



Directorate of Intelligence

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The Lebanese in Sub-Saharan Africa

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An Intelligence Assessment

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January 1988
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The Lebanese in Sub-Saharan Africa

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An Intelligence Assessment

This paper was prepared by [REDACTED]

with [REDACTED]

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coordinated with the Directorate of Operations.

Comments and queries are welcome and may be directed to the Chief, [REDACTED]

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January 1988

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The Lebanese in Sub-Saharan Africa [redacted] b (3)

Key Judgments
Information available as of 5 January 1988 was used in this report.

The Lebanese community in Africa—now estimated to number about 450,000 and concentrated primarily in West and Central Africa—generally mirrors the religious and political conditions in its homeland, including the erosion of substantial Christian influence and the rise of powerful Shia organizations. For generations, the Lebanese in Africa have played an important economic role as small merchants and businessmen while maintaining a low political profile. Some Lebanese businessmen in Africa have used their economic power to establish close links to local government officials, enabling them at times to influence policy. In a sharp break with past patterns, however, Lebanese migrants to Africa over the past few years have been overwhelmingly Muslim—members of both Hizballah, a Shia fundamentalist movement with close ties to Iran, and of Amal, a somewhat more conservative Shia faction. [redacted]

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Anti-Lebanese sentiment among public and government officials in Africa has grown in recent years, a trend that almost certainly will continue. Many Africans believe [redacted] that Lebanese businessmen have acquired their fortunes illegally and are to blame for some of their country's economic problems. As a result, some local authorities—exploiting these popular frustrations—may crack down on Lebanese business activities and use the Lebanese as scapegoats for their country's continued economic stagnation. Likely measures include the expulsions of small numbers of Lebanese businessmen, stiffer immigration controls, and increased expropriations. We also believe that in some countries anti-Lebanese rioting [redacted] may erupt. Nevertheless, most, if not all, governments will stop short of expelling the Lebanese en masse, and, in our judgment, Lebanese businessmen will often use their leverage ties to government officials to prevent more than token expropriations of property. [redacted]

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Paralleling developments inside Lebanon, Hizballah probably will expand its influence within the African Lebanese communities. Over the past two years—reflecting events in Lebanon—Hizballah's presence in Africa has grown at the expense of Amal and other Muslim Lebanese factions.

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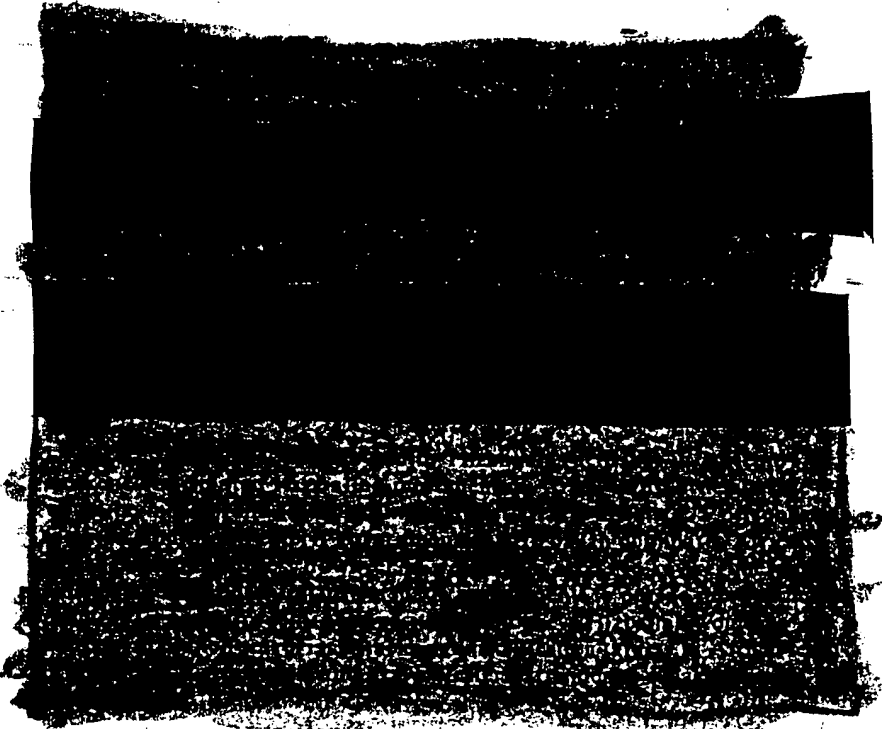
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[redacted] Many Lebanese in Africa are likely to rally to Hizballah's side and provide the movement with financial and material support. A majority of these Lebanese, however, will support Hizballah to protect their remaining businesses and families inside Lebanon. [redacted]

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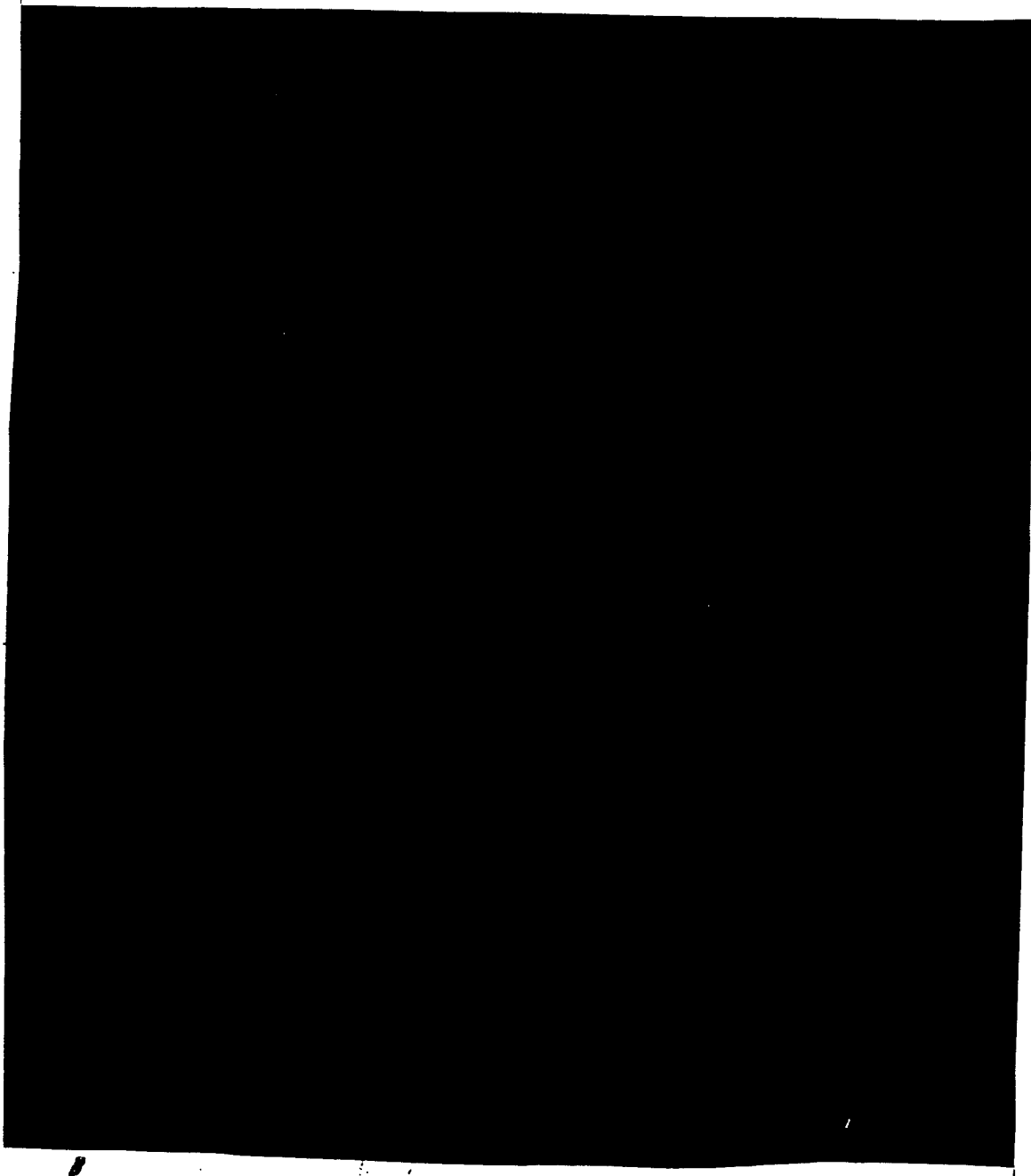
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The Lebanese in Sub-Saharan Africa

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Introduction

Africa's 450,000 Lebanese have long played an important role in the economic life of several West and Central African countries, most notably Ivory Coast, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Zaire.¹ Historically, these Lebanese residents have attempted to keep a low political profile in the host country while establishing a strong economic base as middle-class merchants and businessmen. More recently, however, a surge in Islamic fundamentalism and growing concerns over the worldwide terrorist threat have focused new attention on the Lebanese communities of Africa.

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This paper reviews the longstanding economic and political roles of the Lebanese communities in the region, particularly in West and Central Africa. It also examines the more recent activities of the Muslim Lebanese community, especially the radical, pro-Iranian Hizballah movement. It analyzes the growth of Hizballah in Africa and the potential for terrorism against pro-Western governments and US facilities and citizens in the region.

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The Impact of the Lebanese on African Societies

There has been a Lebanese presence in Africa for generations, although most communities have remained to a large degree isolated and aloof from the local environments.

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the Lebanese almost always marry within their own community.

the focus of Lebanese life generally continues to be directed toward maintaining close ties to the extended family in Lebanon and elsewhere.

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¹ Although there are small groups of Lebanese scattered throughout Sub-Saharan Africa, the communities in West and Central Africa identified in this paper appear to be best organized and have the greatest economic power and political clout.

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Historical Roots of the Lebanese Migration

The Lebanese presence in Africa dates from the late 19th century, when the first migrants from what is now Lebanon arrived in West Africa. Many of these early migrants traveled to Africa because they could not meet the more stringent health requirements of the United States and because travel documents were not needed for the French and British colonies. The pace of migration grew before and during World War I as increasing numbers of these mostly Christian Lebanese fled to avoid conscription into the Army of the Ottoman Empire. Others came in response to British and French officials in West Africa seeking a foreign business class to act as middlemen between colonial administrations and African populations.

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Despite their long presence in the region, most Lebanese in Africa have either chosen or been forced to retain their Lebanese citizenship. The constitutions of Zaire and Liberia, for example, require citizens to be of African descent. In Sierra Leone, Senegal, and Central African Republic, stiff controls and restrictions—which can sometimes be evaded by paying substantial bribes—are designed to limit access to citizenship. Second- and third-generation Lebanese in Ivory Coast are able to attain citizenship with little difficulty.

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The Lebanese communities in Sub-Saharan Africa have been traditionally dominated by Christians, many of whose ancestors arrived in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The politicization of the Lebanese in Africa has been magnified in the last decade by the arrival of numerous Lebanese migrants, almost

all Muslims, and a majority are members of Shia sects that are in practice, or at least potentially, influenced by Iran. In Ivory Coast, for example, b (3) most of the numerous newcomers are relatively young and politicized Shia, with the result that about only 10 percent of the Lebanese community today is Christian, compared with nearly half in the 1960s. Of the 30,000 Lebanese in Sierra Leone, about half have arrived in the last decade, and the majority are impoverished, former street-fighters from Beirut.

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Scope of Economic Interests

The Lebanese in Africa have historically focused on economic pursuits, playing a significant role as merchants and businessmen, and, in a few instances, using their financial power to influence government policies. b (3) this economic influence is most obvious in West Africa, where in some cases relatively small Lebanese communities have been able to wield considerable economic influence with financially hard-pressed regimes. Although most Lebanese are middle-class traders and businessmen, a small number have become multimillionaires, owning import-export houses, manufacturing plants, and agroindustrial complexes. The 300,000-strong Lebanese community in Ivory Coast, for example, is extensively involved in real estate, and owns about 70 percent of the gasoline stations and a quarter of the grocery stores in Abidjan.

b (3) they are also responsible for creating about 20 percent of the new companies registered annually in Ivory Coast and act as crucial middlemen in the coffee and cocoa sectors. In neighboring Liberia, the Lebanese dominate Monrovia's retail sector, owning some 500 firms, including cement and furniture factories, as well as many of the country's restaurants and hotels. b (3)

In Sierra Leone, the Lebanese have continued to dominate the country's destitute economy, despite the departure of their most prominent spokesman, Jamil Muhammed. Throughout the 1970s and early 1980s Jamil helped prop up the regime of then President Stevens by obtaining rice and oil at a time when the government was unable to finance those imports.

b (3) In return, Stevens

turned a blind eye to Jamil's wide-scale business activities, allowing him to exercise relatively unchecked control over the lucrative diamond and fishing industries. Although the current regime has reduced Lebanese activities somewhat—and Jamil has remained outside the country following allegations last year that he funded a coup attempt—the government, desperate for foreign exchange, believes it has little economic choice but to be responsive to other wealthy Lebanese.

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Elsewhere in Africa, b (3) claims that the 7,000-strong Lebanese community in Zaire already controls 40 percent of the commercial businesses in the capital, and that his country is now particularly attractive for new migrants from Lebanon because of Kinshasa's four-year-old economic liberalization program that encourages free enterprise. In the Central African Republic, the 4,800-member Lebanese community has a near monopoly on pharmacies and bakeries and owns several of the largest factories.

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The Lebanese as Local Political Actors

b (3) most Lebanese attempt to avoid direct and visible participation in local politics, economic dominance carries with it considerable political influence. In its most direct form, some Lebanese businessmen provide financial "gifts" to officials—including to heads of state—that enable them to sway government policy and protect their financial interests. Economically powerful Lebanese also often serve as behind-the-scenes advisers to key government officials. b (3) one of President Houphouet-Boigny's closest advisers is Lebanese, and that other Lebanese have woven close friendships with the ruling elite. In Liberia, some influential Lebanese, called the "shadow cabinet" by local observers, offer Doe political advice. Last summer they convinced him to fire his commerce minister, whose revenue-collection campaign had cut into their profits. b (3) In addition, the Lebanese regularly provide financial kickbacks to President Doe.

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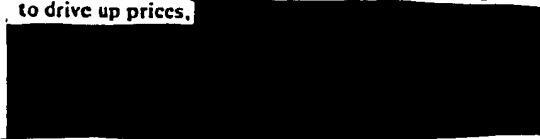
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Anti-Lebanese Sentiment.

Public resentment against the highly visible Lebanese economic presence in West and Central Africa apparently has grown in recent years, although not yet to the level of East African resentment against the Asian business community.² The fact that the Lebanese prefer to send their profits to banks in Europe or to their families or chosen political factions in Lebanon—rather than reinvest in the host country—has long been a key factor in nurturing African resentment. In 1985 the shops of the 3,000-strong Lebanese community in Gabon were vandalized following government allegations that they had cheated on customs duties and taxes. Small-scale anti-Lebanese rioting also has erupted on several occasions in Sierra Leone, most recently in January 1987, when it was widely believed that Lebanese merchants were hoarding rice to drive up prices.

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Anti-Lebanese sentiment also appears to be growing in Ivory Coast, which is now facing a serious recession after more than two decades of sustained economic growth. [redacted] austerity measures and a lower standard of living have fueled animosity toward the more prosperous Lebanese community. In Abidjan, many now see the Lebanese as blocking entry into potentially lucrative commercial areas. Many Lebanese have attributed the increase in robberies in their neighborhoods over the past several years to mounting anti-Lebanese sentiment.

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Government Reactions

Most African governments generally have reacted to public animosity against the Lebanese by taking limited steps to curb both legal and illegal Lebanese business activities while not seriously endangering the privileged Lebanese economic position:

- In December 1986, Zaïre passed a law restricting foreigners from residing in about a quarter of the country. Although ostensibly aimed at all foreigners,

² In the 1970s, Idi Amin in Uganda expelled most of the Asian community in a measure to gain popular support. The Asian community in East Africa—particularly in Malawi and Kenya—has recently come under public criticism over its dominant role in the economy.

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the law was mainly targeted at the Lebanese involved in coffee, diamond, and precious metal smuggling. To date, enforcement has been rather sporadic, and Lebanese businessmen often have co-opted local authorities.

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- In the Central African Republic, government officials have privately said that they plan to encourage more actively black African participation in some of the businesses dominated by the Lebanese. We believe Bangui may quietly take steps to grant bureaucratic favors, such as facilitating licenses and easing access to imports, to its native African citizens in direct competition with Lebanese.

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- Likewise, the Senegalese Government thus far has limited its actions to quietly pressuring Lebanese businessmen in Dakar—who traditionally have hired family members or other kinsmen—to employ more black Africans.

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- Several African governments have occasionally resorted to limited expulsions in an effort to intimidate the Lebanese and bolster the image that their governments will not tolerate illegal business activities. Both Liberia and Sierra Leone expelled a few Lebanese in 1987 as part of widely publicized anti-corruption campaigns. Such actions almost always are short lived, however, and rarely include the most powerful Lebanese economic interests.

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Although African frustration with the economic role of the Lebanese is likely to remain high—occasionally breaking out in violence—most governments almost certainly will continue to take measured responses that stop short of wholesale expulsions.

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although the public strongly resents the Lebanese mercantile class, the government realizes that it plays a vital and probably irreplaceable role in the economy. In our view, many African leaders also realize that large expulsions would not solve their financial problems, and that the rapid transfer of assets to African hands would bring few economic gains. In

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addition, the financial kickbacks African officials receive from Lebanese businessmen also mitigate against major expulsions, in our view. For their part, wealthy Lebanese are well practiced in protecting their interests, and they recognize that resentment and occasional anti-Lebanese outbursts are simply part of the "cost of doing business" in Africa.

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Growing Politicization of the Lebanese Community

The increasing migration of Lebanese Muslims to Africa is heightening the politicization of the community. The Muslims—unlike their Christian counterparts, who have generally attempted to maintain a low political profile—appear increasingly willing to transplant their sectarian divisions and political struggles to African soil. The Muslims themselves are generally either relatively conservative Sunni or more radical Shia.

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Amal's Activities

Members of Amal, a Shia sectarian movement present in most West African countries, generally have sought to keep their political role to a minimum, preferring instead to concentrate almost entirely on raising money for the parent organization in Beirut. Amal has successfully exploited the Shia business community along the West African coast by threatening retribution against their families in Lebanon if "donations" are not paid. In 1986, for example, Amal collected \$1 million in donations from Nigerian Lebanese, \$500,000 from the Ivorian community, and \$400,000 from their kinsmen in Liberia. Fearful of

* Some Lebanese in Africa belong to the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP), which supports Syria's permanent control of Lebanon. Their activity, however, appears to be limited to Liberia, where they number about 500, and to an unknown number in Nigeria. The Druze—who generally are from the Ash Shuf region of Lebanon—are active in Liberia and Nigeria; in Lebanon, the Druze have collaborated with the Palestinians and fought with Amal. The Druze are neither Christian nor Muslim; their religion is partly a historical derivative of Shia Islam, but they reject the prophethood of Muhammad.

expulsion.

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The Politics of Hizballah and Amal

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The Shia are Lebanon's largest religious group—40 percent of the population, according to our estimates—but historically have been the most economically and politically disadvantaged.

Before Amal—meaning hope—was officially founded in 1975, it had existed for several years as a clandestine organization. The initial political message of its founder, al-Sadr, centered on the need to organize the majority of the "disinherited and dispossessed" lower-class Shias. Amal became steadfastly anti-Libyan following the disappearance of al-Sadr.

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[REDACTED]
Hizballah's followers seek to eliminate US, Israeli, and other Western influence from Lebanon, challenge Amal's leadership in the predominately Shia areas of Beirut, the northern Al Biqa' (Bekaa Valley), and the south, and ultimately set up an Islamic republic along Iranian lines.

[REDACTED] while on a trip to Tripoli in August 1978.

[REDACTED]
become increasingly fragmented in recent years. Major defections of Amal fighters to Hizballah have continued to plague Amal, whose size remains fluid because its youth can be bribed to shift loyalties. Personal rivalries and political frictions pervade the organization, and generational and class differences are alienating the younger and more religious-oriented Lebanese Shia—who bear Amal's arms—from the more secular-oriented Amal leadership. Within Africa, Amal focuses its efforts on fundraising activities.

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Coping With a Terrorist Threat

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Hizballah's Links to Tehran and Tripoli

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Outlook and Implications for the United States

In our view, the Lebanese will continue to play a key role in the economies of West and Central Africa. Although public resentment against the visible Lebanese presence is likely to remain a constant feature of political life in West and Central African countries—sometimes flaring in public and violent protest—we believe that the pervasive economic grip and extensive links to government officials of the Lebanese will be sufficient in the near term to protect their interests. Although African governments will continue to pledge allegiance to "Africanization" programs that in part seek to curb the economic dominance of the Lebanese, we believe most will content themselves with taking

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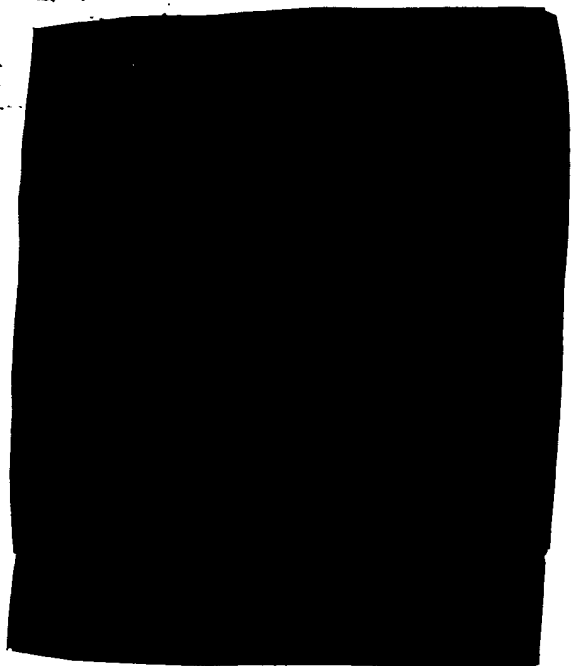
only limited steps, such as expelling small numbers of Lebanese businessmen or expropriating some properties, publicly attacking illegal business activities, promising stiffer migration controls, and pressuring Lebanese merchants to hire more African workers.

local Iranian missions are likely to focus attention on the African Muslim communities in West Africa, especially in pro-Western Liberia and Sierra Leone. They are also likely to expand their inroads among Africa's Christian and animist populations. Although unlikely, in our judgment, to win many religious converts, their themes may have a more popular appeal as a counterweight to Western influences.

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We believe, nonetheless, that in a few African countries the government and public reaction against Lebanese influences may be more severe. For example, when Ivory Coast's 86-year-old President dies, the new leadership is unlikely to be as tolerant of Sub-Saharan Africa's largest Lebanese community and will probably seek to curb its activities. We also believe growing violence against the Lebanese communities is likely as Africans begin increasingly to blame the immigrants for their own hardships. Some violence, moreover, may be encouraged by local authorities to deflect attention from the failure of their governments to improve living standards.



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Within the Lebanese community itself, competition between Amal and Hizballah for the allegiance of Africa's Lebanese will remain intense, although both are likely to try and avoid violent confrontations. The evolution of the relationship between Amal and Hizballah in Africa almost certainly will be determined in large measure by events in Lebanon. To the extent that Amal is able to maintain influence in Lebanon, its probable objective in Africa is likely to remain fundraising rather than promoting its version of Islam. Should Amal falter, however, and Hizballah gain the upper hand inside Lebanon, we believe that a majority of Lebanese in Africa, seeking to protect remaining family and business interests in Lebanon, probably would believe they had no choice but to side with Hizballah.

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Regardless of its small size, we believe Hizballah—sometimes acting in concert with Iran—will continue to seek the spread of its brand of fundamentalist Islamic revolution for Africa. Both Hizballah and

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Appendix

The Lebanese Presence in Sub-Saharan Africa

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Cameroon

Some 600 Lebanese live in Cameroon, most of whom settled there at the beginning of the century. All the Lebanese are entrepreneurs and play an important role in the Cameroonian economy.

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In December 1987, however, 26 Lebanese were temporarily detained for "illegal activities," including currency trafficking.

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Central African Republic

Relations between the government and the Lebanese community of some 4,800 continue to be tense following the hijacking in July 1987 of the Air Afrique flight. At the behest of Paris, in August Bangui expelled 21 Lebanese suspected of terrorist activities, some of them to France. In addition, a special session of the sole ruling party in August called on the government to expel Lebanese nationals whose activities jeopardize state security.

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Congo

President Sassou dislikes the Lebanese business community of about 200 and would like to see Africans take over their commercial enterprises. Some also believe that Sassou may look for an opportunity to expel them.

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Nonetheless, in an effort to protect their interests, some Lebanese have forged close ties to some key officials.

Gabon

Some 3,000 Lebanese—mostly Shia—reside in Libreville, and most are merchants.

Ghana

Relations between the Rawlings regime and the Lebanese community of about 3,000 now appear good, following a tense period in the early 1980s. In 1979, after Rawlings seized power for the first time, he publicly accused the Lebanese of seeking his murder and threatened to expel them. In addition, he blamed the Lebanese for many of the country's economic ills, accusing them of being "economic parasites" because of their illegal market dealings. Most of the Lebanese arrived before Ghana attained independence in 1958. The largest group is Sunni, with Druze, Christian Maronites, and Shia also represented. About half of the Lebanese migrants are now naturalized Ghanaian citizens.

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There is some public animosity toward the Lebanese, however, because of their domination of the timber and import-substitution industries. The Muslim and Christian Lebanese live in harmony.

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Guinea

At independence in 1958 the Lebanese community in Guinea numbered 18,500, but has declined since to an estimated 800. President Toure's mismanagement and repression in the 1960s fueled a migration to other West African countries, particularly Ivory Coast, according to Embassy reporting. A number of the remaining Lebanese, however, are now involved in the lucrative diamond smuggling industry. Despite Guinea's recent economic reforms, which encourage private enterprise, [REDACTED] no inflow of young, unemployed Lebanese.

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Mauritania

Most of the 600 Lebanese are Sunni Muslim, but a small pro-Hizballah sect operates and distributes literature, [REDACTED]

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Ivory Coast

The large Lebanese presence of some 300,000 in Ivory Coast is all-pervasive, from small storekeepers in rural villages to the largest importers, [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] The Shia, who compose some 65 percent of the Lebanese community, live mostly in Abidjan, where they own and operate numerous retail stores. Both public and private opposition to the Lebanese has grown over the past few years.

Nigeria

The majority of the 15,000 Lebanese are Shia. Some 5,000 live in Kano, controlling 80 percent of the factories there, [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] Anti-Lebanese sentiment became public for the first time in 1986, with the publication of two "open letters" in the semiofficial press. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]

Senegal

Ninety percent of the 20,000 Lebanese are Shia, including some Hizballah, but the majority have publicly denounced Khomeini's teachings to protect their economic interests. [REDACTED]

Liberia

About 60 percent of the Lebanese community of about 10,000 is now Shia, some 25 percent is Christian, and 15 percent Sunni. We conservatively estimate active membership of the Amal at 500; the Syrian Socialist National Party at about 500; and of Hizballah at 300 to 400. [REDACTED]

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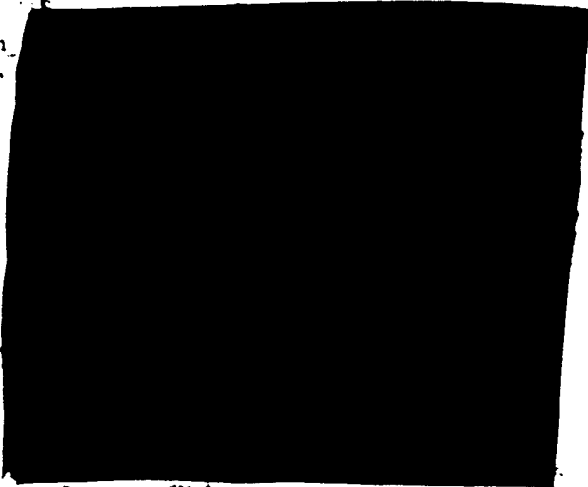
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[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

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[Redacted] Relations between the Shia and Christians occasionally have been tense, and President Diouf has privately warned Lebanese leaders that, if they caused any trouble, he would expel them. [Redacted]



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Sierra Leone



Lebanese Christians among the Lebanese community of some 30,000 are likely to cooperate with the government to report on the activities of both the local Shia and Iranian diplomats. Nevertheless, we believe Sierra Leone's lax security apparatus will encourage Lebanese to use Freetown as a transit point to other parts of West Africa as well as to Europe, facilitating arms and possibly drug smuggling.

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Togo
About half of the 500 or so Lebanese are Christians. [Redacted] Most of the Lebanese community is involved in the export-import business.

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