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Talking Points on Lebanese Internal Situation for 3 September

1. President-elect Bashir Jumayyil has taken some steps to ease Muslim opposition to his election.

- Bashir is calling for a Christian-Muslim dialogue.
- He has resigned formally from his Phalange party positions.
- He has downplayed Israeli press reports that he plans to sign a peace treaty with Tel Aviv.

2. Muslim reaction to Bashir's election is becoming clearer and somewhat more flexible.

- Sunni moderates, including former Prime Minister Saeb Salam, seem more willing than initially to give Bashir a chance to prove himself.
- Leftists, like the Murabitun (the largest Muslim militia), are also keeping their options open and did not prevent the Lebanese army from entering West Beirut on Thursday.
- Shia Muslims are generally backing Bashir.
- The strongest opposition is coming from Muslim and anti-Phalange Christians whose power bases are in the Syrian-occupied north around Tripoli (former prime Minister Karami and former President Franjiyah) who have longstanding blood feuds with Bashir's Phalange party.
- The Syrians have avoided harsh attacks on Bashir, however, and seem willing to seek a working relationship with him.

3. Bashir's key problem, in our view, is to avoid over-identification with Israel. The moderate Arab states (Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia) and Syria appear willing to accept his election and encourage Lebanese Muslims to work with Bashir if he demonstrates relative independence from Begin and Sharon.

- Bashir's conservative, anti-communist politics basically appeals to the moderates as does his promise to restore law and order.
- The Arabs will closely question Bashir at the upcoming summit conference on his intentions toward Israel, a peace treaty with Begin and his plans for handling Major Haddad (who remains a bete noir for the Arabs). Bashir has asked for a summit postponement.

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4. Israeli intentions in Lebanon remain unclear. They could react to the President's peace initiative by stirring up the pot in Lebanon, perhaps encouraging Bashir to extend his authority into Syrian-occupied Christian areas in the north and the Bekaa Valley.

- The Syrians have reinforced their positions in Lebanon but reportedly have also sought to rein in the PLO forces in the Bekaa to reduce provocations.

5. There are some 13,000 Palestinian fighters in Syrian-controlled North Lebanon and the northern Biqa' Valley. [REDACTED] report indicates some PLO leaders plan to return to the Biqa' area. If permitted to do so by the Syrians, and not challenged by the Israelis, there is every incentive for a continued and even augmented Fedayeen presence in these areas.

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6. Potential scenarios are frankly unpredictable and run the gamut from a decisive Israeli military push to mutual withdrawal to acquiescence in a continued Syrian and PLO presence in the area. One possible chain of events would be the following:

- Both Israelis and Syrians/Palestinians refuse to budge.
- Israelis strengthen their own and the Lebanese Christians' strategic positions by taking the mountain ridgelines and the Christian central Biqa' city of Zahlah.
- Syria and Israel eventually agree to phased withdrawals to the northern and southern ends of the country respectively. Palestinian elements remain in Syrian areas, and this situation is tolerated for the foreseeable future.

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