figure 2
Lebanon: Estimated Distribution of Confessional Groups



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currently being unleashed by a militant and uncompromising brand of Islam determined to end Christian privilege.

Maronite Maneuvering: A Zero-Sum Game

At the outset of the civil war, Christians viewed the domestic crisis as a challenge to Lebanese sovereignty posed by the armed Palestinian presence, which they denounced for functioning as a state within a state. Espousal of the Palestinian cause by Muslims, particularly leftists, solidified opposition to Christians initially over the question of Palestinian prerogatives in Lebanon. This Muslim-Palestinian alliance soon altered the focus of the problem, however, to one of Christian prerogatives and shifted the emphasis from Lebanese sovereignty to political equity among Lebanese factions.

Maronites have opposed Muslim calls for the secularization of Lebanon because a government based on numerical majority would relegate them to the role of a political minority. Christians fear *dhimmi* status—the traditional lot of non-Muslims in an Islamic state,

in which the well-being of the *dhimmis* is tied to Muslim tolerance. We believe efforts aimed at secularizing the political system would prompt Christians to renew efforts at withdrawing into a garrison state that could exist only with outside backing.

Christian efforts to maintain their hegemony have led them to pursue varying strategies that generally have been conditioned by their perceptions of Syrian and Israeli policies toward them. At various times Maronites have supported the status quo, as represented by the 1943 pact. Those most alarmed by growing Muslim stridency advocate a retreat into a Christian ministate. Even those committed to maintaining Lebanon's pluralist society support some sectarian separation.

Christian views on the future of Lebanon and their role in it have been affected by the social and political transformation that has taken place as a result of the

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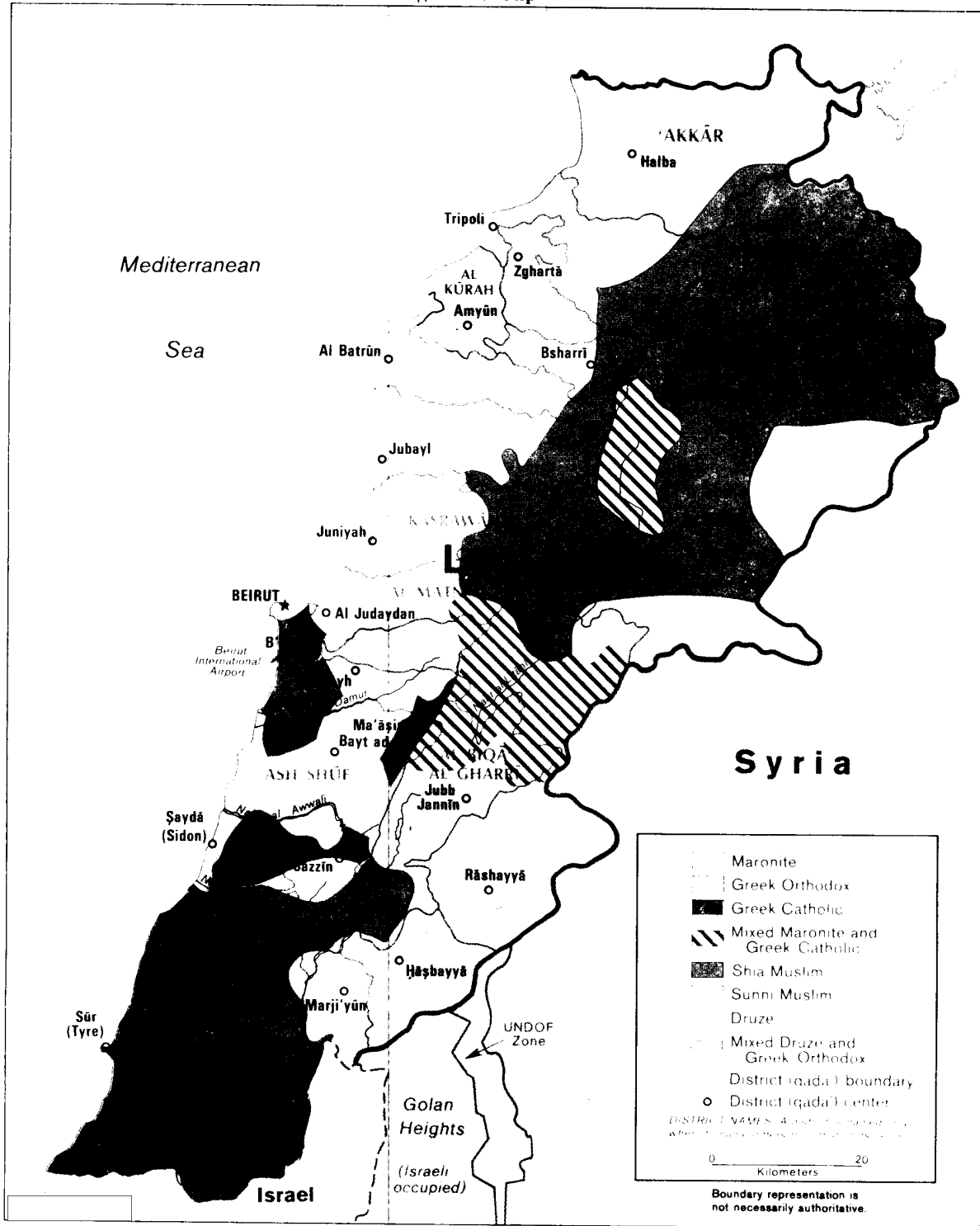
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Figure 3
Traditional Distribution of Lebanese Religious Groups



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Confessional Politics

Lebanese Christians, particularly the Maronite sect, have been the dominant political force in Lebanon since the French created the modern state in 1920. Initially, their claim to political preeminence was bolstered by a slim numerical superiority, established in a census conducted by French authorities in 1932. Since this census—the last taken in Lebanon—the demographic balance has shifted dramatically in favor of Shia Muslims. Christians now justify their ascendancy as necessary for their cultural and religious survival. [redacted]

Lebanon's political system is founded on the so-called national pact concluded in 1943 between Maronite and Sunni Muslim political leaders. This oral agreement was an effort to promote stability in the new state by calming Christian fears of being drowned in a Muslim sea and to assure Muslims that Christians would not serve Western interests. The practical byproduct of the agreement was the apportionment of government positions on the basis of religious affiliation, specifically that the president of the republic would be a Maronite Christian; the prime minister, a Sunni Muslim; and the speaker of parliament, a Shia Muslim. [redacted]

Lebanese law recognizes 17 religious sects. Every Lebanese is registered as a member of one of these

sects, and legally there is no Lebanese who does not belong to a confession. [redacted]

Until 1943 there were periodic readjustments in ratios of confessional representation and allocation of specific offices. Since 1943, however, there has been only one modest adjustment. The current 99-man parliament, elected in 1972, has only 19 seats allocated for Shia Muslims, who constitute an estimated 40 percent of the population, while 30 seats are reserved for Maronite Christians, who make up less than 20 percent of the population. Academic sources note that 26 Lebanese families have held 35 percent of all parliamentary seats, a clear demonstration of the strength of clan politics. [redacted]

This system grew out of the need to balance the competing interests of numerous religious groups. During the early stages of the civil war, most factions still believed the 1943 formula provided a serviceable basis for sectarian cooperation. While the antagonists were prepared to abide by the spirit of the pact, which sought to offset Christian fears by recognizing a degree of political preeminence. Muslims and Druze were seeking revisions that would give power to non-Christians more in line with Lebanon's demographic realities. [redacted]

civil war. We believe that Christian militants, buoyed by their ability to withstand assaults by Muslim adversaries for the last decade, may have unrealistic expectations of their ability to continue to thwart the aspirations of their opponents. [redacted]

Dialogue Versus Violence

Prospects that the Phalange and Lebanese Forces will adopt a conciliatory attitude toward Muslims are dim. Despite new attitudes and approaches that have emerged as a result of the civil war, the core issue for Maronites continues to be whether or not they trust Muslims. The answer, at least from the Maronite leadership, has been a resounding "no." [redacted]

Younger leaders whose political awakening has taken place during the civil war have become accustomed to violence and show little inclination to compromise with Muslims. Extremist rhetoric has reinforced sectarian distrust, and a whole generation has come to maturity without having had contact with their non-Christian countrymen. [redacted]

Many young Christians have never left the relatively orderly existence of Christian areas and regard war-ravaged West Beirut as savage and alien. A Western

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Figure 4. Life in East and West Beirut. Harrods open for business as usual in East Beirut; swimmers enjoy the beaches (top photos); rebuilding once fashionable West Beirut must await stability; traditional Islamic garb is now common (bottom photos). [redacted]

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journalist captured the essence of the way these communities view each other when he described the "green line" separating Christian East Beirut from Muslim West Beirut not like the Berlin Wall, keeping citizens apart, but, like the Hoover Dam, holding each other back. We believe these attitudes have made many young Maronites skeptical about the utility of dialogue or reconciliation and further diminish the prospects that they will abandon violence as a political tool. [redacted]

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community. Typical are the views of Charles Malik, a Greek Orthodox Christian long associated with the Maronite position, who embodies the traditional dedication to the concept of a pluralist society. [redacted] he is nonetheless consumed with distrust of Muslim intentions and sees the safety of the Christian community as an absolute priority. [redacted]

The views of the six-man Lebanese Front directorate form the philosophical base for much of the Maronite

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Directorate member Fuad Boustani, who regards the creation of greater Lebanon as a mistake and wants no part in a Muslim-Christian accommodation, represents the extremist Christian position. Boustani advocates a Christian homeland and sees Lebanon as a refuge for Christians—and only Christians—from throughout the Middle East who sooner or later will be victimized by Muslims. [redacted]

Federalism: The Maronite Model

Hardline Christian leaders now advocate the establishment of a highly decentralized federal system for Lebanon in which each community would be virtually autonomous. Following the collapse of the Lebanese National Reconciliation Conference at Lausanne in March 1984, the Lebanese Front issued a paper calling for the creation of a federal republic in Lebanon. Christian proposals, though couched in general terms calling for political decentralization, expressed the recurrent Maronite theme of their need for geographical guarantees. [redacted]

The outlines of the proposed federation were left purposely vague. Some Christians envisioned the withdrawal of their coreligionists into the Maronite heartland. Others, particularly those from areas outside the heartland, envisioned the creation of a multitude of cantons throughout Lebanon. This version, they argue, would avoid uprooting a large segment of the Christian population and enable them to maintain their property and presence in areas long regarded as Christian. [redacted]

Some Christians argue that the latter plan is not feasible from a security standpoint. Others, however, see advantages in avoiding Christian isolation and breaking up what otherwise would be large, contiguous Shia-dominated areas. [redacted]

The clear intent of either Christian proposal, [redacted] [redacted] is to reduce the traditionally weak central government to the role of a coordinating bureau among self-governing religious factions. Virtually all significant functions of government would be reserved for the local confessional administrations. This extreme decentralization, while in fact evolving, is opposed by Syria and Lebanese Muslims, who see it as a disguised form of partition. [redacted]

We believe that proposals for a federal system in Lebanon represent for hardline Christians the outer limits of their willingness to concede anything to an integrated Lebanese state. The Lebanese Forces rebellion against the Phalange Party and the leadership of Amin Gemayel was an attempt to reassert hardline views in the Christian decisionmaking process. The mutiny was an affirmation of Lebanese Forces inflexibility regarding political concessions to Muslims. [redacted]

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Syria: Big Brother Is Watching

The traditional reliance by Lebanese factions on outside powers to guarantee their political survival theoretically was given up with the adoption of the 1943 national pact. In fact, mentorship by external powers remains a primary feature in Lebanese domestic politics. In the minds of all Lebanese, the actions of their opponents are dictated by, and dependent on, powers beyond Lebanon's borders. The corollary to this tenet is the belief that opposition groups can be brought to heel whenever the mentor states wish it. [redacted]

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Lebanese are so convinced of the omnipotence of external powers that they ascribe all internal events to the machinations of these powers. They see themselves as helpless—even blameless—for Lebanon's political condition. This mentality has enabled Christians to temporize on central issues of political reform, choosing instead the centuries-old pattern of reliance on an external patron—Syria, Israel, the United States, and, once again, Syria—to avoid a significant divestiture of political power. [redacted]

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The present Lebanese Government has, for all practical purposes, charged Syria with responsibility for Christian survival. At best, relations between Lebanese Maronites and Syria have been mercurial. Maronites harbor a deep mistrust of Syria but grudgingly accept its protection when they believe that is their only alternative to annihilation. [redacted]

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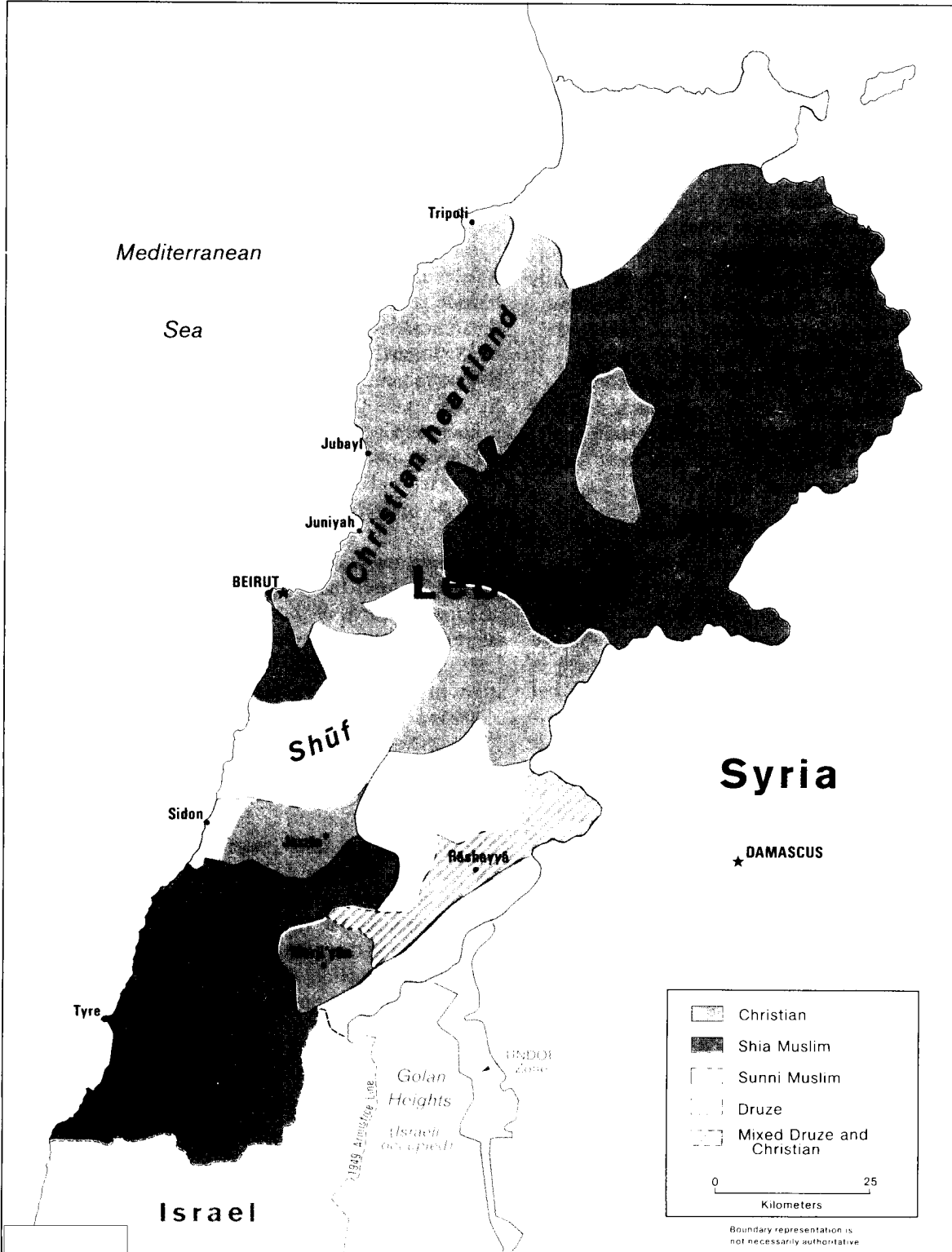
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Syrian policy toward Lebanon is a carefully crafted attempt to maintain a balance among contending forces. This policy has led Damascus to pursue pragmatic relations with most Lebanese factions to prevent a complete victory by any one group. In the years [redacted]

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Figure 5
Approximate Distribution of Lebanese Religious Groups



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Syria and the Maronites: Coming Full Circle

The present understanding between the Christian-dominated government in Beirut and Syrian leaders in Damascus is the second since the outbreak of hostilities a decade ago. Syria's alliance with the Palestinian resistance movement and Lebanese leftists faltered in 1976 when the Druze-led National Movement decided to abandon Syrian-backed mediation efforts in favor of a military campaign against the Maronites. [redacted]

Syria, fearing that the Maronites would use this opportunity to make good their earlier threats to set up a ministate, decided upon military intervention to bring the factions under control and, ironically, to defend the Maronites. By mid-October, Syria had defeated its former Muslim and Palestinian allies and was in control of Lebanon north of the Litani River. Syria also achieved a political victory when the Arab summit meeting, called in Riyadh to halt the fighting, legitimized the Syrian role in Lebanon, making Damascus the final arbiter in Lebanese politics. [redacted]

The struggle between the Maronites and Syria was reignited with the political and military ascendancy

of Bashir Gemayel and the Lebanese Forces militia. Bashir utilized the alliance with Israel to promote his bid for renewed Christian hegemony, a goal that was nearly realized following the Israeli invasion of June 1982 and the temporary devastation of leftist elements opposed to Christian domination. Bashir's assassination in September 1982, a matter of days before he was to assume the Lebanese presidency, contributed to the ensuing breakdown of the Maronite-Israeli alliance. [redacted]

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The souring relationship quickly sobered Maronites into reassessing their prospects and unleashed a power struggle within the community between those who sought to maintain Israeli backing and those who preferred a less polarizing solution. Amin Gemayel, elected to the presidency in place of his assassinated younger brother, attempted to use US support to steer a middle course between Israel and Syria. With the abrogation of the US-mediated Lebanese-Israeli withdrawal accord and the subsequent departure of the US Marines in February 1984, Christians once again became grudging supplicants to Damascus. [redacted]

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since the outbreak of the civil war, Syria has championed Muslim demands for expanded political power while at the same time trying to avoid panicking Christians into establishing an Israeli-backed ministate. [redacted]

Despite the rising tide of opposition to the Maronites, especially from an increasingly radical Shia population, Maronites behave as if they are confident that external support will enable them to reshape the political system to the extent necessary to maintain their preeminence. We believe the Maronites have failed to recognize that the growing fundamentalist movement, despite its heavy reliance on Iranian backing and Syrian cooperation, is primarily an indigenous movement that Syria may be hesitant or unable to control. [redacted]

Despite changing tactics, Syria's goal of achieving relative stability in Lebanon remains constant. Syria's search for stability in Lebanon, however, has been thwarted by Maronites exercising options—such as reliance on Israel and the United States—that leaders in Damascus perceive as detrimental to Syria's vital interests. [redacted]

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The present entente between Beirut and Damascus apparently is based on a belief among those pragmatic Christians who back the President that Syria is capable of protecting them from their adversaries but will not halt Maronite political maneuvering. [redacted]

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[redacted] hardline Christians are less

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optimistic and fear that the end to direct US and Israeli involvement in Lebanon signals the exhaustion of Maronite options. Once Damascus is certain that Christians have no recourse, hardliners argue, Syria will be free to force Christians into political subservience. [redacted]

In our judgment, Syria will not significantly reduce Christian political rights, although we believe Damascus wants to redress some of the political imbalance in Lebanon. These efforts could gain impetus if Syria sees major Christian political concessions as vital in derailing the growing threat from radical Shia fundamentalists. [redacted]

The Christian Shadow Government

Syrian efforts to coerce Maronites into cooperating in an integrated Lebanese state are complicated by the existence of a firmly entrenched self-governing mechanism that operates in the Maronite heartland as a virtual state within a state. The existence and development of this structure have reinforced Maronite separatist tendencies and serve as a daily reminder of the central government's inability to provide for their needs or to protect them. [redacted]

The trend toward Maronite autonomy began with the collapse of the central government during the early stages of the civil war and the decision by the Lebanese Forces to take over security and administrative functions in Christian areas. These efforts were initiated by the Phalange Party to enlist cooperation and participation of nonparty members in mobilizing community resources to support the Christian militia and fill the void left by the government. Although this was envisioned as a temporary necessity, it became a self-perpetuating mechanism. By 1978 the Maronite Christian heartland was beginning to acquire the social and economic characteristics of an autonomous political entity. [redacted]

The Maronite shadow government boasts a foreign affairs department that actively promotes Maronite interests abroad and seeks support from expatriate Maronites. The heart of the domestic program is the public services department and its system of popular committees that operate at the grassroots level throughout the Christian heartland. By 1982 more than 120 popular committees were handling services

related to health, education, finance, environment, civil defense, planning, information, social affairs, and youth programs, as well as problems related to public transport, water, electricity, telephone, and police functions. [redacted]

The committees handle everything from garbage collection to repairing water mains and finding housing for Christian refugees. They regulate consumer prices, and inspectors protect the community from consumer fraud. Those arrested for profiteering are likely to have their names broadcast over the Christian radio station. [redacted]

Other social services include special programs for war-traumatized children, drug rehabilitation, and career counseling. A communications department operates Arabic and French presses and radio and television stations. There is also a special task force made up of technicians and experts who study Lebanon's social and physical infrastructure and prepare plans for reconstruction and future development. An oversight department keeps the work of the other departments and committees accountable to the leadership and to the Christian public. [redacted]

Throughout the civil war, Lebanese Muslim factions did not develop similar structures, although the Palestinian "state within a state" was a close parallel. The process of political and social disintegration in Lebanon has accelerated since the Israeli invasion in June 1982 and is leading other factions, willingly or not, to establish autonomous arrangements in areas under their control. Lebanon is being reconstituted into a series of sectarian fiefdoms. According to an Embassy officer in Beirut, the process in the Druze-dominated Shuf is approaching that of the Christian heartland. The "micantonization" process is under way on a smaller scale in major urban centers such as Tripoli and Sidon, and West Beirut endures an almost daily subdivision by contending militias. [redacted]

The Maronite Challenge

The result of this Maronite initiative has been the creation of a structure that encroaches on the prerogatives of the central government. The Lebanese

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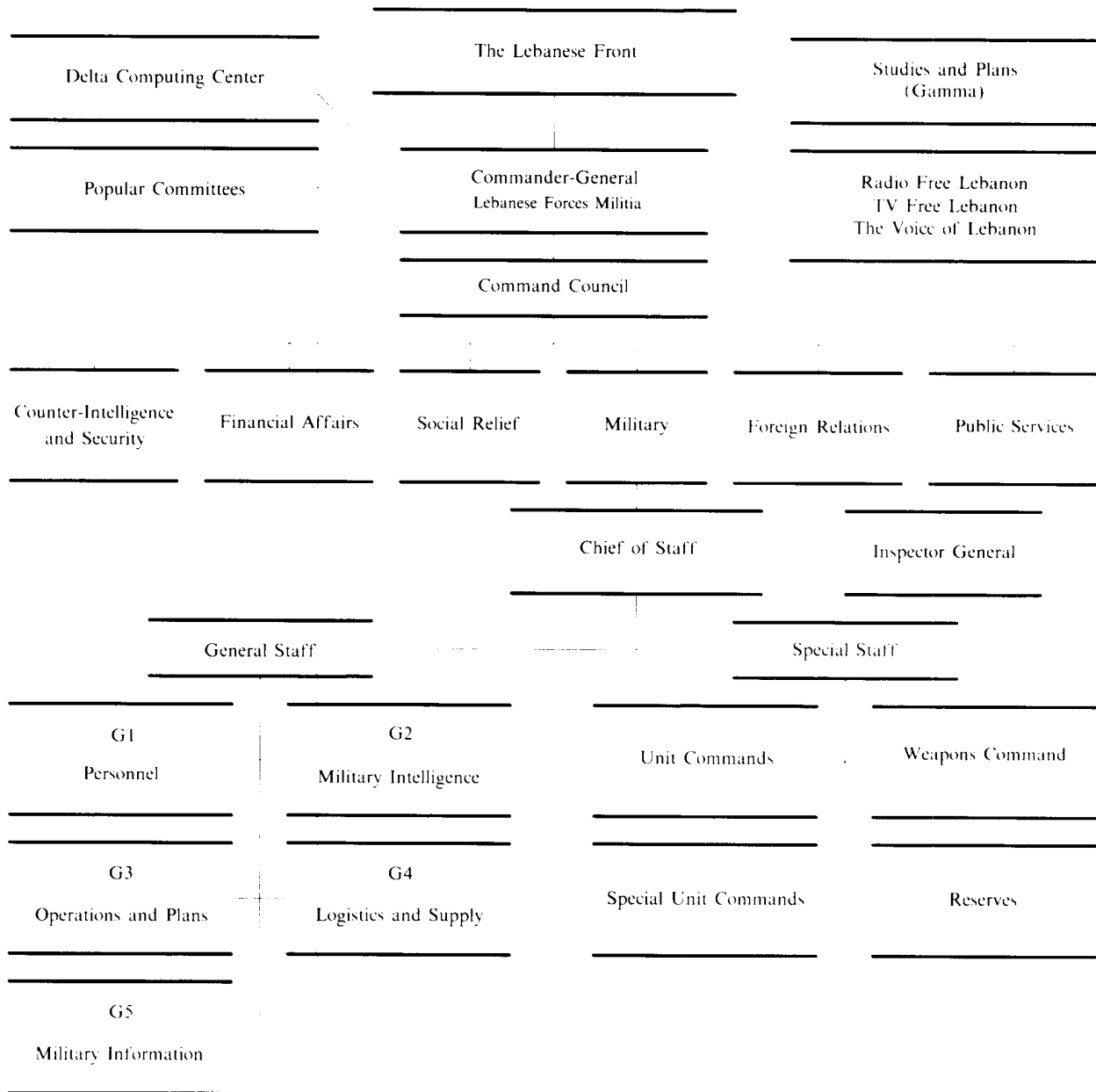
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Figure 6
Maronite Shadow Government



Source: Lewis W. Snider, "The Lebanese Forces: Their Origins and Role in Lebanon's Politics,"
The Middle East Journal, Volume 38, No. 1, Winter 1984.



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Forces militia directly challenges government authority in the areas of military conscription and taxation. The militia levies a small household tax as well as taxes on meals, gasoline, and cinemas. Tariffs are collected on goods transiting checkpoints on the "borders" of the Maronite heartland. [redacted]

The civilian structure, originally created to support the militia, has been so effective that the political strength of the Lebanese Forces now rests not with the militia itself, but in the effectiveness of its social programs, which probably can be sustained even if the militia ceases to function. [redacted]

The operations of the Maronite shadow government have closed down voluntarily on several occasions, indicating a willingness to cooperate with the central government. Each time, they have been reactivated when government actions have brought it into conflict with the Lebanese Forces. Muslims have tended to view these periods of cooperation as conspiratorial rather than genuine militia subservience to the government, confirming their suspicions that the government is the instrument of one community's interests. [redacted]

The real significance of growing Maronite autonomy is the emergence of a new concept among younger leaders that government should serve the governed. This view stands in stark contrast to the Ottoman tradition adhered to by older leaders that government exists for the benefit of those who hold power and the governed serve the governors. The change in attitude among young Christians adds to their determination not to return to old political patterns. This determination not only reduces prospects for reconciliation with non-Christians but also has established new patterns of political behavior that bypass old loyalties and patronage systems. This in turn has repercussions for the future course of Christian leadership and actions. [redacted]

Generational Change

The social transformation of the Maronite community as evidenced by the adoption of new attitudes of self-reliance and responsible government has resulted in alienation from traditional leaders and a rejection of clan politics. Increasingly, young Maronites are establishing their leadership base through participation in

party or militia affairs. Family connections are still useful and convey a dimension of legitimacy, but they are no longer sufficient to establish leadership rights. [redacted]

At the outset of the civil war, Lebanon's political leaders were the same men who had presided at the country's independence 30 years earlier. Lebanon's political elite consisted of feudal warlords who were the absolute rulers of their communities, the dispensers of patronage, the final arbiters in personal conflicts, and the backroom dealers who kept Lebanon running. [redacted]

Many of these octogenarian statesmen remain prominent, but none any longer commands real political power. Power has passed from the politicians to young militia leaders who are increasingly removed from the old feudal loyalties. This new generation of Maronite leaders is defined partly by age and outlook, but, we believe, primarily by their gradual adaptation to institutional, rather than clan, political structures. [redacted]

Although the rise of the Lebanese Forces was dependent upon the Gemayel name and the charismatic personality of its young leader, it has established an institutional structure that enabled it to survive Bashir's assassination. Moreover, the continuation of its social programs ensures the militia a political role that is independent of both its military function and its increasingly tenuous ties to the Phalange Party and the Gemayel clan. Other Maronite factions, such as those associated with the Shamuns and Franjiyahs, have not developed political and military structures that can exist independently of clan association. [redacted]

The Christian Power Struggle

The tough stance of Christian leaders has been based on their belief that they have a viable military option to obtain their political goals. During the period of Lebanese Forces ascendancy under Bashir Gemayel, this attitude was predicated on the belief that Israeli backing was unconditional. Since Bashir's death, the militia has lost significant Israeli support and suffered a series of military reverses. [redacted]

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***The Rise of the Lebanese Forces:
Changing of the Guard***

The emergence of the Lebanese Forces militia as a major political and social force among Maronites is the most dramatic example of the breakdown of traditional clan politics and the transfer of political power to militia leaders. At the outset of the civil war, the Christian political parties formed a loose alliance known as the Lebanese Front. Each of the parties maintained a separate militia that acted at the behest of the parent organization and independently of one another. [redacted]

The militias joined for the first time in June 1976 with the siege of the Palestinian refugee camp at Tal al-Zataar. The two-month campaign was conceived by militia leaders to break the Muslim ring around Christian East Beirut and create a land link with the Maronite heartland of Mount Lebanon. The offensive—which claimed the lives of as many as 2,000 Palestinians—was significant because it was planned by the militia commanders independently of the party leaders and helped to establish the credentials of a new generation of leaders. [redacted]

At the time of the Tal al-Zataar campaign, the militias and the Lebanese Front were organized under a single directorate. In 1977 the party leaders decided that the Lebanese Front directorate should be separate from that of the militias, which then organized themselves in a joint command council under the name of the Lebanese Forces. [redacted]

The decision to separate the party from the militia was apparently an attempt by the old politicians to keep power in their own hands, but, in fact, power flowed in the other direction. Under the dynamic and brutal leadership of Bashir Gemayel, the Phalange militia established its dominance over competing Maronite militias and forged them into an integrated conventional military force separate from the political parties. Eventually, the joint command council of the militias became the executive for both the Lebanese Forces and the Lebanese Front. [redacted]

The decline in their fortunes, however, did not dissuade Lebanese Forces militants from launching the rebellion in March 1985 against the President and his Phalange Party backers. In our view, the willingness of the mutineers to undercut President Gemayel at a time of heightened Christian vulnerability reflects the failure of Christian militants to recognize changed circumstances that have seriously limited their options. [redacted]

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The rebel leaders to date have made few tangible gains. Despite general disgust among rank-and-file Christians with Gemayel's leadership, [redacted] the community at large was not prepared to sanction a move against the legitimacy of the presidency or declare for the rebels and risk Syrian retribution. The mutineers have been forced to modify their political agenda and have reversed their earlier opposition to Gemayel's cooperation with Syria. [redacted]

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The rebellion, nonetheless, has damaged what remains of Gemayel's dwindling credibility. He probably will have to associate himself even more closely with Damascus if he is to counter Christian extremists and maintain his relevance within the Lebanese political process. [redacted]

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Lebanese Forces objections to even limited adjustments in the political system have sent a strong negative message to non-Christians and pushed into the open the sensitive issue of intra-Christian differences concerning political control in Lebanon. The rebellion, moreover, confronted Muslims with even more evidence to support their belief in the permanence of Christian intransigence, further undermining prospects for national reconciliation. [redacted]

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The President, in our judgment, never intended to implement substantive political reforms. In our view, Gemayel believes Syrian backing for his regime obviates the need to make concessions to his domestic opponents. Gemayel probably believes that limited concessions, similar to proposals made by Syrian President Assad in 1976, would satisfy Damascus, if not its Lebanese clients. [redacted]

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Christian Leadership Options

Sentiment in the Christian community against the Phalange Party, the Lebanese Forces, and Amin Gemayel is widespread. [redacted] Christians assail the President and party officials for taking large profits from government and private economic projects and claim that the highest paying jobs go only to Phalange Party members. Many resent Gemayel for his perceived attempt to increase his personal power in the Matn, his home district, through the use of his private militia. [redacted]

The Lebanese Forces is becoming increasingly unpopular among rank-and-file Maronites for its free-wheeling behavior that is reminiscent of activities for which the militia criticized the Palestine Liberation Organization a decade ago. [redacted]

[redacted] Maronites are fed up with arbitrary arrests, detentions, kidnappings, and hooliganism by the militiamen. Moderates are particularly concerned by the provocative behavior of the Lebanese Forces toward Syria as well as toward other factional militias and believe that the community as a whole will suffer because of Lebanese Forces irresponsibility. [redacted]

Most Lebanese Christians recognize the vulnerability of attempting a separate existence, and a common adage among Lebanese is that, if it is difficult for them to live together, it is impossible for them to live apart. Despite the growing frustration among rank-and-file Christians, we believe it will be difficult for Christian moderates to summon the collective will to challenge the present Maronite leadership. Prospects for the development of a less militant alternative to the Lebanese Forces or the Phalange depend on the outcome of the current political maneuvering between Gemayel and hardline leaders within the Lebanese Forces, as well as the extent to which other Christian factions are willing to deal with Syria. [redacted]

If Phalange leaders are sufficiently unnerved by the Lebanese Forces challenge, we believe they might try to outmaneuver the militia by bringing their views more into line with those of rank-and-file Christians. Barring an attempt by the Phalange to increase its grassroots appeal, moves by political moderates to challenge domination by the Phalange and the militia probably would have to develop around traditional structures. [redacted]



Figure 7. Christian Voices of Moderation. Maronite patriarch Cardinal Khuraysh (left); National Bloc spokesman Raymond Edde (right). [redacted]

The Maronite patriarch, traditionally a major political actor in Lebanon, has been cited by some Lebanese as a possible foil to the militants. The patriarch commands the respect and loyalty of about 80 percent of all Christian religious leaders and their communities and, [redacted] has the potential to rally opposition to Phalange and Lebanese Forces domination. The patriarch, along with the lower Maronite clergy, has long opposed the hardline extremism espoused by the Maronite Order of Monks, whose teachings provide the philosophical foundation for Lebanese Forces thinking. The current patriarch is elderly and has avoided political involvement. We doubt, however, that even a politically active successor could be effective in the face of opposition from the monks. [redacted]

Some Lebanese believe that moderate clan leaders, such as National Bloc elder statesman Raymond Edde, could rally the Maronite rank and file. Edde, who has lived in self-imposed exile in France since the outset of the civil war, does not share in the blame for the Lebanese tragedy that is attributed to other Maronite leaders. His absence, however, has also meant that he has not shared in the suffering brought on by the civil war. Syrian opposition to Edde, moreover, is likely to be an insurmountable political liability. [redacted]

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Federalism: Pros and Cons

While federalism may satisfy the requirements of the Maronite leadership, some political observers contend it is impractical for many reasons. Religious sects are not territorially isolated, except for Maronites in the enclave dominated by the Lebanese Forces militia and, increasingly, Druze in much of the Shuf. Moreover, two-thirds of all Christians still live outside the Maronite heartland. Boundaries cannot be drawn without including large numbers belonging to sects whose territorial base would be elsewhere. [redacted]

Federalism would allow the majority in each area to negate the demands of the minority or require massive population exchanges. Those unwilling to move to their own area would risk discrimination by the majority confessional group. Moreover, mixed areas would be contested by the major forces, producing further sources of conflict. Continuing fighting, however, could lead to major population shifts as minorities flee areas of conflict to seek refuge with their coreligionists in more secure areas. This process could reach such proportions that confessional exclusivity would eventually spread to additional areas of Lebanon, ultimately negating many of the arguments against federalism. [redacted]

The most compelling reason against federalism is its rejection by Lebanese Muslims. The Shias, Lebanon's largest and most deprived religious group, oppose decentralization because it would prevent them from transforming their main asset, demographic superiority, into political power. Political decentralization would produce a national government that had little commitment to protecting the predominantly Shia population of the south from Israeli retaliation, if not direct occupation. [redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted] Despite Muslim opposition to geographic and political division, some segments of the community apparently recognize the need to develop

administrative structures to cope with the government's inability or unwillingness to provide basic services. [redacted]

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Moreover, Shia political activists—particularly those associated with the fundamentalist movement—increasingly proselytize through traditional self-help and mosque-centered welfare services that require a growing administrative cadre to function. While these are a far cry from the self-sustaining mechanisms developed by Christians and Druze—and are not associated with an attempt at geographic separatism—they add to the Christian argument that sectarian separatism is appropriate for all of Lebanon's communities. [redacted]

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[redacted] some Maronite government officials believe that, with Israel's troop withdrawal from the south, the Shias will engage in a power struggle with other forces in the area aimed at solidifying their control. Once they establish preeminence, [redacted] the Shias will have taken the first step toward the creation of a Shia canton, setting a precedent that Maronites will use to strengthen their argument that there is no other alternative for Lebanon. [redacted]

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The Maronites, in our view, have not seriously addressed the possibility that Shia moderates interested in pursuing their destiny within the Lebanese political system could lose out to extremists whose primary aim is to transform Lebanon into an Islamic state. The radical Hizballah movement is not indigenous to the south, however, and its ability to make inroads in an area that is the traditional stronghold of the more moderate Amal movement will be a significant indicator of the strength and appeal of radical Shiism. Amal leaders—and apparently Maronite leaders as well—are gambling that radical attempts to “transfer” their brand of religious zealotry to the south will be rejected by the more nationalistic forces that have been nurtured by Amal. [redacted]

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Political Reform: Some Practical Suggestions

Practical steps could be taken to restore Lebanon to some semblance of stability if Christians recognized that their survival depends on acceptance of political reform. As long as hardline Christians believe they have a military option that would enable them to sustain a separate existence, we see no possibility for Christian compromise without sustained Syrian pressure. [redacted]

A Lebanese scholar concerned with Lebanon's political reconstruction has suggested a series of steps to expand the resources and rewards of the political system to make room for emerging elites. This could be done by increasing the size of the parliament and creating a senate and a vice-presidency. Lowering the voting age would encourage Lebanon's highly politicized youth to recognize options other than militia service and violence. [redacted]

As a compromise between the 1943 formula and calls for complete secularization, arguments have been made for the retention of religious groups as Lebanon's constituent political units. But, to bolster equality among all Lebanese, sectarianism would have to be abolished in the bureaucracy. Removing the reference to confessional membership on identity cards would have symbolic significance. Christian fears could be allayed in part by retaining the present confessional distribution among the top three posts, with adjustments such as the prime minister's being nominated by the parliament and the extension of the speaker's present one-year term to four years. [redacted]

Other proposals include the acceptance of the principle of administrative decentralization and an increase in the number of "governorates," or administrative districts in which one confessional group is predominant. Elected provincial councils would help increase local participation and preserve the identity of individual regions without risking the drawbacks associated with federation. Moreover, the new infrastructure demanded by decentralization would create jobs that could absorb a number of militiamen. [redacted]

Even if such revisions were adopted, we believe it is unlikely that Lebanon could move toward the complete disestablishment of religion or the abolition of

sectarian laws. Nonetheless, progress toward the adoption of common civil law in matters of personal status and the promotion of a national system of secular public education is essential to achieve some concept of Lebanese nationality. [redacted]

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In our judgment, any solution that is to have a chance at restoring order to Lebanon must be based on the recognition that the Muslim majority cannot remain a political minority. Muslim grievances must be redressed, but at the same time security guarantees must be given to the Christian community if any formula is to work. [redacted]

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Outlook: The Labyrinth Revisited

Lebanon's decadelong march toward de facto partition will be reversed only by a dramatic change in the leadership of the Christian community or swift action by Syria to block the emergence of semiautonomous cantons. We believe the eventual outcome of continued factional fighting will be the creation, either by accident or design, of territories that tend to be confessionally exclusive. The question for Lebanon now appears to be the extent and rigidity of evolving confessional separation. [redacted]

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In our judgment, Christian extremists are pressing for a confessionally segregated Lebanon consisting of four cantons—one Christian, one Druze, and two Shia. The Sunnis, who are more dispersed geographically, probably would not have a separate territorial base. Most Christians live outside the heartland, and a move toward formal separation could produce massive population shifts as Christians are forced to relocate to the mountain enclave. This possibility also raises prospects for renewed warfare as Christians attempt to expand their territory to accommodate the population influx. [redacted]

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A more flexible form of confessional separation could result through a federation among numerous governorates. This arrangement would produce a multitude of "minicantons" that of necessity would recognize

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the authority of the central government. Theoretically, this would produce a more cohesive state, but it would be subject to all the disadvantages of federalism. [redacted]

If the pattern of violence currently being played out in the predominantly Shia south escalates, the results are likely to parallel earlier rounds that have produced distinctly Christian and Druze territories. The Shias have few means to block the trend toward de facto cantonization. Either they must assuage Christian fears by dropping their political demands, or they must fight those Christians seeking cantonization, thereby validating Christian arguments that territorial security is essential for their survival. [redacted]

We believe a confrontation between Muslim and Christian militiamen in the south could be crucial in determining the extent of Christian separation from their Muslim countrymen. Druze leader Walid Jumblatt and Amal chief Nabih Barri have stated publicly that coexistence with Christians is necessary to preserve Lebanon's sovereignty. Both leaders have reiterated that their quarrel is not with Christians per se, but with that segment of the community that has joined forces with Israel. [redacted]

Druze and Muslim efforts to distinguish between "good" and "bad" Christians are aimed at achieving the political and military defeat of the Lebanese Forces and the Israeli-backed Army of South Lebanon without stampeding the resident Christian population into the heartland or to an Israeli-protected canton along Lebanon's southern border. [redacted]

Many Christians are not likely to be reassured. Panic has spread among Christians in the south in the wake of attacks in late April on Christian villages near Sidon. The attacks, which came after assurances that Christians would be unharmed following the withdrawal of Lebanese Forces militiamen from the area, have reinforced the siege mentality among Christians. Protracted violence could set in motion a Christian exodus. According to the Embassy, Christian refugees from the south are trickling into the heartland. [redacted]

We believe Syria is prepared to tolerate considerable administrative and political decentralization in Lebanon but is leery of confessional separation. The adoption of a federal system aimed at lessening contacts among constituent groups is likely to encourage evolution toward partition. Syria opposes the concept of cantonization because it is concerned that it would have difficulty countering the influence external powers would develop in Lebanon's cantons. [redacted]

Syria, in our judgment, will not permit confessional factions to flaunt their independence or to compromise Syrian interests in Lebanon. The Syrians will not tolerate Maronite-Israeli ties and will demand an end to Maronite reliance on Israel as the price for Syrian tolerance of a decentralized system. Eventually, we believe Syria will be forced to exert greater control over non-Christian factions as well, particularly those with ties to Iran, Libya, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt. [redacted]

We doubt that Syrian leaders have determined where they will draw the line on Christian efforts to force decentralization. Syrian leaders have stated publicly that they will not tolerate cantonization. In the near term, we believe the evolution of more realistic strategies among hardline Christians would reflect a desire to preempt Syrian action rather than a genuine desire to pursue national reconciliation. Continued Lebanese Forces recalcitrance, however, will prompt Syrian action. [redacted]

Christian leaders have told US officials they fear that Syria plans direct intervention to bring hardline Christians under control. We expect Damascus would employ techniques of intimidation and, if necessary, assassination to bring the militia to heel. We believe Damascus will avoid for as long as possible military strategies that could reignite the civil war. [redacted]

Although Damascus cannot impose a lasting solution on Lebanese factions, we believe that Syrian predominance in Lebanon is permanent and necessary to avoid

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complete political collapse. Prolonged domestic instability in Syria could prevent Damascus from actively pursuing its policies in Lebanon. Under such circumstances, Lebanon could be dramatically restructured. We believe that Christian hardliners would take advantage of Syrian preoccupation to establish a separate, and possibly independent, entity. [redacted]

We believe that any government in Damascus would pursue the same policy goals in Lebanon as the Assad regime. The resolution of domestic crisis in Syria would result in a reassertion of Syrian influence in Lebanon including the stationing of Syrian troops in Lebanese territory, if necessary, to restore the status quo. We do not believe that Syria wishes to annex Lebanon; Syria wants to project the image of a defender of Lebanese interests, not an aggressor against a weak neighbor. [redacted]

Political uncertainty surrounding Syria's intentions following the Israeli withdrawal, continuing violence in Beirut and South Lebanon, and growing Shia extremism raise prospects for imminent and possibly dramatic change in Lebanon. Confessional alienation has reached such proportions in Lebanon that we doubt any group is prepared to seize the opportunities presented by these events to halt Lebanon's political dissolution. As a result, Lebanon's chaos could continue without change or resolution for some time. [redacted]

Centuries-old patterns of political hostility and generations of ingrained confessional hatred suggest that a Lebanese modus vivendi—if one is ever achieved—probably will not be reached through the conscious effort of the factions, but rather will evolve as hostile factions gradually accommodate each others' "red lines." [redacted]

Implications for the United States

The Government of Lebanon and the Christian community continue to solicit US support. The rise of militant Islam, however, will severely restrict the scope of US influence in Lebanon. Shia fundamentalists are implacable enemies of the United States. Suicide bombings of the US Embassy in April 1983

and September 1984, at the US Marine barracks in October 1983, and the assassination and kidnappings of US citizens in Lebanon bear grim witness to the effectiveness of Shia fanaticism. The greater their influence in Lebanon, the fewer will be the opportunities for the United States to implement policies designed to bolster moderate forces there. [redacted]

US efforts to support and strengthen legitimate authority in Lebanon are viewed by Shia radicals and other regime opponents as a partisan effort to defend narrow Christian interests at the expense of the rest of the population. We believe both Christians and their Druze and Muslim opponents perceived US reluctance to press the Lebanese Government during the period of conspicuous US involvement from August 1982 until February 1984 as an indication of US backing for the Christian community. [redacted]

In our view, Christian perceptions of outside commitment to their security encouraged them to pursue more aggressive policies rather than use external support to underpin a negotiated settlement. We judge that the Lebanese Government will continue to temporize on moves aimed at solving the domestic crisis as long as it perceives that Western support is not dependent on political reform. [redacted]

US or Western efforts to stabilize Lebanon depend upon the perception by Lebanese factions that initiatives are "evenhanded." In their view, benefits should extend to broader segments of the Lebanese polity and avoid strict identification with legal authority, which we believe most Lebanese view as different from legitimate authority. Such efforts, however, would have to be discreet to avoid violent reaction from Shia extremists and would have to complement Syrian goals. [redacted]

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Figure 8. US Embassy Beirut
18 April 1983.



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The rise of militant Islam and the determination of its adherents to eliminate Western, especially US, influence in Lebanon severely limit the opportunities for Western initiatives that could ameliorate Lebanon's continuing domestic tragedy. Conspicuous US efforts would draw fire from pro-Iranian Shia extremists, possibly forcing a US retreat from commitments to Lebanon. Moreover, the continuing burden of the Lebanese albatross could limit—and possibly preclude—the development of effective policies on other US interests in the area, particularly the broader Middle East peace process.

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