



Director of  
Central  
Intelligence

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# Prospects for Lebanon

Special National Intelligence Estimate

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**PROSPECTS FOR LEBANON**

Information available as of 11 October 1983 was  
used in the preparation of this Estimate.

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THIS ESTIMATE IS ISSUED BY THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE.

THE NATIONAL FOREIGN INTELLIGENCE BOARD CONCURS.

*The following intelligence organizations participated in the preparation of the Estimate:*

The Central Intelligence Agency, the Defense Intelligence Agency, the National Security Agency, and the intelligence organizations of the Departments of State and Treasury.

*Also Participating:*

The Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Department of the Army

The Director of Naval Intelligence, Department of the Navy

The Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence, Department of the Air Force

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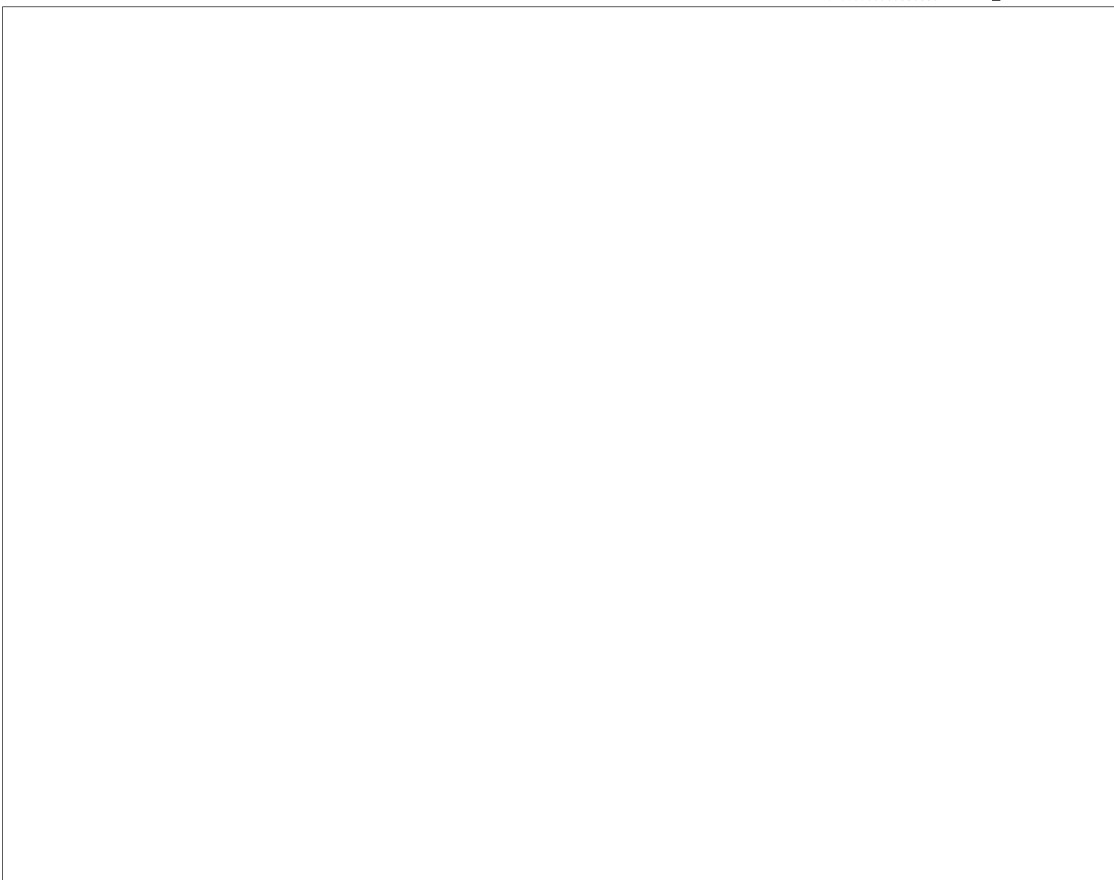


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### SCOPE NOTE

This Estimate examines the prospects and outlook for Lebanon over the next six months. The goals, intentions, and capabilities of key internal and external actors are analyzed. The role of the Palestinians in Lebanon is addressed. The broader Palestinian issue and the Arab-Israeli peace process will be the focus of a forthcoming Estimate, *Outlook for the Palestinians*.

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## KEY JUDGMENTS

The prospects for a lasting political reconciliation among Lebanon's confessional factions are extremely bleak. Domestic stability in Lebanon depends upon reaching a new balance-of-power arrangement in which the interests of the country's majority Muslim population are more equitably accommodated and the security of the Christian community is assured. Progress on these political issues is essential if the cease-fire is to endure.

Maronite Christians—particularly the Phalange Party and Lebanese Forces militia leaders—will resist changes that significantly reduce their influence in the government. Syria will urge the Muslims and the Druze to press for their maximum demands. Whenever a national reconciliation conference is held, it is most likely to stalemate and eventually break down, resulting in heightened confessional intransigence, renewed factional fighting, and a prolonged partition of Lebanon.

Meaningful national reconciliation depends primarily on the Lebanese and for the present they seem unwilling to make the concessions and compromises necessary for a lasting accommodation. As a consequence, the prospects of achieving a sovereign and politically stable state free from foreign occupation are virtually nonexistent.

Instead, we can expect a weak central government which probably can maintain control over greater Beirut but which has to contend with autonomous Maronite and Druze heartlands and prolonged Syrian and Israeli occupation. The legal facade of the central government's sovereignty will continue, however, since no party favors formal partition.

In essence, a de facto confederal or cantonal system might emerge within which many of the essential interests of most internal and external participants would be met. The weaker the authority of the central government the greater is the likelihood of its acceptability to most parties.

This situation, while far from ideal, may well endure for an extended period. Even with continued US military support, the Gemayel government may at best gain a breathing space from fighting in which to begin political negotiations and arrange cosmetic deals with some Muslims. Failure to achieve real progress, however, probably will lead sooner or later to renewed fighting.

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The introduction of US military power into Lebanon—symbolized by naval gunfire and substantial logistic support for the Lebanese Army defense of greater Beirut in September—has at least temporarily altered the military equation in the country. The threat of greater US, French, and possibly Israeli involvement, the credible performance of the Lebanese Army, the exhaustion of Druze forces, and the fact that Syria had obtained many of its political goals induced Damascus to shift the conflict from the military to the political level in the near term.

The Gemayel government and Christian hardliners will look to the United States for support to counter Muslim and Syrian pressure for radical political change. The United States will be blamed for brokering any settlement that is not responsive to Druze, Muslim, and Syrian interests.

*If the Christians agree to greater Muslim influence in the political system, however, the likely result over the long term will be a more pro-Arab Lebanon that will improve its relations with Damascus and be less accommodating toward Israel. The 17 May Israeli-Lebanese Accords will be in greater jeopardy, but we believe any Lebanese government will hold the agreement in abeyance in any case.*

The Gemayel government is now perceived within Lebanon and throughout the Arab world as representing narrow Christian Phalangist interests. US military support for Christian interests against Muslim and Druze actions will make it very difficult for the Egyptian and Jordanian Governments to lend further diplomatic and military support for US policies in Lebanon. Should the United States become involved in a direct military confrontation with Syria, Saudi Arabia would be forced to support President Assad publicly—leaving US policy in Lebanon without Arab support.

Both Syria and Israel want a central government in Lebanon responsive to their own interests. Without such a government, both countries will remain indefinitely in Lebanon and accept de facto partition.

The principal Lebanese factions will continue to look to these neighboring states for support to enable them to avoid making political compromises with their internal rivals. These factions will be responsive to the interests of Syria and Israel to obtain continuing support.

Syria's key goals in Lebanon are to establish a government responsive to its interests and to minimize Israeli influence in the country. Damascus will continue to support its allies and surrogates in Lebanon to weaken the government of President Gemayel and force



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Gemayel or his successor to reach an accommodation with Syria. Assad can use either indirect military pressure or political negotiations to keep the Army and the Lebanese Forces on the defensive.

Regardless of the outcome of talks on Lebanon's internal political configuration, Assad will not accept a Lebanese government that maintains overt ties to Israel. Damascus will continue to press Gemayel or a successor regime to abrogate the 17 May Lebanese-Israeli agreement.

Consistent with the USSR's primary aim of increasing its influence in the region, Moscow supports Syria's policies. *Damascus, not Moscow, determines Syrian policy in Lebanon, but Soviet support reinforces Assad's confidence.* Like Damascus, Moscow does not want a Beirut government that is aligned with Israel, or any solution to the Lebanese problem that has been brokered by the United States. In addition, Moscow has a strong interest in having the US military presence in Lebanon removed or be seen as ineffective. It is also interested in frustrating broader US peace initiatives in the region that do not include Moscow, damaging the US image and undermining its credibility in the Arab world and elsewhere, and hindering the United States' ability to use its military might in other parts of the world.

While Soviet advisers and air defense personnel already in Syria could become involved in the event of major escalation, we do not envision direct Soviet military support to Syrian forces in Lebanon. Moscow has long made it clear to Assad that Soviet support to Syria does not obligate it to protect the Syrian presence in Lebanon. The Kremlin would prefer that the level of conflict in Lebanon remain low so that a Syrian-US or Syrian-Israeli confrontation is avoided. Moscow, however, cannot control Syrian actions that could lead to escalation of the fighting.

Israel's key goals in Lebanon are to guarantee the security of its northern border and to prevent the PLO and Syrians from establishing a presence in the south. The Israelis hope to avoid renewed military involvement north of the Awwali River, but they would respond to specific Syrian or Palestinian provocations with airstrikes or artillery and would not tolerate a Palestinian presence in the Shuf below the Damur River or a Syrian drive to Beirut. Israel would first try to intimidate Damascus, perhaps by threatening to move against Syrian forces in Lebanon, but ultimately would be prepared to move physically into the Shuf.

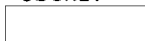


If  
the Gemayel government crumbles, Israel will look to the United States

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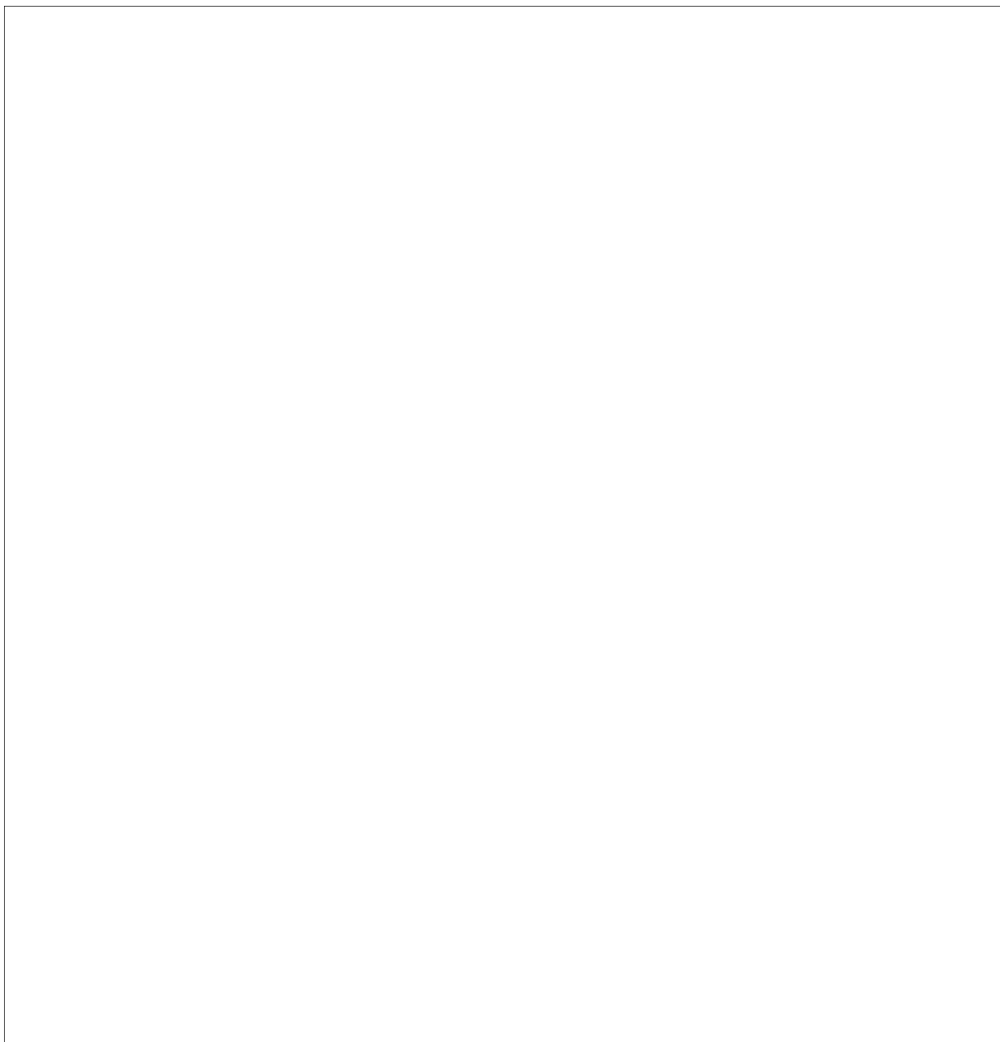


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to save it and will be extremely reluctant to intervene on its own. Nonetheless, a Syrian-inspired move against the Maronite heartland north of Beirut designed to cripple the Phalange would prompt Israeli intervention.

The three West European contributors to the Multinational Force are likely to maintain their contingents in Beirut over the next six months unless there is a dramatic increase in their casualties or a major uprising in West Beirut. They will be unlikely to agree to an expansion of the size or mission of the force, unless it is approved by all of the Lebanese factions, because France, Italy, and the United Kingdom are highly sensitive to domestic concern over casualties and to Arab charges of meddling in an intra-Arab dispute.

Syria is likely to avoid a direct military confrontation with the United States in Lebanon. Assad almost certainly believes he can attain his objectives in Lebanon without significant direct Syrian military involvement.



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hinder, but not necessarily cripple, broader US initiatives to promote peace and regional stability.

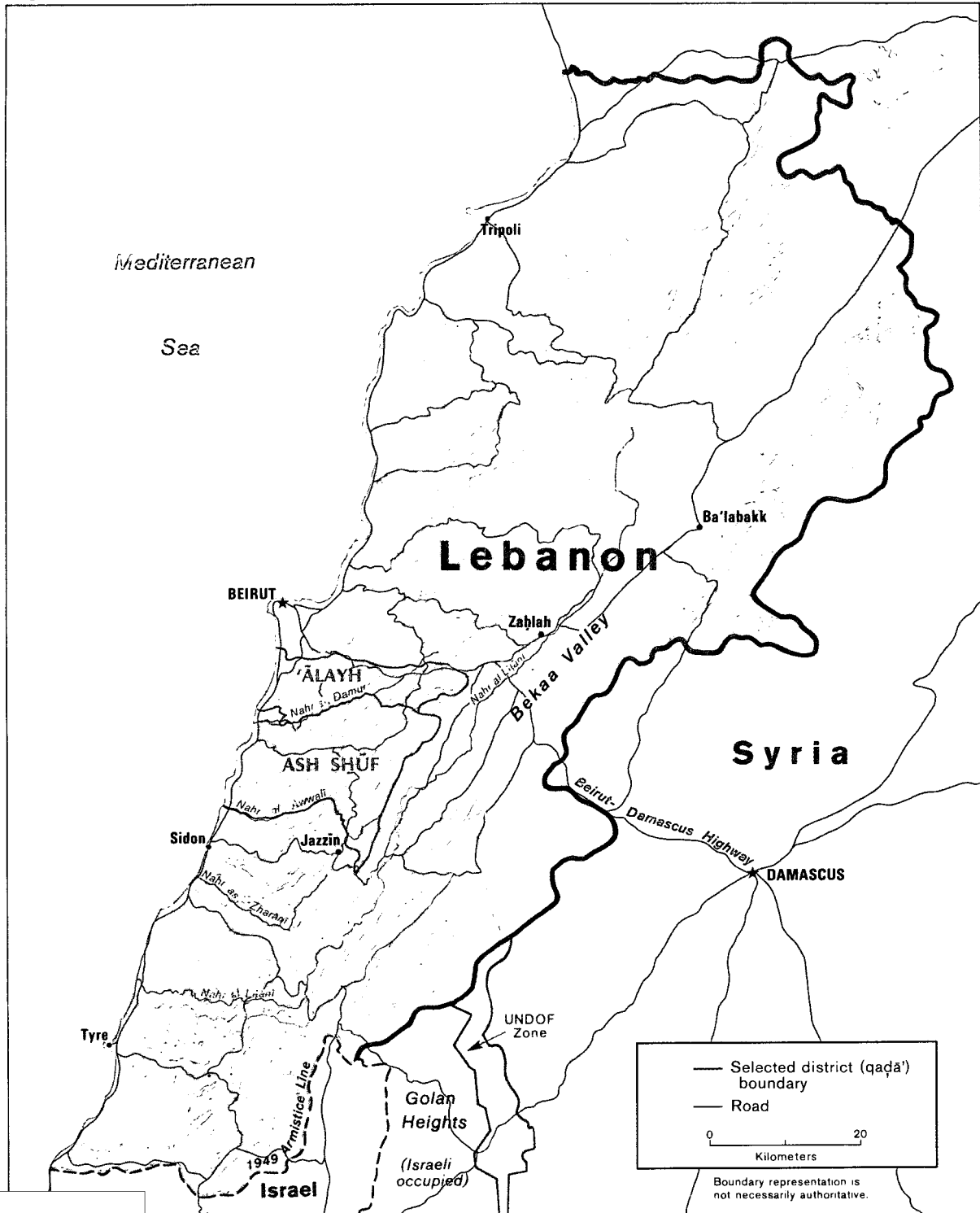
Nonetheless, very real risks emerge from our involvement in Lebanon. For the Phalange and much of the Maronite community, the United States is the latest in a series of foreign power patrons to be exploited in an effort to preserve Maronite hegemony. Deepening the American commitment to the Gemayel government may shore up central authority, but there is always the risk that it also will take the pressure off the Phalange for further concessions.

*I MIGHT ADD MR. SPEAKIN THAT*  
Moreover, US involvement will continue to offer enormous opportunities for anti-American groups of every variety. Pro-Iranian Shia, Lebanese leftists, radical Sunnis, and Palestinians will have a ready target against which to vent their frustrations and carry out their antigovernment activities.

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Figure 1



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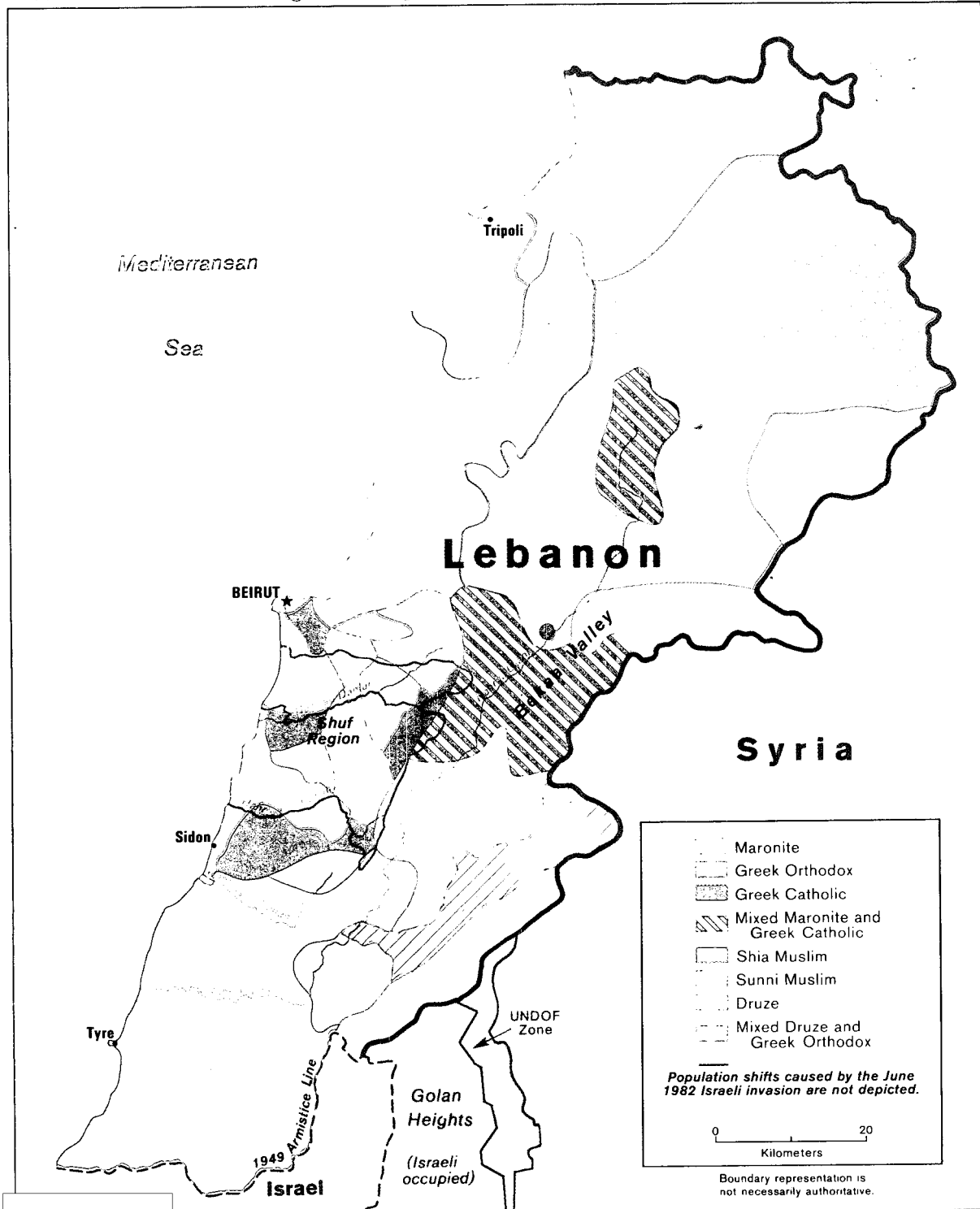
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Figure 2  
Predominant Lebanese Religious Groups



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