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Lebanon: The Lebanese Forces Militia

Summary

The Phalange-dominated Lebanese Forces militia represents the most serious domestic threat to the authority of Lebanese President Amin Jumayyil. It is the strongest indigenous military group in Lebanon, and under the leadership of its former commander, Bashir Jumayyil, it had become a major political force in its own right. One of Amin's most difficult tasks will be to subordinate the militia to the authority of the central government.

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Bashir's assassination last September ushered in a period of uncertainty for the Lebanese Forces. The militia leaders viewed Bashir's election to the presidency as the guarantee of their own legitimacy and preeminent role in Lebanese politics. These leaders now are attempting to redefine that role under radically different circumstances.

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Never well disposed toward Amin, the militia leaders initially seemed prepared to challenge his authority if he deviated from Bashir's policies. In recent weeks, however, the adversarial relationship between Amin and the Lebanese Forces seems to be moderating. Militia leaders are beginning to gain confidence that Amin is willing to compromise on issues they regard as vital to their interests. They also lack a viable alternative to Amin's leadership and recognize that he has secured US support that is necessary to restore Lebanon's national sovereignty.

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This memorandum was prepared by [redacted] of the Levant Branch, Arab-Israeli Division, Office of Near East/South Asia Analysis, at the request of Ambassador Habib.

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Amin and the militia leaders are still engaging in political maneuvering with one another, and numerous issues, particularly the future role of the Lebanese Forces, could upset the still evolving relationship and lead to a showdown. Unless clan and factional interests agree on a compromise, Lebanon's future--like its past--is likely to remain one of ongoing conflict and violence.

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The Lebanese Forces is a coalition of Maronite Christian militias formed in August 1976 during the Lebanese civil war. Initially it included virtually all of the militias of the Maronite political parties, but after 1978, the Syrian-backed Zgharta Front, associated with former President Sulayman Franjiyah, withdrew because of the anti-Syrian attitudes of the other Maronite groups. Today the Lebanese Forces is made up of the Phalange, the National Liberal Party of Camille Shamun, and two extremist splinter groups--the Tanzim and the Guardians of the Cedars.

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The Lebanese Forces is totally dominated by the Phalange militia. The Phalange fielded the largest Christian militia during the civil war and was the first of the Maronite military forces to clash with the Palestinians, whom the Phalange blame for plunging the country into civil war.

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Bashir Jumayyil, then commander of the Phalange militia, soon became the head of the Lebanese Forces, but he did not have direct command over the other militias within the organization. He remedied this situation in July 1980 by launching a brutal attack on the rival Shamunist militia, forcing its total submission to his authority. A short time later, the minor Christian militias also surrendered their forces to Bashir. Since that time, the term Lebanese Forces has become virtually synonymous with the Phalange militia.

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The philosophy of the militias reflects the political ideology of the Maronite parties. Their aim is to maintain an independent Lebanon under Maronite hegemony and thus ensure that Lebanon will never be dominated by Muslims or absorbed into the Arab world.

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Structure of the Lebanese Forces

We estimate the Lebanese Forces have a standing army of approximately 3,000 men, supplemented by an estimated 9,000 trained reservists. The Phalange claims that its total military strength, including its militias and irregulars, is as high as 40,000. In theory, the actions of the Lebanese Forces are governed by a command council which implements policies handed down by the the Lebanese Front, the political voice of the unified Maronite parties. [REDACTED]

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Under Bashir's leadership, however, the Phalange militia grew into a powerful and disciplined military force that eventually superceded the authority of the political wing of the party. Bashir seldom consulted political leaders concerning the activities of the Lebanese Forces, and he frequently ignored the advice of the politicians when it was offered. Bashir transformed the Lebanese Forces into an independent vehicle for political change that eventually rivaled the traditional political wing of the party, led by his father, Pierre. [REDACTED]

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New Circumstances

According to US Embassy reports, the Lebanese Forces has lost some of its special identity and cohesion since Bashir's assassination. Militia leaders want to maintain their organization as a unique military force, but without Bashir's dynamic leadership they appear to be drifting back under the control of the party politicians. [REDACTED]

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Pierre Jumayyil, whose influence over the party's military wing was eclipsed during the period of Bashir's ascendancy, has again emerged as the most important influence on the Lebanese Forces. Fadi Frem, Bashir's politically inexperienced successor as Lebanese Forces commander, has not been able to continue Bashir's practice of acting without reference to the Phalange Party. [REDACTED]

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Amin and the Lebanese Forces

After Amin's election, the militia leaders moved quickly to protect their interests. [REDACTED] Amin has acquiesced to several of their demands, including the appointment of many of Bashir's close advisers to positions of importance.

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While the President may still to some extent fear the militia, we believe he is demonstrating political skill by taking advantage of his father's influence with the militia, initially to reach a modus vivendi and eventually to coopt its leaders. [REDACTED]

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During the past month, for example, Amin has made an effort to gain the support of key militia figures, including appointees who were forced upon him by the militia. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] Amin has made special efforts to win over Zahi Bustani, formerly a close adviser to Bashir. Amin is expected to name Bustani as Director of the Lebanese Surete Generale. We doubt that Bustani will support Jumayyil, however, on policies that adversely affect the interests of the Lebanese Forces. [REDACTED]

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The gradual restoration of party influence over the militia has improved relations between Amin and the militia leaders. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] the militiamen still do not like Amin, who they believe represents the corrupt politics of the older generation. They nevertheless have a basic identity of interests--the removal of Syrian, PLO, and Israeli forces from Lebanon and the restoration of national sovereignty and territorial integrity. We believe that the militia leaders, however disgruntled, see no immediate alternative to Amin. They also realize Amin has the US backing necessary to achieve their ultimate objectives. [REDACTED]

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The Israeli Connection

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The close contact and cooperation between Israel and the Lebanese Forces over the past seven years has welded a very tight relationship, the depths of which may never be known. We judge that the militia leaders will remain indebted to the Israelis for having come to their aid at a time when they were on the very brink of being exterminated by the Palestinians and their leftist Lebanese allies. [REDACTED]

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[Redacted]

[Redacted]

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The major contentious issue continues to be a peace treaty.

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[Redacted]

In a conversation with US officials earlier this week, a militia official claimed that the Lebanese Forces has informed the Israelis that it has decided to back Amin and would no longer countenance Israeli meddling in internal political affairs.

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[Redacted] militants apparently believe their room for political maneuvering has been blocked by US involvement in Lebanon, and particularly US support for Amin. Nonetheless, these militia leaders probably view the Israelis as their ultimate trump card should their interests be threatened by the Lebanese central government.

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[Redacted]

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Outlook

The resurgence of party control over the militia has reduced the threat posed by the militia for the near term, but it has not been eliminated. The loyalty of the militia hierarchy to Phalange party founder Pierre Jumayyil--and the lack of alternate leadership--may be strong enough to keep the militia from challenging Amin.

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Amin and the militia are still in a stage of tactical maneuvering with one another. While a shift in the power balance in favor of the President apparently is underway, it is by no means complete. Major differences could still undermine their

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[REDACTED]

new found accord. The nature of Lebanese-Israeli relations, particularly the issue of a peace treaty, and the future of the Lebanese Forces could lead to a showdown. [REDACTED]

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The key to Amin's winning the continuing cooperation--if not loyalty--of the militia will be his ability to preserve the Lebanese Forces in some form, without compromising the status of the regular Army or offending Lebanon's Muslim majority.

[REDACTED]

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Ultimately, these compromises may be rejected by Muslims or by the Army, which is seeking to rebuild and reassert its authority throughout the country. Even if accepted, the proposals now under consideration may provide only near term solutions in the absence of a strong sense of national identity that outweighs clan and factional loyalties. Without this identity, Lebanon's future, like its past, is likely to be one of ongoing political and communal conflict. [REDACTED]

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LEBANESE FORCES COMMAND COUNCIL

<u>Name</u>	<u>Position</u>	<u>Party</u>
Fadi Frem	Commander of The Lebanese Forces and President of The Lebanese Forces Command Council	Phalange
Eli Aswad	Deputy Commander of The Lebanese Forces	National Liberal Party
Na'um Farah		Phalange
Fuad Rukuz		Phalange
Georges Adwan		Tanzim
Fawzi Mahfuz AKA Abu Roy		Tanzim
Etiene Saqr AKA Abu Arz		Guardians of The Cedars
Nabil Karam		National Liberal Party
Samir Tawil		Tanzim

* The Tanzim split into two factions in 1977. Adwan and Tawil represent one faction, while the other, represented by Abu Roy, is closely associated with the Phalange.

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THE LEBANESE FORCES HEADQUARTERS STAFF ORGANIZATION

<u>Name</u>	<u>Position</u>	<u>Party</u>
Fu'ad Abu Nadar	Chief of Staff	Phalange
Assad Sayid	Assistant Chief of Staff	Phalange
Joseph Sha'ul	Chief of Administrative Affairs	National Liberal Party
Vacant	Chief of Military Intelligence	
Namit Allah Thai	Chief of Operations	
Raja Murakadi	Chief of Logistics	Independent
Fadi Hayak	Chief of Psychological Operations	Tanzim
Na'um Farah	Chief of External Relations Department	Phalange
Elie Hubayka	Director of The Lebanese Forces Intelligence Department	Phalange
Dib Anastas	Director of The Lebanese Forces Police Department	Phalange

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