

CRS Report for Congress

Lebanon

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**Prepared for Members and
Committees of Congress**

Lebanon

Summary

The United States and Lebanon continue to enjoy good relations. Prominent current issues between the United States and Lebanon include progress toward a Lebanon-Israel peace treaty, U.S. aid to Lebanon, and Lebanon's capacity to stop Hezbollah militia attacks on Israel. The United States supports Lebanon's independence and favored the end of Israeli and Syrian occupation of parts of Lebanon. Israel withdrew from southern Lebanon on May 23, 2000, and Syria completed withdrawing its forces on April 26, 2005. Regional tensions increased in mid-2006, however, as clashes between Israel and Palestinian militants in the Gaza territory spread to Lebanon. In July, Hezbollah rocket attacks against Israel and capture of two Israeli soldiers prompted large-scale Israeli bombing of Hezbollah positions and Lebanese infrastructure. On August 11, the U.N. Security Council adopted Resolution 1701, which ended the fighting and created an expanded international peacekeeping force in Lebanon. Sectarian and political factionalism has continued, however, with periodic escalation of tension (see below).

Lebanon's government is based in part on a 1943 agreement (the National Covenant) that called for a Maronite Christian President, a Sunni Muslim Prime Minister, and a Shi'ite Muslim Speaker of the National Assembly, and stipulated that the National Assembly seats and civil service jobs be distributed according to a ratio of 6 Christians to 5 Muslims. On August 21, 1990, at the end of a devastating 15-year civil war, Lebanon's National Assembly adopted the "Taif" reforms (named after the Saudi Arabian city where they were negotiated). The parliament was increased to 128 to be divided evenly between Christians and Muslim-Druze, presidential authority was decreased, and the Speaker's and the Prime Minister's authority was increased.

The assassination in February 2005 of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri sparked a political crisis, realignments in Lebanon's domestic politics, and withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon. Since June 2005, an independent U.N. commission has been investigating the circumstances of Hariri's assassination, amid allegations of Syrian involvement, directly or through pro-Syrian Lebanese officials. On May 30, 2007, a divided U.N. Security Council voted to establish a special tribunal outside Lebanon to try suspects in the Hariri case. Meanwhile, in late May 2007, frictions between the Lebanese Army and a splinter Palestinian faction known as Fatah al-Islam, based in a refugee camp in northern Lebanon, led to an outbreak of fighting and exacerbated already existing internal tensions. To help Prime Minister Siniora deal with current challenges, the Bush Administration requested a large increase in U.S. assistance, ultimately contained in H.R. 2206 (P.L. 110-28). Meanwhile, a radical Palestinian group mounted further challenges to the government of Prime Minister Siniora.

This report will be updated as significant changes occur in Lebanon or in U.S.-Lebanese relations. Other CRS reports on Lebanon include CRS Report RL33933, *U.S. Foreign Aid to Lebanon: Issues for Congress*, by Jeremy M. Sharp.

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Lebanon

Most Recent Developments

Since the murder of the late Prime Minister Hariri, U.N. investigators have sought to uncover the circumstances behind the atrocity and ascertain responsibility. U.N. Security Council Resolution 1595, adopted on April 7, 2005, established “an international independent investigation commission (UNIIC) based in Lebanon to assist the Lebanese authorities in their investigations of the terrorist act. The commission was initially headed by a German prosecutor, Detlev Mehlis, later by a Belgian prosecutor, Serge Brammertz. The commission, whose mandate has been repeatedly extended, has issued eight progress reports; so far these have been inconclusive but the first two tended to implicate Syrian or pro-Syrian Lebanese officials. The eighth report, submitted to the U.N. Security Council on July 12, 2007, has reportedly identified persons who may have been involved in the Hariri assassination. Brammertz, however, has not named any suspects.

Another major point of contention among Lebanese leaders is the establishment of “a tribunal of an international character” to prosecute suspects in the murder of the late Prime Minister Hariri. The proposed tribunal, called for in U.N. Security Council Resolutions 1644 and 1664, has been resisted by pro-Syrian elements in Lebanon, possibly because of concerns over the possibility that such a tribunal would uncover a Syrian role in the murder. As noted above, six members or supporters of Hezbollah resigned from the cabinet on November 11. Subsequently, on November 25, remaining members of the Lebanese cabinet approved the U.N. Security Council proposal to establish the court, in the face of strong opposition from pro-Syrian elements, who maintained that the truncated cabinet lacked a popular mandate to take this step (see above).¹ Also, governmental approval of the tribunal still requires the approval of the pro-Syrian President Emile Lahoud, who has said the decision was improper because of the resignation of the six ministers. Similarly, parliamentary approval has proven difficult to obtain, despite the anti-Syrian majority in parliament, where it is held up by the powerful Speaker, Nabih Berri, an ally of Hezbollah.²

Confronted with an impasse over the proposed tribunal, supporters of the tribunal decided on a new approach that would circumvent the Lebanese governmental machinery and enlist the international community. On April 4, 2007, a U.N. spokesman announced that 70 members of the Lebanese parliament petitioned

¹ The U.N. proposal for an international court is contained in U.N. Security Council document S/2006/893, Report of the Secretary-General on the establishment of a special tribunal for Lebanon, November 15, 2006.

² Anthony Shadid, “Crisis in Lebanon Reaches New Threshold,” *The Washington Post*, November 26, 2006.

the U.N. Secretary-General to act under the U.N. Charter and set up a special tribunal to try suspects in the Hariri murder. On May 14, Lebanese Prime Minister Siniora wrote to the Secretary-General, asking that the Security Council establish the court as a matter of urgency. Subsequently, on May 30, 2007, a divided U.N. Security Council voted by 10 to 0 with 5 abstentions (Russia, China, South Africa, Indonesia, and Qatar) to adopt Resolution 1757, which establishes a tribunal outside of Lebanon to prosecute persons responsible for the attack of February 14, 2005. The resolution contains a detailed annex covering the establishment of the tribunal. The resolution also provides that the provisions of the annex will “enter into force” on June 10, 2007 unless Lebanon ratifies the tribunal before that date.

The upcoming expiration of President Emile Lahoud’s term of office in November 2007 confronts the Lebanese with another difficult and likely divisive issue. Bi-elections, held on August 5, 2007 to replace two anti-Syrian members of parliament assassinated in November 2006 and June 2007, have been read by some commentators as strengthening the position of pro-Syrian elements in the Lebanese government, although others disagree.

On the heels of these tensions, Palestinian militants in Lebanon – relatively quiet during recent years – have mounted further challenges to the fragile Lebanese government. Approximately 400,000 Palestinians, mainly refugees, reside in Lebanon, often in squalid camps. Most of them are denied Lebanese citizenship, work permits, or other amenities. Discontented with their austere living conditions in the camps, which in some cases form a breeding ground for insurgency or terrorism, some are drawn to radical Palestinian organizations and militias. Lebanese leaders of all sects are reluctant to offer them citizenship, partly because such a move could upset the delicate sectarian balance in the country. Most recently, in late May 2007, frictions between the Lebanese Army and a splinter Palestinian faction known as Fatah al-Islam led to an outbreak of fighting between the two sides as the army sought to suppress potential uprisings by Fatah al-Islam elements in the Nahr al-Bared refugee camp in northern Lebanon. This obscure Palestinian group, numbering between 100 and 300, is variously described as having ties to Al Qaeda or to Syrian intelligence; however, Syrian officials deny any links with it and maintain that they have pursued Fatah al-Islam through Interpol. Observers differ on the group’s composition as well, some calling it Palestinian and others saying it includes Syrians, Saudis, Jordanians, and members of other nearby Arab states. (See section below on Fatah al-Islam.) Clashes between Fatah al-Islam and the Lebanese army have continued, despite mediation efforts.

United States and Lebanon

Overview

The United States and Lebanon have traditionally enjoyed good relations, rooted in long-standing contacts and interaction beginning well before Lebanon’s emergence as a modern state. Factors contributing to this relationship include a large Lebanese-American community (a majority of Arab-Americans are of Lebanese origin); the pro-Western orientation of many Lebanese, particularly during the Cold War; cultural

ties exemplified by the presence of U.S. universities in Lebanon; Lebanon's position as a partial buffer between Israel and its principal Arab adversary, namely Syria; Lebanon's democratic and partially Christian antecedents; and Lebanon's historic role as an interlocutor for the United States within the Arab world.

Two U.S. presidents have described Lebanon as of vital interest to the United States, President Eisenhower in 1958 and President Reagan in 1983. (Public Papers of the Presidents, 1958, pp. 550-551; Public Papers of the Presidents, 1983, vol. II, p. 1501.) Both statements were made in the context of brief U.S. military deployments to Lebanon to help Lebanese authorities counter rebellions supported by radical Arab states with ties to the former Soviet Union. Some would agree that a friendly and independent Lebanon in a strategic but unstable region is vital to U.S. interests. But others might disagree, pointing to the absence of such tangible interests as military bases, oil fields, international waterways, military or industrial strength, or major trading ties. In a broader sense, a ruinous 15-year civil war that created turmoil in Lebanon between 1975 and 1990 and that periodically threatened to spill over into adjacent areas of the Middle East illustrated the dangers to U.S. interests posed by instability in this small country.

Lebanon: Demography and Politics

Political Profile

Sectarianism. Lebanon, with a population of 3.8 million, has the most religiously diverse society in the Middle East, comprising 17 recognized religious sects. "Confessionalism," or the distribution of governmental posts by religious sect, is a long-standing feature of Lebanese political life, despite frequent calls to abolish it. Because of political sensitivities related to power sharing among the various communities, no census has been taken in Lebanon since 1932, when Lebanon was under a French mandate. According to current estimates by the Central Intelligence Agency as of 2005, Muslim groups comprise 59.7% of the population while Christian groups comprise 39.0%, with another 1.3% of assorted religious affiliations. A more detailed but less recent estimate by an expert on the geography and demography of the Middle East gives the breakdown shown in **Table 1**.³

³ Colbert C. Held, *Middle East Patterns*, Westview Press, 2000, p. 262. Reflecting 1999 figures, Held uses an estimated total Lebanese population of 3.506 million, to which he applies the percentages in Table 1.

Table 1. Lebanon Population and Religious Sects

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

- a. Affiliated with the Roman Catholic Church but retain their own rituals.
b. Grouped with Muslims; regarded by some as derived from Shi'ite Islam.
c. A senior Lebanese official stated that there are more Greek Orthodox than Druze in Lebanon. Conversation, February 21, 2006.
d. Armenians are the only sizeable ethnic minority in Lebanon; other Lebanese groups are all ethnic Arab.

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

Political Structure and Power Sharing. Post-civil war Lebanon retains the country's unique political system, based on power sharing among the diverse religious sectarian communities and political factions that comprise the modern Lebanese state. Under the constitution of 1926, Lebanon is a republic with a president elected by parliament for a non-renewable six-year term, a prime minister and cabinet appointed by the president, and a parliament, elected by universal adult suffrage for a four-year term. Composition of parliament varies in accordance with

electoral laws that are promulgated before each election; current membership is 128. Unlike the President, the prime minister and cabinet must receive a vote of confidence from parliament.

In 1943, when Lebanon became fully independent from France, leaders of the principal religious communities adopted an unwritten agreement known as the National Covenant, which provided that the President be a Maronite Christian, the Prime Minister a Sunni Muslim, and the Speaker of Parliament a Shi'ite Muslim; parliamentary seats were divided on the basis of six Christians to five Muslims. Cabinet posts are generally distributed among the principal sectarian communities, notably Maronites, Greek Orthodox, smaller Christian sects, Druze (a small sect associated with Islam), Sunni Muslims, and Shi'ite Muslims.⁴ As time passed, the 1943 ratios, which had been based on the country's sole census conducted in 1932, became less reflective of Lebanese society as Muslims gradually came to outnumber Christians, while within the Muslim community, Shi'ite Muslims came to outnumber Sunni Muslims. Discontent over power sharing imbalances was a major factor in inter-communal tensions and civil strife culminating in the 1975-1990 civil war.

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

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

⁴ The National Covenant (sometimes translated National Pact) addressed various foreign policy issues as well. For discussion of this unwritten document, see Fahim Qubain, *Crisis in Lebanon*, Washington, The Middle East Institute, 1961, pp. 17-18; Kamal S. Salibi, *The Modern History of Lebanon*, London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1965, pp. 186-188.

many Shi'ite Muslims, the Syrian presence was increasingly resented by other elements of the Lebanese population.

Political Upheaval of 2005

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

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

On April 7, as domestic and international outrage mounted, the U.N. Security Council adopted Resolution 1595, under which the council decided to "establish an international independent investigation Commission ('the Commission' or UNIIC) based in Lebanon to assist the Lebanese authorities in their investigation of all aspects of this terrorist act, including to help identify its perpetrators, sponsors, organizers and accomplices." Heading the Commission was Detlev Mehlis, described as "a 25-year veteran of the Berlin prosecutor's office with a record of solving high profile terror cases."⁵ The resolution requested the Commission to complete its work within three months from the date it commences operations, authorized the Secretary General to extend the Commission's mandate for another period of up to three months, and requested an oral update every two months while the Commission is functioning. The U.N. Secretary General informed members of the Security Council that the Commission was fully operational as of June 16, 2005. On September 8, 2005, the Commission requested a 40-day extension to complete its work. Upon submission of the Commission's initial report on October 19, the Secretary General extended its mandate until December 15 to enable the Commission to pursue further gaps it had identified (see "The Mehlis Commission," below). On

⁵ Warren Hoge, "Bush Pushes U.N. to Move Swiftly on Syria Report," *New York Times*, October 22, 2005.

August 30, a U.N. spokeswoman announced that three former heads of Lebanese intelligence agencies and a former Lebanese member of parliament had been identified as suspects in the assassination of Hariri. A subsequent press report describes the suspects as Syrian proxies with close ties to President Lahoud.⁶

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

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

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

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

The Commission report adds that the investigation is not complete and calls for further investigation; states that Syrian authorities, including the foreign minister, while extending limited cooperation, have provided some false or inaccurate information; and calls on Syria to help clarify unresolved questions. Syrian officials, including President Bashar al-Asad, have denied complicity in the Hariri assassination and said the Mehlis report was biased. On October 29, President Asad said Syria has set up a commission to investigate the assassination.⁷

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

⁷ Warren Hoge and Steven R. Weisman, "U.N. Is Expected to Pass Measure Pressuring Syria," *New York Times*, October 31, 2005.

Questions have been raised regarding the apparent exclusions in the report of the names of suspects who had been identified in earlier drafts of the report. The principal example appears in Paragraph 96 (page 29) of the report, in which a witness told the Commission that in September 2004 “senior Lebanese and Syrian officials decided to assassinate Rafik Hariri” and held several follow-up meetings in Syria to plan the crime. An earlier version reportedly listed the names of five of the senior officers, including President Asad’s brother Maher al-Asad and the President’s brother-in-law Asif Shawkat, chief of military intelligence and widely considered the second most powerful official in the regime. Some reporters questioned whether or not the Commission chief Detlev Mehlis had come under pressure to make the report less accusatory. At a news conference on October 21, both Mehlis and Secretary-General Kofi Annan denied this; Mehlis went on to explain that he suppressed the names of the officers when he found out that the Commission’s report was to be made public, because he had only one anonymous source for the specific accusation.⁸ Maher al-Asad does not appear at all in the official copy of the report and Asif Shawkat appears only once (paragraph 178) when Shawkat allegedly forced an individual 45 days before the assassination to make a tape claiming responsibility for the crime, purportedly in an effort to hide Syrian or Lebanese complicity.

Resolution 1636. On October 31, 2005, the U.N. Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 1636, which requires Syria to cooperate “fully and unconditionally” with the Mehlis investigation into the assassination of the late Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri or face unspecified “further action.” By dropping a threat appearing in earlier drafts of specific economic sanctions, the sponsors of the resolution were able to attract support from Russia and China while leaving the door open to the imposition of sanctions at a later date. U.S. officials noted that the resolution was adopted under Chapter VII of the U.N. Charter, which gives the Council power to impose penalties, including use of military force.⁹ After temporizing, Syria acceded to a request by the Mehlis Commission to make five Syrian officials available for questioning by the commission at U.N. offices in Vienna, Austria. The Syrians, whose names were not announced, were reportedly intelligence and security officials including the former Syrian intelligence chief in Lebanon Rustom Ghazali; meetings took place from December 5 to 7. Meanwhile, further violence took place in Lebanon, with several attacks directed against Lebanese politicians and journalists opposed to the Syrian presence in Lebanon.

The Mehlis Follow-On Report. On December 12, the Mehlis commission submitted a follow-on report which states that “[t]he Commission’s conclusions set out in its previous report ... remain valid.” According to the follow-on report, the Commission interviewed additional witnesses (for a total of 500 as of December 12), identified 19 suspects (reportedly including the five Syrian officers interviewed in Vienna), and reviewed additional documentation. Statements by two of the suspects indicated that all Syrian intelligence documents concerning Lebanon had been burned. Also, the head of a separate Syrian investigative commission informed the

⁸ Warren Hoge, “Bush Pushes U.N. to Move Swiftly on Syria Report,” *New York Times*, October 22, 2005.

⁹ Warren Hoge, “U.N. Tells Syria to Stop Impeding Slaying Inquiry,” *New York Times*, November 1, 2005.

Mehlis Commission that no material regarding the Hariri assassination had been found in Syrian archives. The Mehlis follow-on report further expresses the view that Hussam, the witness who recanted his statement, “is being manipulated by the Syrian authorities.” Analysts are reportedly reviewing the material in an attempt to find material relevant to planning for the assassination. The report stated that “[t]he detailed information [from the additional statements and documents reviewed by the commission] points directly at perpetrators, sponsors and organizers of an organized operation aiming at killing Mr. Hariri, including the recruitment of special agents by the Lebanese and Syrian intelligence services.” The report recommended that the commission be extended by an additional six months.

Resolutions 1644 and 1664. On December 15, 2005, the U.N. Security Council adopted Resolution 1644, which extended the mandate of the Independent Commission for six months until June 15, 2006, as recommended by the Commission, and requested the Commission to report on its progress at three-month intervals. The Council acknowledged a Lebanese request that suspects be tried by “a tribunal of an international character” and asked the Secretary General to help the Lebanese government identify the nature of such a tribunal (Paragraph 6). The Council also requested the Secretary General to present recommendations to expand the Commission’s mandate to include investigations of other attacks on Lebanese figures (Paragraph 7). In a subsequent Resolution 1664 adopted on March 29, 2006, the Council requested the Secretary General to negotiate an agreement with the government of Lebanon aimed at establishing the requested tribunal. (See The Tribunal/Resolution 1757, below.) Meanwhile, Mehlis, who wanted to return to his post in Germany, stepped down as Commission chairman in early January 2006 and was replaced by Serge Brammertz, a Belgian prosecutor serving with the International Criminal Court.

Brammertz Progress Reports. On March 14, 2006, Brammertz released his first progress report to the U.N. Security Council (the third progress report by the Commission, counting the two released by Mehlis). The 25-page document, described by one commentator as more conservative and less detailed than the Mehlis reports (*New York Times*, March 15, 2006), stated that “[t]he individuals who perpetrated this crime appear to be very ‘professional’ in their approach” and went on to say that “[i]t must be assumed that at least some of those involved were likely experienced in this type of terrorist activity” (Paragraph 33 of the Brammertz report). Syrian spokesmen put a positive interpretation on the report, saying that it “was realistic and has a lot of professionalism.” President Asad, who had temporized for several months over the Commission’s demand for an interview, agreed to meet Brammertz under a deal that will give the Commission access to individuals, sites, and information, including the head of state (Paragraphs 91-95). Pursuant to these understandings, news media reported that Brammertz met with the Syrian president and vice president in Damascus on April 25; however, the news reports did not give details on the course of the meetings. Earlier, U.S. State Department spokesman J. Adam Ereli told a news briefing audience on March 15 that “we support the work of Investigator Brammertz. He’s continuing the important and invaluable work of his predecessor, Mr. Mehlis.”

Brammertz released his *second* progress report (the *fourth* progress report by the Commission) to the U.N. Security Council on June 14, 2006. Like its predecessor,

the June 10 report did not name suspects; however, it described the crime as “a targeted assassination.” Brammertz said the level of assistance provided by Syria to the Commission during the reporting period “has generally been satisfactory,” with that country responding to all requests in a timely manner. Brammertz welcomed and endorsed the request of the Lebanese government for a one-year extension of the Commission’s mandate. On June 15, the Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 1686, which extended the Commission’s mandate until June 14, 2007 and supported the extension of the Commission’s mandate to offer further technical assistance to Lebanese investigation of other possibly related assassinations during the last two years.

Brammertz completed his *third* progress report (the *fifth* progress report by the Commission) on September 25, 2006. The 22-page report is largely technical in nature and deals mainly with three main issues: continuing work related to the crime scene; broadening knowledge and evidence of possible linkages; and developing new projects and leads (Paragraph 9). In his report, Brammertz said that cooperation from Syria “remained generally satisfactory” (Paragraphs 6 and 82) and noted that the commission has received “ongoing strong support” from Lebanese authorities, even during the July-August 2006 fighting described below (Paragraph 2).¹⁰

In his *fourth* progress report (*sixth* report by the Commission), submitted on December 12, Brammertz stated that the investigation into the Hariri assassination “is approaching a sensitive and complicated phase” that requires confidentiality in order to create a secure environment in which witnesses and staff will be able to carry out their functions (Paragraph 115). Without naming names, Brammertz added that the investigation is bringing to light “significant links” between the Hariri case and 14 other cases involving attacks or assassinations (Paragraph 116) that have occurred in Lebanon since October 2004. Again, the report noted that the “level of assistance provided by the Syrian Arab Republic during the reporting period remains generally satisfactory” (Paragraph 101).¹¹

In his *fifth* progress report (*seventh* by the Commission), submitted on March 15, 2007, Brammertz noted in his summary that “the Commission has made progress in collecting new evidence and in expanding the forms of evidence collected,” but did not specifically identify a perpetrator. He pointed to close cooperation with Lebanese authorities (Paragraphs 91-94), and said the cooperation with Syria “remains generally satisfactory,” while commenting that responses by interviewees “can be characterized as variable in quality on occasion.” (Paragraphs 95-98) Brammertz recalled that in his previous report (December 12, 2006) he had noted requests from information from ten unidentified other states were overdue, but added that as of the current report, “almost 11 outstanding matters were resolved.” (Paragraphs 99-102) In his conclusion, Brammertz anticipated that the Commission will need more time to complete its work and welcomed the request of the Lebanese government on February 21 for an extension of the Commission’s mandate beyond

¹⁰ The report is U.N. Document S/2006/760, dated September 25, 2006. See also Warren Hoge, “U.N. Inquiry Into Death of Lebanon’s Ex-Premier Focuses on Killers,” *New York Times*, September 26, 2006.

¹¹ The report is U.N. Document S/2006/962, dated December 12, 2006.

its current expiration date of June 15, 2007 (Paragraph 118; also in the U.N. Secretary General's forwarding letter).¹² Pursuant to this recommendation, the Security Council adopted Resolution 1748 on March 27, 2007, which extended the Commission's mandate until June 15, 2008, and changed the frequency of the Commission's reports from three to four months. (See below.)

In his *sixth* progress report (*eighth* by the Commission), submitted on July 12, 2007, "the Commission has identified a number of persons of particular interest who may have been involved in some aspects of the preparation or commission of the crime or could have had prior knowledge that such a plan was under way." (Paragraph 55.) Brammertz, however, has not named any suspects so far.¹³

Elections of 2005 and Aftermath

As Syrian troops departed from Lebanon under U.S. and international pressure (see below), the Lebanese prepared to hold parliamentary elections without Syrian interference for the first time since 1972. Parliamentary elections, held in four phases between May 29 and June 5, 2005, gave a majority (72 out of 128 seats) to a large, anti-Syrian bloc known as the Bristol Gathering or the March 14 Movement, headed by Saad Hariri, a son of the late prime minister. A second, largely Shi'ite and pro-Syrian bloc grouping Hezbollah and the more moderate Amal organization won 33 seats. A third bloc, the Change and Reform Movement (also known as the Free Patriotic Movement), consisted of largely Christian supporters of former dissident armed forces chief of staff General Michel Awn,¹⁴ who returned to Lebanon from exile in France in May 2005. Awn's bloc, which adopted a somewhat equivocal position regarding Syria, gained 21 seats. (See **Table 2** below.) Despite Hariri's success, the electoral pattern resulted in a mixed government, which complicates its abilities to adopt clear policy lines. Hariri associate Fouad Siniora became prime minister and the 24-member cabinet contains 15 Hariri supporters; however, it also contains five supporters of the Shi'ite bloc including for the first time in Lebanese history two members of Hezbollah. Other key pro-Syrians remaining in the government are President Lahoud and veteran parliamentary speaker Nabih Berri, who heads the Amal organization (Hezbollah's junior partner in the Shi'ite coalition) and has held the speakership since 1992.

Siniora immediately faced difficulties in working with this mixed government. First, pressure has mounted among anti-Syrian elements for the resignation of President Lahoud with the identification of several of his close associates in the Hariri assassination.¹⁵ Second, the role of the formerly exiled General Awn is

¹² This report is U.N. Document S/2007/150, dated March 15, 2007.

¹³ This report is U.N. Document S/2007/424, dated July 12, 2007.

¹⁴ General Awn (variant spelling: Aoun), a controversial former armed forces commander and prime minister, rejected the Taif Agreement and eventually obtained political asylum in France.

¹⁵ In early January an anti-Syrian Lebanese political figure described Lahoud's extension in office as "null and void." On the other hand, Lahoud's extension is not without (continued...)

uncertain: though long an opponent of the Syrian role in Lebanon, Awn formed tactical alliances with several pro-Syrian Lebanese politicians during the 2005 elections in an effort to defeat pro-Hariri candidates. On the other hand, Awn's grouping is not represented in the cabinet and Awn has said he will form the backbone of an opposition to Siniora's government. Some observers believe Awn, a Maronite Christian, has his eye on the presidency. Third, the inclusion of Hezbollah officials in the cabinet raised further problems; for example, the U.S. State Department, while welcoming the Siniora cabinet, has said it will not deal with an official of Hezbollah, which the U.S. government has listed as a foreign terrorist organization. Fourth, a major stumbling block for the government is a U.N. demand contained in Security Council Resolution 1559 that all militias be disbanded, which in effect refers mainly to Hezbollah. This demand has proven difficult to implement in view of Hezbollah's strong bloc of supporters in parliament, its paramilitary capabilities, its support from Syria and Iran, and a perception among some Lebanese that Hezbollah has stood up to Israel in various clashes in southern Lebanon.

Deadlock and Partial Realignment. Disputes over Lahoud's status and Hezbollah disarmament led to a cabinet crisis and temporary boycott by Shi'ite cabinet ministers in December 2005. The crisis was temporarily resolved when Prime Minister Siniora stated on February 3, 2006, that "we have never called and will never call the resistance [Hezbollah] by any other name" [thereby avoiding the term "militia" in characterizing Hezbollah]. In the meantime, leaders of two major parliamentary blocs with strongly differing views on Syria and other topics — Hezbollah chief Hasan Nasrallah and Free Patriotic Movement leader General Michel Awn — held what some describe as a historic meeting in a Beirut church on February 6, 2006. At the meeting, the two adopted a "Paper of Understanding" that called for finding ways to end rampant corruption; drafting a new election law; finding ways to confront issues such as the demarcation of borders and establishment of diplomatic relations with Syria; and disarming Hezbollah guerrillas and Palestinian factions. The parties emphasized that they were not forming an alliance or seeking to terminate other bilateral undertakings involving either of the two parties. Some parties, however, have gone so far as to call the Awn-Nasrallah meeting a "coup," saying that a meeting between the two leaders who have wide followings in their respective communities "will leave its impact on balances of power that have emerged since Hariri's assassination."¹⁶

¹⁵ (...continued)

precedent. On two previous occasions, in 1949 and 1995, Lebanon has extended the term of a president. Shi'ite cabinet ministers reportedly refused to attend a cabinet meeting unless President Lahoud was present. Majdoline Hatoum, "Calls for Lahoud's Resignation Intensify," *The Daily Star* (Beirut), January 4, 2006; Adnan al-Ghoul, "Hizbullah Takes Gloves off in Row with Jumblatt," *The Daily Star* (Beirut), January 16, 2006.

¹⁶ Hussein Dakroub, "Alliance Between Pro-and Anti-Syrian Leaders Seen as 'Coup' in Lebanon's Politics," *Associated Press*, February 8, 2006.

Table 2. 2005 Parliament: Composition by Major Bloc

Bloc	Leader(s)	Number
March 14 Movement	Saad Hariri Prime Minister: Fouad Siniora	72*
Shi'ite Bloc (Hezbollah, Amal)	Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah Speaker: Nabih Berri	33
Free Patriotic Movement	General Michel Awn	21
Independents	N/A	2

*Assassination of two members of the Hariri bloc in November 2006 and June 2007 reduced the bloc's majority from 72 to 70 and temporarily reduced total membership in parliament from 128 to 126; by-elections to fill these positions were held on August 5, 2007, but some Lebanese figures do not accept their validity.

National Dialogue. On March 2, 2006, 14 Lebanese leaders representing major sectarian communities and political groups convened a National Dialogue conference to address key issues currently dividing Lebanon. The ground-breaking conference, pushed by parliamentary speaker Nabih Berri and other Lebanese politicians, agreed to address such issues as the status of President Lahoud, the international investigation of the Hariri and other assassinations, arms maintained by Hezbollah and Palestinians outside refugee camps, demarcation of the Syrian-Lebanese border including the disputed Shib'a Farms area (see below), and establishment of diplomatic relations between Lebanon and Syria (which has never taken place). According to press reports, the conferees reached initial agreement on March 13 to disarm Palestinians outside refugee camps and to work to establish diplomatic relations with Syria; however, Syria resisted border demarcation or establishment of diplomatic relations at this time; moreover, the parties were unable so far to agree on the status of President Lahoud or disarmament of Hezbollah. Further sessions have been held intermittently, but as of June 8, 2006 the parties had agreed only on a "Code of Honor" pact stipulating that the various parties "respect each other." The National Dialogue briefly reconvened on June 29 but adjourned until July 25, according to the Speaker of Parliament. (See below.)

Recent or Current Foreign Presence in Lebanon

Syria

Thirty-five thousand Syrian troops entered Lebanon in March 1976, in response to then President Suleiman Frangieh's appeal to protect the Christians from Muslim and Palestinian militias; later, Syria switched its support away from the main Christian factions. Between May 1988 and June 2001, Syrian forces occupied most of west Beirut and much of eastern and northern Lebanon. Syrian forces did not venture south of a "red line" running east and west across Lebanon near Rashayah, inasmuch as territory south of the line was considered to fall within the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) operating area.

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

The Hariri assassination in February 2005 prompted strong international pressure on the Syrian regime, particularly from the United States and France, to withdraw its forces and intelligence apparatus from Lebanon in accordance with Resolution 1559. On April 26, 2005, the Syrian foreign minister informed U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan and the President of the U.N. Security Council that Syrian forces had completed their withdrawal from Lebanon. In his *first* semi-annual report on the implementation of Resolution 1559,¹⁷ the U.N. Secretary General stated that as of April 26, however, he had not been able to verify full Syrian withdrawal; consequently, he dispatched a U.N. team to verify whether there had been a full Syrian withdrawal. On May 23, the U.N. Secretary General forwarded a report by a team he had sent to Lebanon to verify Syrian withdrawal. The team "found no Syrian military forces, assets or intelligence apparatus in Lebanese territory, with the exception of one Syrian battalion" deployed near the disputed village of Deir Al-Ashayr on the Lebanese-Syrian border. The team also concluded that "no Syrian military intelligence personnel remain in Lebanon in known locations or in military uniform" but added that it was "unable to conclude with certainty that all the intelligence apparatus has been withdrawn."¹⁸

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

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

¹⁸ Annex to U.N. Security Council document S/2005/331, Letter dated May 23, 2005, from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council.

intelligence presence or activity in Lebanon, though the distinctly close historical and other ties between the Syrian Arab Republic and Lebanon also had to be taken into account when assessing a possibly ongoing influence of Syrian intelligence in Lebanon.” He acknowledged that there were some credible reports that Syrian intelligence continued to influence events in Lebanon but said most of these reports were exaggerated.

On the other hand, the Secretary General noted that other requirements of Resolution 1559 remained to be implemented, particularly disbanding and disarming Lebanese and non-Lebanese militia (notably Hezbollah and several Palestinian groups) and extension of Lebanese government control throughout all of the country.¹⁹ The *third* semi-annual report on implementation of Resolution 1559, submitted to the Security Council on April 19, 2006, recounted previously reported threats by Syrian officials against Lebanese legislators if they did not vote for extension of President Lahoud’s term. The report says that Syrian forces and intelligence services have effectively left Lebanon, but some other U.N. demands remain unmet, including disarmament of Hezbollah, demarcation of the border, and establishment of diplomatic relations. The *fourth* and *fifth* semi-annual reports, submitted on October 9, 2006 and May 7, 2007, respectively, repeat some of these themes.²⁰ For example, the *fourth* report notes that “[a]llegations have at times been made, including by the Government of Lebanon, that there continues to be Syrian intelligence activity in Lebanon.” The *fifth* semi-annual report quotes an allegation that “forces directly affiliated with Syrian intelligence are bringing in new shipments of weapons” to Lebanon. Both reports cite Syrian denials of these allegations. In an interview with Lally Weymouth published in the May 1, 2006, edition of *Newsweek*, Prime Minister Siniora said “Syria has its men and people in the country: supporters, some politicians and quite a number of Syrian intelligence.”

Syria has long regarded Lebanon as part of its sphere of influence. Some international observers have expressed concern that Syrian leaders might try to circumvent the effect of the withdrawal by maintaining their influence through contacts they have acquired over the years in the Lebanese bureaucracy and security services.²¹ Attacks on and assassinations of some prominent Lebanese critics of Syria in addition to Hariri have accentuated these fears. Another remaining question concerns the ability of the Lebanese security forces to assume responsibility for maintaining order in areas vacated by Syrian forces. Lebanon’s ground forces number approximately 70,000 organized into 11 under strength brigades and a few separate units and armed largely with obsolescent equipment, plus minuscule air and

¹⁹ Text of report is attached to U.N. Security Council document S/2005/673, October 26, 2005.

²⁰ U.N. Security Council documents S/2006/832, October 19, 2006 and S/2007/262, May 7, 2007.

²¹ Robin Wright, “Syria Moves to Keep Control of Lebanon,” *Washington Post*, March 31, 2005. Syria also has potential built-in assets through the continued presence of President Lahoud and parliamentary speaker Berri.

naval forces, each consisting of about 1,000 personnel.²² In this connection a Lebanese study group has prepared a report indicating despite Syria's formal withdrawal from Lebanon in 2005, Syria continues to occupy as much as 180 square miles of Lebanese territory (approximately 4.5% of the country). The drafters of the report believe Syria maintains camps and smuggling routes through which they infiltrate foreign fighters and weapons into Lebanon.²³

Israel

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

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

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

²² Recent estimates appear in International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance, 2005-2006*, London, pp. 197-198.

²³ Barbara Slavin, "Syria lingers in Lebanon, report says," *USA Today*, July 25, 2007.

Security Council that Israel had withdrawn from Lebanon in compliance with Resolution 425.

Hezbollah, on its part, claimed credit for forcing Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon, thereby boosting its credentials within the Arab world. Since May 2000, Israeli forces in the Shib'a Farms area have been the main focus of Hezbollah attacks. Some analysts believe that Syria, the Lebanese government, and Hezbollah raised the issue of this obscure enclave as a justification for continuing to put military pressure on Israel to withdraw from the Golan Heights in the aftermath of its withdrawal from Lebanon.²⁴ Syria denies this. Moreover, Lebanese politicians across the spectrum, including those opposed to Syria, appear to agree that the Farms are Lebanese territory; in his interview with Lally Weymouth, Prime Minister Siniora said the "Sheba (variant spelling) Farms is Lebanese." Commentators have speculated that through its contacts with Hezbollah, Iran may seek to fill the vacuum left by Syria's withdrawal from Lebanon. Others doubt that Iran has the means to fill Syria's former role in Lebanon, noting that unlike Syria, Iran does not have contiguous borders with Lebanon.²⁵

The Hezbollah-Israel Confrontation of 2006-2007

Resumption of Violence

As agreement on basic domestic and regional issues continued to elude the Lebanese, the fragile consensus they had achieved in the year following the Hariri assassination began to unravel. Tensions between Israel and the militant Palestinians in the Gaza territory spread to Lebanon in mid-July 2006 as a cycle of violence began between Israel and militants from the Lebanese Shi'ite Muslim organization Hezbollah. On July 12, possibly in a gesture of solidarity with the radical Palestinian organization Hamas combating Israel in Gaza, Hezbollah units launched attacks across Israel's northern border, killing eight Israelis and seizing two Israeli soldiers as hostages. Israel launched widespread air and artillery strikes on Hezbollah targets in Lebanon and Lebanese infrastructure including Beirut International Airport, vowing to continue the attacks until the Israeli hostages are returned. Hezbollah has launched daily attacks on northern Israel with extended-range rockets, penetrating as far as the northern Israeli port of Haifa, Israel's third largest city, and beyond, to which Israel has responded with air strikes. Military commentators have said that Hezbollah has more than 12,000 largely unguided Katyusha rockets, with ranges of 20-45 miles, but also some more advanced variants of Iranian or Syrian manufacture. Though with limited accuracy, they can cover a wide range of Israeli territory.

²⁴ Michael Slackman, "Shabaa [variant spelling] Farms at Center of Tension for Lebanon, Syria and Israel," *Los Angeles Times*, April 28, 2001.

²⁵ Michael Slackman, "As Syria's Influence in Lebanon Wanes, Iran Moves In," *New York Times*, March 13, 2006.

Initially, the Israelis used primarily airpower and artillery in their strikes against Hezbollah; however, by mid- to late July, they had carried out some small ground operations in southern Lebanon. On July 21, Israel began massing ground forces on the Lebanese border, and the following day, the Israeli Armed Forces Chief of Staff Lt. General Dan Halutz said “[w]e shall carry out limited ground operations as necessary in order to strike at the terrorism which strikes at us.”²⁶ By August 4, Israeli forces in Lebanon reportedly numbered 10,000 and had positioned themselves in or around more than a dozen villages and towns up to four miles inside Lebanon in some locations. On August 9, the Israeli “inner cabinet” agreed to expand the ground offensive in an effort to drive Hezbollah forces across the Litani River and clear a buffer zone in southern Lebanon before international diplomacy might lead to a cease-fire. According to press reports, the Israeli Prime Minister and the Minister of Defense would decide when the new phase of the offensive was to begin and might defer it briefly depending on further diplomatic developments.²⁷

Diplomatic Endeavors

At the G-8 summit meeting in St. Petersburg, Russia, attendees disagreed over various aspects of the crisis; however, on July 16, they adopted a statement placing blame for the immediate crisis on extremist forces of Hezbollah and the militant Palestinian organization Hamas, but calling on Israel to exercise utmost restraint and avoid casualties among civilians. U.S. officials have been reluctant to support a cease-fire resolution without dealing with “root causes,” which they identify as the actions of Hezbollah. On July 23, two veteran officials from Saudi Arabia, Foreign Minister Prince Saud al-Faisal and Prince Bandar bin Sultan, former Saudi Ambassador to the United States and presently chief of the Saudi National Security Council, met with President Bush and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to propose a cease-fire that would postpone the question of disarming Hezbollah. The U.S. leaders made no public commitment to back this plan; however, the two sides reportedly discussed restoring sovereignty to Lebanon, strengthening the Lebanese Armed Forces, and rebuilding the country.²⁸

In late July and early August, diplomatic activity focused on the feasibility of a cease-fire, with U.S. and Israeli officials arguing that conditions must first be in place to assure that a cease-fire would be “sustainable” before formally establishing one. While the issue was under discussion, the Council issued two statements, deploring an Israeli attack on a U.N. observer post and on a building in the Lebanese town of Qana where a number of civilians had sought shelter; also, it adopted Resolution 1697, which extended by one month the mandate of the existing U.N.

²⁶ Greg Myre and Jad Mouawad, “Israeli Buildup at Lebanese Line as Fight Rages,” *New York Times*, July 22, 2006. On the other hand, unnamed Israeli officials were quoted as saying that a larger invasion may not be needed to achieve Israel goals. Scott Wilson and Anthony Shadid, “Israel Fights To Secure Key Region in Lebanon,” *Washington Post*, July 23, 2006.

²⁷ Steven Erlanger and Warren Hoge, “Israel Holds Off on Drive to the North,” *New York Times*, August 11, 2006.

²⁸ “In Battle To Remove Hezbollah, Both Israel, Lebanon Pay Price,” *Wall Street Journal*, July 24, 2006.

Interim Force in Lebanon, pending study of options for further arrangements in southern Lebanon. On August 5, 2006, the United States and France proposed that the U.N. Security Council adopt a two-track process consisting of a joint resolution aimed at an initial cease-fire in Lebanon, possibly followed by a second resolution aimed at securing a more lasting peace.²⁹

U.N. Security Council Resolution 1701. After extended discussion and debate, the U.N. Security Council on August 11, 2006, unanimously adopted as Resolution 1701 a revised U.S.-French resolution calling for a “full cessation of hostilities based upon, in particular, the immediate cessation by Hezbollah of all attacks and the immediate cessation by Israel of all offensive military operations.” Among the other terms of the resolution are expansion of the existing U.N. Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) from 2,000 to a maximum of 15,000; deployment of UNIFIL plus a 15,000-member Lebanese Army contingent³⁰ to southern Lebanon to monitor the cease-fire; withdrawal of Israeli forces in southern Lebanon “in parallel” with the deployment of U.N. and Lebanese forces to the south; a ban on delivery of weapons to “any entity or individual” in Lebanon, except the Lebanese Army. The resolution requests the U.N. Secretary General to develop proposals within 30 days for disarmament [of militias] delineation of Lebanon’s international borders including the disputed Shib’a (Shebaa) Farms enclave. In preambular language, the resolution also emphasizes the need to address the issue of prisoners on both sides. The resolution also calls upon the international community to extend financial and humanitarian assistance to the Lebanese people, including facilitating the safe return of displaced persons.

According to the U.N. Secretary-General, the “cessation of hostilities” called for in Resolution 1701 went into effect on August 14, at 5:00 a.m. GMT. In his first report to the Security Council on implementation of Resolution 1701, the Secretary General noted the leaders of Lebanon and Israel had accepted the resolution and that the parties were generally complying with the cessation of hostilities as of the writing of his report,³¹ although some of the heaviest fighting in the conflict had taken place during the 48 hours before the cessation of hostilities came into effect. Some other terms of the resolution are being carried out. Lebanese Army contingents are beginning to deploy to some areas of southern Lebanon, and the expanded U.N. Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) is deploying to southern Lebanon. As of late September, about 5,000 UNIFIL troops were in Lebanon, representing a moderate increase in UNIFIL’s former strength of 2,000 but significantly short of the maximum target figure of 15,000 cited in the resolution. In an interview in an Italian

²⁹ Terms are listed in more detail in *Washington Post*, August 6, 2006. See Colum Lynch and Robin Wright, “U.S., France Agree On Plan to Halt Lebanon Fighting.” (Sidebar, “Main Points of the U.N. Draft Resolution.”)

³⁰ The Lebanese Prime Minister offered to deploy 15,000 military personnel, and the Lebanese offer is welcomed in the preambular portion of Resolution 1701.

³¹ U.N. Document S/2006/670, Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) (For the period 11 to 17 August 2006). The Secretary General noted that “[o]n 12 August, the Government of Lebanon announced its acceptance of resolution 1701 (2006). On 13 August, the Government of Israel announced that it would act according to its obligations as outlined in the resolution.”

newspaper in late December, the French commander of UNIFIL, General Alain Pellegrini, said the expanded UNIFIL (sometimes called UNIFIL-2) had reached a strength of 11,000, with 23 countries represented, and is set to reach 12,000.³² In his parting report to the U.N. Security Council of December 11, 2006, then Secretary General Kofi Annan pointed out two other positive aspects of the U.N. deployment: a “crucial role” by UNIFIL in helping the Lebanese army ensure that southern Lebanon is “free of armed personnel, assets and weapons”; and the establishment of a UNIFIL Maritime Task Force to assist the small Lebanese navy in securing its territorial waters.³³

In a subsequent report on implementation of Resolution 1701 submitted on March 14, 2007, the new U.N. Secretary-General Mr. Ban Yi-moon noted that the second phase of UNIFIL deployment had been completed as of February 20, 2007, bringing UNIFIL forces in southern Lebanon to the following numbers: 12,431 total military personnel from 29 contributing countries, including 10,479 ground troops operating in an eastern and a western sector; in addition, UNIFIL naval personnel had reached a total of 1,772. He added that the mission has continued to recruit civilian staff, reaching a total of 473 by February 8, with an authorized strength of 1,078. On February 2, 2007, the former UNIFIL commander Major General Pellegrini, a French officer, was succeeded by Major General Claudio Graziano, from Italy.³⁴ Further increases as of June 19, 2007 brought UNIFIL to 11,113 ground troops and 2,000 serving in the maritime force, plus smaller headquarters and support elements.³⁵

After-Effects of the Fighting

According to the U.N. Secretary General, the Israeli bombardments and ground invasion into Lebanon killed an estimated 1,200 Lebanese, injured over 4,000, killed four U.N. military observers, and created nearly a million internally displaced people. Over 140 Israelis, including 43 civilians, were killed and over 100 injured, many by Hezbollah attacks using rockets. The Secretary General notes continued violations of the cessation of hostilities resolution on both sides, including reports of weapons supply to Hezbollah and Israeli overflights of Lebanon.³⁶

The 34-day military confrontation between Hezbollah and the Israeli Defense Force in July and August 2006 enhanced the prestige of Hezbollah at the expense of the Lebanese government. Hezbollah’s leader Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah acquired a folk-hero status as his organization was widely hailed both for its military prowess in the conflict with Israel and for its perceived ability to initiate disaster relief projects far more quickly and efficiently than the regular governmental organizations.

³² “Al-Qa’ida Is Threatening the Blue Helmets,” *La Repubblica* (Rome), December 17, 2006, p. 17.

³³ U.N. Document S/2006/956, December 11, 2006, p. 9.

³⁴ U.N. Document S/2007/147, Report of the Secretary-General on the Implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006), March 14, 2007, p. 11.

³⁵ U.N. Document S/2007/392, June 28, 2007, pp. 11-12.

³⁶ U.N. Document S/2006/956, December 11, 2006, pp. 8-9.

Even those Lebanese who might be inclined to criticize Hezbollah for precipitating a crisis that devastated much of southern Lebanon have been muted, at least temporarily, by Nasrallah's soaring popularity and Hezbollah's success in delivering aid to large numbers of displaced persons and other homeless or destitute Lebanese.³⁷ Similarly, he finds himself in a strong position to withstand pressures to disarm Hezbollah. Syria too, as a major sponsor of Hezbollah, finds that it has more maneuver room in dealing with Lebanese issues.

The inevitable comparisons being drawn between Hezbollah effectiveness and Lebanese government ineptitude raise questions about the future of the Siniora government and its ability to withstand domestic criticism over its leadership during the current crisis. Although not all Lebanese Shiites support Hezbollah, many observers believe Sheikh Nasrallah is likely to be heeded to a greater degree in the post conflict environment in Lebanon; he benefits from his ability to play multiple roles including military leader, reconstruction czar, and political participant. Despite his currently favorable image, however, Nasrallah seems reluctant to allow the situation to escalate into a resumption of civil or border strife.

Further Tensions

As autumn wore on, Hezbollah began pressing for a larger role in the Lebanese government headed by the anti-Syrian prime minister Siniora. A "victory rally" staged by Hezbollah in late September was followed by increased pressure for the replacement of the Siniora government with a "national unity" government, more than one third of whose members would be members or supporters of Hezbollah.³⁸ In an interview on October 31, 2006, Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah warned that if a national unity government had not come into being by mid-November, "[w]e will take all available democratic steps to achieve this goal, including resigning from the government." On November 11, the Hezbollah-led bloc carried out this threat, and its ministers and supporters resigned from the cabinet, a decision that cost the Siniora government crucial support within the Shiite community.³⁹

The proximate causes of the resignation of the six ministers were the breakdown of national unity talks and the recommendation of the U.N. Security Council to establish an international tribunal to try suspects in the Hariri murder case, a step strongly opposed by Hezbollah and other pro-Syrian groups. On November 13, following the resignations, a depleted Lebanese cabinet minus the Hezbollah ministers approved a draft law establishing a tribunal.

³⁷ Sharon Behn, "U.S., Hezbollah Vie to Rebuild for Lebanese; Hope To Win Public Opinion," *Washington Times*, August 18, 2006; Paul Richter, "Cease-Fire in the Middle East," *Los Angeles Times*, August 17, 2006.

³⁸ A minority of one third of the cabinet seats plus one additional seat would provide the Hezbollah bloc with effective veto power of cabinet decisions; hence, the governing coalition's refusal to consider this demand. Michael Slackman, "Lebanon Talks Collapse as Shiites Vacate Cabinet," *The New York Times*, November 12, 2006.

³⁹ "Hezbollah Quits Lebanese Cabinet," *The Washington Post*, November 12, 2006. Five ministers from Hezbollah and its ally Amal resigned, plus a Sunni Muslim minister opposed to Siniora's policies.

The Tribunal. On November 25, 2006, remaining members of the Lebanese cabinet approved the U.N. Security Council proposal to establish the court, in the face of strong opposition from pro-Syrian elements, who maintained that the truncated cabinet lacked a popular mandate to take this step (see above).⁴⁰ Also, governmental approval of the tribunal still requires the approval of the pro-Syrian President Emile Lahoud, who has said the decision was improper because of the resignation of the six ministers on November 11. Similarly, parliamentary approval has proven difficult to obtain, despite the anti-Syrian majority in parliament, where it is bottled up by the Speaker, Nabih Berri, an ally of Hezbollah.⁴¹ On January 17, 2007, U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon (who had replaced Kofi Annan) expressed concern that Lebanon has not yet given final approval to creation of the tribunal. The Hezbollah-led opposition reportedly has said that it accepts the principal of the court but does not want it to become a vehicle for attacking Syria. In a further development, on February 6 the U.N. Chief Legal Counsel signed the agreement to establish the court, but Lebanese ratification remained blocked as explained above.⁴²

Resolution 1757. Confronted with this impasse, supporters of the tribunal decided on a new approach that would circumvent the Lebanese governmental machinery and enlist the international community. On April 4, 2007, a U.N. spokesman announced that 70 members of the Lebanese parliament petitioned the U.N. Secretary-General to act under the U.N. Charter and set up a special tribunal to try suspects in the Hariri murder. On May 14, Lebanese Prime Minister Siniora wrote to the Secretary-General, asking that the Security Council establish the court as a matter of urgency. Subsequently, on May 30, 2007, a divided U.N. Security Council voted by 10 to 0 with 5 abstentions (Russia, China, South Africa, Indonesia, and Qatar) to adopt Resolution 1757, which establishes a tribunal outside of Lebanon to prosecute persons responsible for the attack of February 14, 2005. The resolution contains a detailed annex covering the establishment of the tribunal. The resolution also provides that the provisions of the annex will “enter into force” on June 10, 2007 unless Lebanon ratifies the tribunal before that date.

Establishment of the tribunal is likely to prove divisive among Lebanese and elsewhere in the region. Pro-Syrian elements have already criticized Resolution 1757 and Syria has threatened not to cooperate with the tribunal, while some third world countries have expressed reservations. (Lebanese President Lahoud reportedly expressed skepticism but said he would support the tribunal if it is “fair and

⁴⁰ The U.N. proposal for international court is contained in U.N. Security Council document S/2006/893, Report of the Secretary-General on the establishment of a special tribunal for Lebanon, November 15, 2006.

⁴¹ Anthony Shadid, “Crisis in Lebanon Reaches New Threshold,” *The Washington Post*, November 26, 2006.

⁴² Betsy Pisik, “U.N., Beirut agree about Hariri tribunal,” *The Washington Times*, February 7, 2007; Evelyn Leopold, “UN OK’s tribunal on Lebanese political killings,” Reuters, February 6, 2007.

impartial.”⁴³) Western countries including France and Germany (which currently holds the European Union presidency) have praised this step; Egypt welcomed the June 10 target date, which in effect gave the Lebanese parliament one last chance to establish the tribunal itself. Opponents of the resolution objected on grounds that it was passed under Chapter VII of the U.N. Charter, which could include the use of force, and that it represents interference in Lebanon’s internal affairs; the Russian delegate commented that “never before has the Security Council ratified agreements on behalf of a parliament of a foreign country.” Some observers say it may take a year to set up the machinery of the tribunal.

The Hezbollah Demonstrations and Their Aftermath. Meanwhile, a new phase of the confrontation began in December with the beginning of massive demonstrations led by Hezbollah with the avowed purpose of bringing down the Siniora government. Since December 1, pro-Hezbollah crowds, estimated by some at more than 100,000, have camped in front of the government building (the “Serail”) where Prime Minister Siniora has remained with his supporters, who have organized counter rallies to show solidarity with the government. Government supporters want a presidential election to replace President Lahoud, while the Hezbollah supporters want new parliamentary elections that they think would deprive the Prime Minister of his majority and lead to a new government over which Hezbollah could exercise a veto. Meanwhile, Hezbollah’s unlikely ally retired General Awn is believed by some to be seeking the presidency, a position reserved for the Maronite Christian community, to which Awn belongs. The standoff continued for almost two months with little or no violence.⁴⁴

The situation escalated on January 19, 2007, when the Hezbollah-led opposition called for a general strike on January 23 in an effort to step up its campaign against Prime Minister Siniora. Leaders of the 350,000-member labor federation called for a parallel strike protesting Siniora’s planned tax increase. The strikes succeeded in paralyzing much of Beirut and some other areas; initially peaceful, they quickly turned violent causing three deaths and numerous injuries as protesters threw up road blocks with burning tires and cars and clashed with government supporters, while military, police, and firefighters tried to reopen roads. The unrest died down and a tense calm returned to the city on January 24 as the opposition suspended the strike, saying that it had served as a warning to the government. Pro-government groups, on their part, warned of counter-protests if the opposition resumed their strike.

More violence marked the second anniversary of the late Prime Minister Hariri’s assassination, when three Lebanese were killed and 23 wounded in the bombing of two minibuses in Beirut. Commentators noted that this was the first time since the 1975-1990 civil war that such attacks were directed against ordinary Lebanese rather than public figures and speculated that it was designed to scare people away from

⁴³ Scheherezade Farmamarzi, “Syria and Lebanese opposition criticize U.N. creation of tribunal,” AP News Wires, May 31, 2007.

⁴⁴ Anthony Shadid, “Lebanese Government Issues Own Warning,” *The Washington Post*, December 14, 2006; Megan K. Stack, “The World; A key player in Lebanon shreds script,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 20, 2006.

attending the Hariri memorial service; however, many did attend.⁴⁵ The Lebanese Army, according to its commander General Michel Suleiman, is deployed throughout Lebanon in an effort to keep the peace; General Suleiman added that “the army is suffering from pressure” and “has been bearing above its load for months.” He went on to say that the army “is ready to bear more on condition that officials and civilians also bear their responsibilities in preventing security disturbances.”⁴⁶

Seeking a Rapprochement. In the aftermath of the strikes and demonstrations, there were some signs of forward movement in attempts by the various parties to resolve the current political deadlock. On March 8, 2007, a series of meetings began between two main rival leaders, Parliament Speaker Berri and March 14 Movement leader (and son of the late prime minister) Saad Hariri. After a follow-up meeting between the two politicians on March 16, Hariri told reporters that the meetings would continue “until a settlement is reached.”⁴⁷ The Berri-Hariri meetings have been held against the backdrop of external diplomatic contacts aimed at encouraging the Lebanese parties to find common ground; Saudi Arabia, for example, has been active lately in seeking to settle growing religious sectarian crises. Saudi Arabia also hosted an Arab League summit conference on March 28-29, 2007. But unrest has continued in Lebanon. Two assassinations of parliamentarians (November 2006 and June 2007) reduced the Hariri bloc in parliament from 72 to 70 while decreasing overall membership from 128 to 126. By-elections to fill these two positions were held on August 5, 2007, but some Lebanese figures do not accept their validity. (See below.)

France on its part undertook a reconciliation mission on July 14-15, 2007, when 31 representatives of 14 Lebanese factions assembled in Paris for talks. Participants were asked not to comment, but French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner said “[w]e achieved progress during the talks” and reportedly said there will be further inter-communal talks. France has sent an envoy to Iran and there has been talk of sending one to Syria as well, to pursue reconciliation efforts in Lebanon, with which France has special ties.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Anthony Shadid, “Anger and Homage, Side by Side Along Lebanon’s Divide,” *The Washington Post*, February 15, 2007; Michael Slackman, “Rival Groups Kept Apart at Hariri Memorial in Beirut,” *The New York Times*, February 15, 2007.

⁴⁶ “Suleiman says army is trying to keep the peace,” *The Daily Star (Beirut)*, January 27, 2007; Lebanese general says army under pressures,” Reuters, January 27, 2007.

⁴⁷ Hassan M. Fattah, “2 Key Lebanese Leaders Meet,” *The New York Times*, March 9, 2007.

⁴⁸ Rym Ghazal, “Lebanese factions agree to avoid ‘political violence’,” *The Daily Star (Beirut)*, July 16, 2007.

Palestinian and Palestinian-Associated Militia

On the heels of Lebanon's internal rivalries, Palestinian militants in Lebanon – relatively quiet during recent years – have mounted further challenges to the fragile Lebanese government. Up to 400,000 Palestinians, mainly refugees, reside in Lebanon, often in squalid camps. Most of them are denied Lebanese citizenship, work permits, or other amenities. Discontented with their austere living conditions, some are drawn to radical Palestinian organizations and militias.⁴⁹ In the past, Palestinian militias in Lebanon were secular and in some cases Marxist in outlook, with little affinity for Islamic fundamentalism. More recently, however some Palestinians in Lebanon have moved closer to the type of hard-line Sunni Muslim fundamentalism espoused by Osama bin Laden and the late Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. Some have joined the insurgency in Iraq, while others have sought to turn Lebanon into a recruiting ground for terrorist activities. Since early 2006, Lebanese authorities have reportedly been concerned about two militias in southern Lebanon with reported ties to bin Laden:

- Jund al-Sham (Army of Greater Syria), composed mainly of Lebanese veterans of the 1980s war against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. It numbers less than 100.
- Asbat al-Ansar (League of Partisans), composed mainly of Palestinians and numbering 300-400.

One Lebanese military official expressed the belief that the two organizations were largely the same and described them as “very dangerous men.”⁵⁰ Subsequently, during an interview with Reuters News Wire on September 22, 2006, then U.S. Director of National Intelligence John Negroponte expressed concern that Al Qaeda may be seeking to extend its influence into the Levant area (basically, Lebanon and Syria), despite religious differences between the Sunni Al Qaeda and the Shiite Hezbollah in Lebanon.

Fatah al-Islam. A relatively obscure Palestinian-associated group known as Fatah al-Islam has mounted a more serious challenge to the Lebanese government. Numbering between 100 and 300, this group is variously described as having ties to Al Qaeda or to Syrian intelligence; however, Syrian officials deny any links with it and maintain that they have pursued Fatah al-Islam through Interpol and other channels.⁵¹ Observers also differ on its composition, some calling it a Palestinian organization and others saying its membership includes Syrians, Saudis, Jordanians, and other Arab nationals. The organization is particularly strong among Palestinian

⁴⁹ The U.S. State Department estimates Lebanon's Palestinian population at 200,000 to 400,000. Extension of Lebanese citizenship to Palestinians is opposed by most Lebanese, who fear that such a step would upset Lebanon's delicate confessional balance. U.S. Department of State, *Background Note: Lebanon*. August 2005.

⁵⁰ Mitch Prothero, “A Wellspring of Anger,” *U.S. News and World Report*, June 26, 2006, p. 34.

⁵¹ Liz Sly, “Lebanon's stability under fire; Al Qaeda-linked group emerges as new threat,” *Chicago Tribune*, May 22, 2007.

refugees residing in the Nahr al-Bared camp located near the northern Lebanese city of Tripoli. Some observers believe Jund al-Sham has joined forces with Fatah al-Islam in recent clashes discussed below. General Michel Suleiman calls the Fatah al-Islam “a branch of the al-Qaida⁵² [variant spelling] organization.”

On May 20, 2007, Lebanese police conducted raids against suspected Fatah al-Islam hideouts in Tripoli reportedly in pursuit of bank robbers. Fighting between Fatah al-Islam and army and police units spread to the nearby Nahr al-Bared refugee camp and were echoed in smaller clashes near the Ayn al-Helweh refugee camp in southern Lebanon. Prohibited by a 1969 agreement from entering Palestinian camps, the army besieged the camps and shelled militia positions in an effort to force the militia out. Sporadic fighting continued for more than three months between the Army and the Fatah al-Islam militia until September 3, when the Army announced that it had taken control of the Nahr al-Bared camp. As of June 11, 2007, according to a Lebanese Army spokesman, numbers of casualties had reached 58 soldiers, 41 militants, and 31 civilians. By the time the siege of Nahr al-Bared had ended, Lebanese Army spokesmen said the Army had lost 163 soldiers, while between 400 and 500 had been wounded according to press accounts.⁵³

Shakir al-Absi, the leader of Fatah al-Islam, reportedly killed in the late August fighting, was described by U.S. officials as a well-known Palestinian-Jordanian militant sentenced to death in absentia in Jordan for involvement in the 2002 murder of U.S. diplomat Laurence Foley. U.S. officials further describe his organization as an offshoot of a Syria-backed secular Palestinian terrorist group called Fatah al-Intifada. On August 9, 2007, U.S. Secretary of State Rice designated Fatah al-Islam as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist organization, citing his role in the Foley murder, the unprovoked attack on Lebanese security forces in May 2007, and use of civilian camp-dwellers as human shields in the subsequent fighting between Lebanese military and Fatah al-Islam forces. The designation, among other things, cuts Fatah al-Islam off from the U.S. financial system and blocks any of its property or interests in the United States. Meanwhile the U.S. Administration, already supporting the Lebanese government and army against other internal challenges, notably Hezbollah, responded with assistance to the Lebanese government including humanitarian supplies, ammunition, and light weapons and equipment, some already promised but with deliveries accelerated.

Spring 2007 Developments and Aftermath

Several developments marred the Middle East scene as political activity intensified with the release of U.N. reports and preparations for a September presidential election (see below). On June 24, unknown persons attacked a UNIFIL position in southern Lebanon, killing six members of the peacekeeping force. No one claimed responsibility and the UNIFIL commander vowed to continue their mission. On June 29, in a step seen by some as designed to put further pressure on Syria,

⁵² Hussein Dakroub, “Army commander: Militant group battling Lebanese troops in refugee camp al-Qaida affiliated,” Associated Press, August 13, 2007.

⁵³ Tom Perry, “Lebanon crushes militant group, but threat remains,” Reuters News Wire, September 3, 2007.

President Bush issued a proclamation banning entry into the United States by Syrian and Lebanese officials seen as threatening Lebanon's democratically elected government; the list specifically mentioned ten individuals including Assef Shawkat, brother-in-law of President Asad and chief of intelligence. Two U.N. reports have engendered further interest in Lebanon:

- The U.N. Secretary General's report on implementation of Resolution 1701, which notes continuing violations of the arms embargo to militias. The Secretary General recommends strengthening the Syrian-Lebanese border possibly with international forces, a step opposed by Syria.⁵⁴
- A further report by the Brammertz Commission, submitted in mid-July, as noted above. In the summary to this report, Brammertz comments that the Commission continues to receive generally positive responses from Lebanon, Syria, and others to his requests for assistance, but adds that the security environment in Lebanon has deteriorated significantly during the period of this report, as exemplified by an attack on a UNIFIL convoy in southern Lebanon on June 24, 2007.

Presidential Succession. A major political step confronting the Lebanese is the expiration of President Lahoud's extended term of office in November 2007. Until recently, the only declared candidate was the politically controversial retired General Awn, the one-time right-wing armed forces commander, now in an incongruous semi-alliance with Hezbollah – an association that may lose him support among Lebanese Christians. President Lahoud has spoken of forming a parallel government, since his supporters do not accept the validity of Prime Minister Siniora's government. Others have suggested the current armed forces commander General Michel Suleiman, who has gained some support for his handling of several crises during the confrontation with Fatah al-Islam. Another prominent figure mentioned as a potential successor is former President Amin Gemayel, a Maronite leader who served as president from 1982 to 1988 and is now a member of the Hariri bloc. Several other Maronite leaders associated with the Hariri bloc – deputies Butros Harb and Robert Ghanem and former deputy Nassib Lahoud – have announced their candidacies.

Parliamentary By-elections. By elections held on August 5, 2007 to elect replacements for the two parliamentary deputies assassinated in November 2006 and June 2007 may affect both the balance of power in the Lebanese parliament and the outcome of the presidential elections later in the year. The slain former members of parliament were both members of the anti-Syrian March 14 bloc headed by deputy Saad Hariri and Prime Minister Fouad Siniora. The winners of the by-elections, however, included one member of the March 14 bloc but also a member of General Awn's group, which is loosely linked to the Hezbollah bloc. Consequently, Prime Minister Siniora's majority has slipped incrementally from 72 to 71, while General Awn's bloc has gained a seat (advancing from 21 to 22), thereby benefitting Awn's

⁵⁴ U.N. Security Council document S/2007/392.

semi-ally Hezbollah. Moreover the seat gained by Awn's bloc was at the expense of former President Gemayel, who had contested one of the by-elections but lost his bid. Some observers interpreted the election results as a victory for opponents of the March 14 bloc, particularly inasmuch as it entailed the defeat of a potential presidential candidate from the Hariri (March 14) bloc, but others thought the split results represented a draw.⁵⁵ Still others attribute the outcome to local issues, including rivalries between Gemayel supporters and the small Armenian Christian minority.

Implications of the Conflicts

Large-scale fighting between Israel and Hezbollah in mid-2006 and accompanying destruction of large parts of Lebanon's newly rebuilt infrastructure complicates U.S. support for Lebanon's reconstruction. Subsequent clashes between radical Palestinian militia and the Lebanese Army exacerbated the situation. In a broader sense, the conflict jeopardizes not only the long-term stability of Lebanon but presents the Bush Administration with a basic dilemma. On one hand, the Administration was sympathetic to Israeli military action against a terrorist organization; President Bush has spoken in favor of Israel's right of self-defense. On the other hand, the fighting dealt a setback to Administration efforts to support the rebuilding of democratic institutions in Lebanon. As one commentator put it, "the two major agendas of his [Bush's] presidency — anti-terrorism and the promotion of democracy — are in danger of colliding with each other in Lebanon."⁵⁶ Mounting tension between pro- and anti-U.S. factions in Lebanon during the fall of 2006 and an impasse in attempts by Lebanese parties to reestablish a political dialogue threaten the long-term viability of Lebanon's political system.

If Lebanon disintegrates through a return to communal civil strife or becomes closely aligned with a radicalized Syria or Iran, U.S. goals could be seriously affected. The United States would lose a promising example of a modernizing pluralist state moving toward a resumption of democratic life and economic reform and quite possibly face a return to the chaos that prevailed in Lebanon during the 15-year civil war. Such conditions would be likely to foster terrorism, unrest on Israel's border, and other forms of regional instability. Alternatively, the growth of Syrian or Iranian influence or some combination of the two could strengthen regional voices supporting extremist and likely anti-Western views associated with clerical regimes (Iran), totalitarian models (Syria), or a militant stance toward Israel, quite possibly resulting in some type of costly U.S. regional involvement to protect allies or maintain stability.

Saudi Arabia, on its part, was close to the late Lebanese Prime Minister Hariri, wants his killers brought to justice, and wants to see stability in Lebanon; moreover, Saudi leaders are wary of Iranian influence in the region and are trying to position Saudi Arabia as an Arab counterpoint to Iran. But Saudi efforts to mediate regional rivalries have increased lately, as Saudi leaders seek to dampen tensions in the area

⁵⁵ "Opposition wins seat in Lebanon," *The New York Times*, August 6, 2007; Alia Ibrahim, "In Lebanon Vote, Implications for the President," *The Washington Post*, August 6, 2007.

⁵⁶ Michael Hirsh, "The Legacy On the Line," *Newsweek*, July 24, 2006, p. 30.

and as Saudi and Iranian officials have increased bilateral contacts over Lebanon in recent months. Consequently, U.S. policy makers face a dilemma: they support Saudi efforts to calm the situation in Lebanon but look with disfavor on any expansion of Iranian influence in Lebanon.⁵⁷

Army Perceptions. One byproduct of Lebanon's extended governmental crisis and the more recent siege of the radical Palestinian Fatah al-Islam has been an enhancement of the Lebanese army's standing in the eyes of a wide spectrum of Lebanese citizens. During the demonstrations and counter-demonstrations led by pro-Syrian and anti-Syrian factions starting in late 2006, the army carefully avoided taking sides, while keeping the two groups apart. The army's subsequent clashes with radical Palestinian groups exposed certain weaknesses on the part of the poorly equipped army units in their efforts to expel the Fatah al-Islam groups from the refugee camps; however, observers say that most Lebanese regardless of their affiliation have perceived the army as defending the country against foreign elements such as Palestinians and pro-Palestinian fighters. One experienced observer described the Lebanese army as "the only national institution left in the country" and went on to say that the army has "credibility and respect in the country."⁵⁸

U.S.-Lebanese Relations

U.S. Policy Toward Lebanon

The United States has enjoyed good diplomatic relations with Lebanon and has supported its political independence. During the 1975-1990 civil war, the United States expressed concern over the violence and destruction taking place there; provided emergency economic aid, military training, and limited amounts of military equipment; and briefly deployed military forces to Lebanon in the early 1980s, as noted earlier. The United States supported and participated in various efforts to bring about a cease-fire during the civil war and subsequent efforts to quiet unrest in southern Lebanon along the Lebanese-Israeli border. In 1996 the United States helped negotiate an agreement between Hezbollah and Israel to avoid targeting civilians and is a member of a five-party force monitoring this agreement. The United States endorsed the U.N. Secretary General's findings in May 2000 that Israel had completed its withdrawal from southern Lebanon.

The U.S. Administration reacted strongly to the assassination of the late Prime Minister Hariri in February 2005, criticized the Syrian presence in Lebanon, and demanded withdrawal of Syrian forces from Lebanon. The United States welcomed the formation of a new Lebanese government following the withdrawal of Syrian forces. After a meeting with Lebanese Prime Minister Fouad Siniora on July 22, 2005, Dr. Rice said, "I think that you cannot find a partner more supportive of

⁵⁷ Michael Slackman, "U.S. Ally and Foe Are Trying to Avert War in Lebanon," *The New York Times*, January 30, 2007.

⁵⁸ Hassan M. Fattah, "Army Provides a Sense of Unity in Fractured Lebanon," *The New York Times*, June 20, 2007.

Lebanon than the United States.” On January 23, 2007, after the Hezbollah strike began, U.S. Under Secretary of State Nicholas Burns called on Arabs and Europeans to throw their support behind Prime Minister Siniora against those who would try to destabilize his regime.

Role of Congress

Congress has shown considerable interest in Lebanon over the years and has periodically addressed Lebanese issues in legislation. Reasons for this interest include a large expatriate Lebanese community in the United States; the western orientation of many Lebanese, especially among Christians; and Lebanon’s key role as a buffer between Syria and Israel. Congress is concerned over radical tendencies on the part of Syria and has frequently criticized Syrian efforts to exert influence in Lebanon, especially when such influence appears to threaten the security of Israel. Like the Administration, Congress widely condemned the assassination of the late Lebanese Prime Minister Hariri. During the 34-day Israel-Hezbollah fighting in mid-2006, both houses voiced support for Israel and for the efforts of the President to bring about an end to hostilities. The continued efforts of Hezbollah and its allies to increase their influence in Lebanon could affect future congressional attitudes toward Lebanon, especially if a new or modified Lebanese regime appeared to threaten Israel. On the other hand, some Members of Congress seem disposed to support Lebanon’s ability to maintain internal and regional stability through additional economic support funds and a resumption of foreign military aid to the Lebanese Armed Forces.

Recent and Current U.S. Assistance to Lebanon

In December 1996, the United States organized a Friends of Lebanon conference, which resulted in a U.S. commitment of \$60 million in U.S. aid to Lebanon over a five-year period beginning in FY1997 and ending in FY2001 (i.e., \$12 million per year mainly in Economic Support Funds (ESF)). Congress increased this amount to \$15 million in FY2000 and \$35 million in FY2001, reportedly to help Lebanon adjust to new conditions following Israel’s withdrawal and cope with continuing economic strains. U.S. economic aid to Lebanon has hovered around \$35 million in subsequent years, rising to \$42 million in FY2006.

The Bush Administration initially requested \$41.2 million in aid for Lebanon in FY2007, including \$35.5 million in Economic Support Funds (ESF), \$4.8 million in Foreign Military Financing (FMF), and \$935 thousand in International Military Education and Training (IMET). Since the Hezbollah-Israel fighting in mid-2006, however, the United States and its allies have been vying with Iran and Hezbollah in an effort to win “hearts and minds” of Lebanese citizens who have suffered from the war’s devastation. Both the U.S. Administration and Hezbollah have promised or provided significant relief and reconstruction packages.

For FY2007, President Bush requested \$770 million in supplemental aid from Congress for Lebanon. H.R. 1591, the House-passed FY2007 Emergency Supplemental Appropriations bill, would have fully funded the Administration’s request for aid to Lebanon; however, it would have required the Administration to

certify to Congress that before the aid is disbursed, the Lebanese government and the Administration had fulfilled certain conditions placed on assistance. A Senate-approved supplemental bill, S. 965, would also have fully funded the President's request but would have required the Secretary of State to certify that U.S. military assistance to Lebanon is not provided to U.S.-designated foreign terrorist groups. Conference report H.Rept. 110-107 was filed on April 24, 2007, and agreed to by the House by 218-208, 2 voting present, Roll. no. 265 on April 25. The conference report in Section 1803(c) retained the provision in the Senate bill to ensure that no military assistance goes to terrorist groups. The Senate accepted the conference report on April 26, 2007, by 51 to 46 with three not voting (Record Vote No. 147). However, President Bush vetoed the bill on May 1, because it contained a time table for withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq, and the House failed to override the veto by 222 to 203 (Roll no. 276).

Subsequently, the President did sign a new supplemental appropriations bill, H.R. 2206, on May 25, 2007 as P.L. 110-28. Like H.R. 1591, H.R. 2206 fully funded the President's requested supplemental aid to Lebanon but did not include a time table for U.S. withdrawal from Iraq. Section 3802(d) of H.R. 2206 requires the Secretary of State to submit to the congressional appropriations committees within 45 days a report on Lebanese actions to implement Section 14 of U.N. Security Council Resolution 1701. (See above.) Section 14 of the resolution calls upon the Government of Lebanon to secure its borders and prevent the entry of unauthorized arms or related material. (For more information, see CRS Report RL33933, *U.S. Foreign Aid to Lebanon: Issues for Congress*, by Jeremy M. Sharp.)

U.S. Reconstruction and Economic Assistance. The battle for political primacy in Lebanon waged by Prime Minister Fouad Siniora's March 14 government coalition and its U.S., European, and Saudi supporters against Hezbollah, their sympathizers, and their foreign patrons in Syria and Iran is being fought on a number of different fronts, including in the economic arena. The summer 2006 war and the opposition's campaign to obstruct the government have placed enormous financial strains on the Lebanese economy, and Prime Minister Siniora has called on the international community to provide financial backing to his fragile government.

The United States has committed several hundred million dollars to Lebanon's rebuilding efforts. President Bush announced on August 21, 2006, that the United States would provide an immediate \$230 million to Lebanon (an additional \$175 million on top of an earlier pledge of \$55 million) during a conference in Stockholm designed to raise funds for Lebanese reconstruction. At a January 2007 donors' conference in France, dubbed "Paris III," Secretary of State Rice pledged an additional \$250 million in cash transfers directly to the Lebanese government. This U.S. economic aid was requested in the FY2007 supplemental request under ESF assistance and may be tied to certain benchmarks that the Siniora government would be required to meet. To assuage donors' fears that foreign assistance would be mismanaged, Prime Minister Siniora has developed an economic reform plan designed to lower Lebanon's crippling \$41 billion public debt (which costs nearly \$3 billion a year in interest payments or nearly 40% of the national budget), decrease public subsidies, privatize the electricity and telecommunications sectors, and increase the Value Added Tax (VAT) from 10% to 12%. The opposition has countered with a populist campaign to thwart these reforms, accusing Siniora of

adopting Western-backed liberalization schemes that hurt Lebanese workers. One opposition slogan found in Beirut reads “‘No to the government of VAT’ and ‘No to the government of seafront properties.’”⁵⁹

Military Assistance. For the first time since 1984, the Administration requested Foreign Military Financing (FMF) grants to Lebanon in the FY2006 foreign affairs budget. Originally, it sought approximately \$1.0 million in FMF for FY2006 and \$4.8 million for FY2007 to help modernize the small and poorly equipped Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) following Syria’s withdrawal of its 15,000-person occupation force in 2005. However, the summer 2006 Israel-Hezbollah war spurred Western donors to increase their assistance to the LAF. Drawing from multiple budget accounts, the Administration ultimately reprogrammed an estimated \$42 million to provide spare parts, technical training, and new equipment to the LAF, including 25 five-ton trucks and 285 Humvees to enhance the LAF’s border patrol operations.⁶⁰

The Administration’s FY2007 emergency supplemental request includes \$220 million in FMF for Lebanon, a significant increase from previous levels. U.S. military assistance may be used for expanded personnel training by private U.S. contractors or the provision of spare parts and ammunition for Lebanese forces. According to the U.S. State Department, U.S. security assistance would “promote Lebanese control over southern Lebanon and Palestinian refugee camps to prevent them from being used as bases to attack Israel. The U.S. government’s active military-to-military programs enhance the professionalism of the Lebanese Armed Forces, reinforcing the concept of Lebanese civilian control. To foster peace and security, the United States intends to build upon welcome and unprecedented Lebanese calls to control the influx of weapons.”⁶¹ The Administration also has requested \$60 million in Non-proliferation, Anti-terrorism, De-mining, and Related Programs (NADR) funds primarily to train and equip Lebanon’s Internal Security Forces (ISF).⁶² For more background on aid to Lebanon, see CRS Report RL32260, *U.S. Foreign Assistance to the Middle East: Historical Background, Recent Trends, and the FY2007 Request*; CRS Report RL33933, *U.S. Foreign Aid to Lebanon: Issues for Congress*, by Jeremy M. Sharp.

⁵⁹ “People’s Revolt in Lebanon,” *The Nation*, January 8, 2007.

⁶⁰ According to the U.S. State Department, the \$42 million in FY2006 military assistance to Lebanon was re-programmed from several accounts, including \$10 million from Department of Defense Section 1206 funds, \$2.7 million from FMF, \$28 million from the Peacekeeping Operations (PKO) account, and \$1.2 million from ESF and INCLE.

⁶¹ See, FY2008 International Affairs (Function 150) Congressional Budget Justification, U.S. Department of State, February 16, 2007.

⁶² According to H.R. 1591, the House Appropriations Committee’s FY2007 Emergency Supplemental Appropriations bill, the \$60 million in NADR funds is to be used for “non-lethal assistance” for Lebanon, of which \$36,500,000 is for training of the Internal Security Forces; \$19,500,000 is for equipment including individual supplies for 9,000 new recruits, 300 unarmored SUVs, computers, and radio gear; and \$4,000,000 is to refurbish 35 police stations, 4 police academies, and a command and control center.

Table 3. U.S. Assistance to Lebanon
(millions of dollars)

Year	Total	Economic Aid (Grants)	Food Aid (Grants)	Military Aid (Loans)	I.M.E.T. (Grants)
1946 - 1980	332.7	120.2 ^a	86.2 ^b	123.3 ^c	3.0
1981	24.3	4.0	0	20.0	0.3
1982	21.8	9.0	2.2	10.0	0.6
1983	153.9	52.2	0	100.0	1.7
1984	44.0	28.1	0.3	15.0	0.6
1985	21.1	19.9	0.5	0	0.7
1986	17.6	16.0	1.1	0	0.5
1987	23.0	12.8	9.7	0	0.5
1988	12.3	5.1	6.8	0	0.4
1989	15.5	2.8	12.3	0	0.4
1990	19.4	8.3	10.7	0	0.4
1991	19.2	9.3	9.9	0	0
1992	16.4	9.2	7.2	0	0
1993	14.4	10.3	3.5	0	0.6
1994	2.0	1.7	0	0	0.3
1995	16.0	15.6 ^d	0	0	0.4
1996	2.5	2.0	0	0	0.5
1997	12.8	12.3	0	0	0.5
1998	12.6	12.0	0	0	0.6
1999	12.6	12.0	0	0	0.6
2000	15.6	15.0	0	0	0.6
2001	35.4	34.9	0	0	0.5
2002	35.6	35.0	0	0	0.6
2003	35.5	34.8	0	0	0.7
2004	35.9	35.2	0	0	0.7
2005	35.9	35.2	0	0	0.7
2006 ^e	41.7	40.0 ^e	0	1.0	0.7
2007 ^f	41.2	35.5	0	4.8	.9
2007 (supplem.) ^g	520.0	300.0	0	220.0	0
2008 (request) ^h	53.2	42.1	0	9.6	1.5
Totals	1,644.1	970.5	150.4	503.7	19.5

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

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

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

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

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

d. Includes about \$6 million from 1994.

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

f. Plus additional relief/reconstruction funds and military financing; sources of funding not yet clear.

g. In addition, the supplement contains approximately \$65 million in several accounts other than ESF and FMF, including peacekeeping.

h. Does not include some small categories of aid such as de-mining