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THE OUTLOOK FOR LEBANON

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THE PROBLEM

To estimate the political outlook in Lebanon, particularly the implications of the prospective elections.

THE ESTIMATE

1. It will soon be two years since virtual civil war, threatening the integrity of Lebanon, led to the Lebanese request for US military intervention. The period since the end of Chamoun's administration has been relatively tranquil. Under President Chehab and Prime Minister Karami, Lebanese foreign policy has taken a middle direction, avoiding both the outspokenly pro-West course followed by Chamoun, and the strong pro-UAR tendencies exhibited by Chamoun's more ardent opponents at the time of the 1958 troubles. In general, we consider that the present regime's orientation reflects the preference of most Lebanese. There is little desire for a recurrence of the violent outbreaks of 1958, and most factions, since the restoration of order, have accepted a kind of political truce under a cabinet of moderates who have largely avoided provocative issues.

2. This tone has been set by President Chehab, former commander of the armed forces. Chehab has so far employed a combination of compromise and firmness in his determination to avoid a repetition of the 1958 strife. He has shown himself willing to use force against occasional

threats to public security, and has successfully employed pressure against both Christian and Moslem political factions when he considered it necessary. As a Christian, he favors the system of confessional balance in the Lebanese Government. However, he is unsympathetic to Chamoun, whom he regards as a dangerous extremist. He clearly hopes to prevent a resurgence of Chamoun's political power, in part by bringing about a larger and more balanced representation in parliament of the various Lebanese factions than that resulting from the 1957 elections, which Chamoun rigged. Prime Minister Karami, a leader of the pro-UAR Moslem faction in 1958, has gone along with Chehab's policies, and substantial cooperation between them is likely to continue. Karami has removed many Chamoun sympathizers from the government—including the gendarmerie and police—but he has avoided replacing them with Moslem extremists. He, like Chehab, has sought to avoid identification with any one Arab regional faction.

² The complex system by which the various Lebanese religious groups are apportioned representation in the government.

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✓ Source: Department of State, INR Files. A covering note indicated that this special estimate, submitted by the Director of Central Intelligence, was prepared by CIA, and the intelligence organizations of the Departments of State, the Army, the Navy, the Air Force, and The Joint Staff. All members of the United States Intelligence Board concurred with the estimate on May 10, with the exception of the representatives of the AEC and the FBI who abstained on the grounds that the topic was outside their jurisdiction.

✓ The complex system by which the various Lebanese religious groups are apportioned representation in the government. [Footnote in the source text.]

3. The basic internal rivalries between Lebanese political forces remain, of course, essentially unchanged. The central issue of Moslem-Druze-Christian tensions is inevitably coming to the fore with the approach of elections, planned for this June. Chamoun, in particular, feels that he and his followers are threatened, and that a combination of outside pressures from the UAR, together with Chehab's maneuverings, will destroy his political power. There is considerable apprehension, not only among Christians, that the next parliament will be dominated by Moslem extremists bent on destroying the delicate balance of the confessional system. Many Christian politicians fear that UAR influence and money, chiefly originating in Syria, will be used to bring this about, with the aim of controlling Lebanon if not actually absorbing it. They insist that strong Western support is needed to enable their forces to rally and to counter the trend. Many Moslem and Druze elements, on the other hand, take Western support of the Christians for granted and seek UAR assistance to counter it.

4. While there is already evidence of UAR interference in pre-election maneuvering, we doubt that the UAR Government is intent on a massive campaign of intervention or that Nasser presently entertains serious ambitions of absorbing Lebanon or establishing UAR hegemony there. Nasser clearly wants a Lebanese government sympathetic to the UAR and the broad aims of Pan-Arab nationalism, and is prepared to contribute money and influence to this end. He almost certainly believes that the Western Powers will provide support for pro-West Lebanese factions. If he came to believe that

outside forces were attempting to foster a Lebanese government which would follow the strongly anti-Nasser policies Chamoun pursued, UAR counterefforts would be stepped up strongly. On the whole, however, we think it likely that Nasser's actions will stop well short of the kind of blatant interference which characterized UAR activities against Chamoun two years ago. Syrian Region Interior Minister Sarraj may try to interfere on a scale and by means not sanctioned by Nasser, but we believe that Nasser can probably control Sarraj's activity.

5. We base this estimate on the belief that Nasser himself is fully alive to the unique conditions governing Lebanese affairs. Lebanese policies under Chehab and Karami have been essentially satisfactory to Nasser. Nasser is aware of Western interest in Lebanon's continued independence and is not desirous of adding to his troubles with the Western Powers—at least with the US—at a time when he is heavily engaged with his own problems. He probably believes that the Western Powers under certain circumstances would again intervene in Lebanon. Moreover, he has been impressed with the difficulties of governing Syria, and is aware that Lebanon's peculiar domestic institutions and international position would present even thornier problems if he tried to take them on.

6. Nor do we believe that any substantial Lebanese faction seriously wants the state to be joined with or subservient to the UAR. Certainly President Chehab and Prime Minister Karami have shown little of the extreme pro-UAR sentiments which some of Karami's fellow-dissidents displayed when they were in arms against Chamoun two years ago. The moderate

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Moslem factions, which were prompted to turn to the UAR as the only available support against Chamoun in 1957 and 1958, now feel reasonably secure under Chehab and Karami. Having seriously weakened Chamoun and strengthened the Moslem position, Karami and his sympathizers give every indication of wanting to consolidate these gains, but to do so far short of following the Syrian politicians into dependence on Nasser.

7. They will find support in this course from Arab leaders other than Nasser. King Saud, once a heavy financial contributor to various Lebanese political factions, no longer has the funds for such purposes. However, such influence as he and his family retain will be exerted against the spread of Nasser's influence. The Iraqis, Jordanians, Iranians, and Turks will also back candidates opposed to Nasser. On the whole, these attempts are not likely materially to affect the outcome of the elections.

8. Neither the UK nor France is likely to be as active as in the past. Both will probably attempt to hold pro-UAR influences to a minimum, through covert support of certain Christian and moderate Moslem elements, but they will probably avoid, as unfeasible, attempts to bring about the kind of clear pro-Western orientation which British and French influence fostered in previous Lebanese governments.

9. As the elections approach and tensions mount, interested outside powers are likely to become more deeply involved than they may now plan. Nasser will be under pressure from pro-UAR elements for greater support, and he will find it difficult to reject these demands even if

he were so inclined. The Western Powers will encounter growing importunities from pro-West elements to take more vigorous action.

10. In any case, the elections will be hard fought, with considerable risks of serious clashes. On the whole, we believe that Chehab's control of the security forces is strong enough to enable him to cope with the kind of localized armed clashes which are a normal feature of Lebanese elections. This is particularly true since the elections will be held on four successive Sundays in different parts of the country, thus enabling the security forces to be moved around. A more serious danger is that disorders might become widespread. Further incidents such as the May bombings in Beirut, for example, unless decisively dealt with by Chehab, might cause both Christians and Moslems to drop their present internal differences and close ranks against each other. Such a development would divide government and country alike and place critical strains on the unity and discipline of the security forces. As a last resort the government might feel compelled to postpone the elections, but this now appears unlikely.

11. The elections are likely to result in a parliament more accommodating to Nasser and his policies than the recent one. In an effort to bring all political factions

3/ The Christian-Moslem rivalry in Lebanon is complicated by the sectarian and factional differences within each community. The Sunni-Shia split tends to inhibit effective Moslem unity, while the Christian camp is divided into various sects, with Maronites in the majority, followed by Greek Orthodox and various others. The Druzes constitute a distinct but influential third element. Normally, these internal differences equal or even overshadow the simple distinction between Christians and Moslems.

[Footnote in the source text.]

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into the new parliament and discourage extra-parliamentary maneuvering by disgruntled "outs," 33 new seats are to be added to the parliament, now composed of 66 members. In accordance with custom, confessional representation is to remain in about the same proportion. However, most of the new seats will probably be won by politicians unsympathetic to Chamoun. Finally, many present pro-Chamoun deputies will probably encounter much stiffer opposition in their own districts.

12. We do not, however, believe that extremist Moslems are likely to gain sufficient strength in parliament to attempt drastic changes in Lebanon's present middle of the road foreign policy or to upset the present confessional balance. Any such effort would be opposed not only by the Christians, but also by many moderate Sunnis, most Shias, and the Druzes. An additional measure of protection is

afforded the Christians by virtue of the fact that President Chehab's term of office has four more years to run. Chehab will probably attempt to prevent any Moslem extremism in parliament.

13. Long-term trends in Lebanon clearly favor some increase in Moslem influence and greater identification with Arab nationalism in general. Outspoken pro-Westernism of the Chamoun brand is highly unlikely to be adopted again, and no foreseeable Lebanese government would have much chance of surviving if it tried to restore that orientation. Nonetheless, it remains unlikely that Moslem influence will lead, even in the longer run, to unification of Lebanon with the UAR or the effective suppression of pro-West or Christian elements. For the foreseeable future most Lebanese, Christian and non-Christians alike, would have too much to lose by such a development.