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LEBANON

## EXAMINATION OF POLITICAL FACTIONS

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[Text] LEBANON'S three million people have produced a complex mosaic of political organisations and alliances. Sixteen religious sects and nearly 40 political parties have spawned more than 20 separate armed militias. The complicated patterns of loyalty make it extraordinarily difficult to keep abreast of political developments.

Lebanon's president is Elias Sarkis, a Christian who has remained in office since 1976. Sarkis is said to be backed by the Christian majority of Lebanese, but he has no organised support, no party or militia.

Prime Minister Shafiq Wazzen is head of Lebanon's Islamic Council. His cabinet reflects the traditional 'confessional' system, which allocates administrative positions to communal groups according to the pattern laid down in Lebanon's National Charter of 1943. Under this system the Christian communities dominated the administration, the judiciary and the army.

Sarkis's government enjoys only limited authority in Lebanon, for rival factions exercise de facto political control over most of the country. Where the government attempts to exercise its own authority it is through the Lebanese National Army. Lebanon's army largely disintegrated under the pressures of the civil war in 1975-1976, and this force under Victor Khoury is a product of the Army Law of 1979 which aimed to create a strong, independent body responsible only to the president and parliament. In addition, the government can call upon the Deuxième Bureau, which carries out certain policing functions.

The most effective nationally-organised force is that of the Arab Deterrent Force, established in 1976, and now largely composed of Syrian regular troops. The ADF

controls much of the environs of Beirut, the Bekaa Valley and Eastern Lebanon. Through the Higher Security Committee it coordinates with the forces of the Palestinian movement and those of the Lebanese left. The ADF can call upon some 20,000 men.

In the south a further external force — the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (Unifil) — passively patrols a 'neutral zone'.

Lebanon's political parties proper can be divided into three groups: the organisations of the Lebanese National Movement (the LNM), those of the Lebanese Front and a number of independent groups.

The LNM claims to speak for all the people of Lebanon — it does not differentiate on a confessional basis, although in practice it draws its support largely from the poorer layers of Lebanese society, and therefore principally from Muslims.

The LNM originated in the loose coalition of socialist, communist and Nasserist organisations formed under the Druze leader, Kemal Jumblatt, in 1969, and is committed to economic and social reform and to support for the Palestinian movement.

In 1972 the coalition achieved some electoral success, and in 1973 undertook its first military operations against Lebanese army units attacking Palestinian camps. In 1975 a formal alliance was declared, announcing a 'programme for reform'. This expressed opposition to the confessional system and to the conduct of the administration, judiciary and army.

In 1976 a Central Political Committee was formed, headed by Jumblatt, and later that year it started to liaise with the Palestinian organisations. Its executive committee includes representatives of all the major organisations of the LNM.

The movement cooperates with the Arab Deterrent Force, and organises locally in West Beirut, the coastal cities and the Bekaa Valley, those areas not under right-wing control. Its daily paper is *Al Wasat*. The LNM coordinates 13 organisations, of which the most important are:

The Progressive Socialist Party, formed in 1949, also under Jumblatt. The PSP advocates Arab unity and a non-marxist form of socialism, being a member of the Socialist International group of parliamentary parties.

Although a wealthy landowner, Jumblatt occupies a special place on the Lebanese left, being the key figure in drawing together the alliance. On his death in 1977, the PLO announced: 'Jumblatt's death is for us as terrible as that of Nasser.' He was succeeded by his son, Walid.

The PSP experienced one serious setback, when it failed to coordinate its planned National Front of Lebanese parties with Syria in 1977. The PSP has an almost exclusive following in and around Jumblatt's village of Mukhtara in the Shouf, south of Beirut, and among the Druze communities of the central mountains.

The Independent Nasserist Movement is popularly known by the name of its armed wing, *Al Mourabitoun*, which emerged in 1975. The *Mourabitoun* organise under Nasser's slogan of 'Freedom, Socialism, Unity', and aim 'to provide charismatic leadership — Nasserism is not dead'. They are strongest in Beirut, having a large following among the poor of the Sunni Muslim population. The *Mourabitoun* leader is Ibrahim Qlayat.

The Syrian Social Nationalist Party was formed in 1932 as the *Parti Populaire Syrien*. The SSNP stands for the unity of geographical Syria, including Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon, today's state of Syria, and Cyprus — 'the Fertile Crescent with Cyprus as its star'. The SSNP was made illegal during the 1940s and again in the 1960s after a failed coup in 1961, which led to years of intense repression.

Its rather unusual development — drawing on both nationalist and socialist traditions — also led the SSNP during the 1950s into an alliance with Camille Chamoun's NLP against the Nasserists. The SSNP emphasises its expressly secular politics: 'We fight confessionalism — we are a 100 per cent lay party.' It draws its members from all sections of the population, having a large number of supporters in the

Phalange-dominated areas of Mount Lebanon, and a successful military wing still in action in the Metn mountains, within the Phalange stronghold. Its president is Inam Raad.

The Lebanese Communist Party was founded in 1932. Declared illegal in the mid-1950s, the LCP grew rapidly after re-acquiring legal status in 1970. Unlike most communist parties in the Middle East, the LCP engages in armed struggle. It has substantial support outside Lebanon in Tripoli, Sidon and Tyre, and though most of the membership is Muslim, many leading members are of Greek Orthodox origin. The LCP's secretary is George Hawi, and its daily paper is *Al Nida* ('The Call').

The Communist Action Organisation was formed in 1970 by a merger of the Organisation of Socialist Lebanese, led by Mohsen Ibrahim, and a group of independent socialists led by Fawwaz Trabulsi.

The organisations of the Lebanese Front are dominated by the Phalange, or *Kataeb*, which was formed in November 1936 under the leadership of the Maronite businessman, Pierre Gemayel. It was originally known as the 'Phalange Libanaise', after the Phalange or militia units associated with European rightwing organisations in the 1930s.

The Phalange claims to represent the interests of the Christian community, and 96 per cent of its members are Christian, most of them Maronite. It argues for a return to the system prevailing before the civil war — Gemayel describes the 1943 constitution which guaranteed Maronite privileges as having been 'fashioned by geniuses'.

The Phalange is adamantly opposed to the presence of the Palestinians in Lebanon. Gemayel describes them as 'a fifth column'. Fighting under the slogan 'God, Family and Country', the Phalange regards its dispute with the PLO and the Lebanese left as 'a struggle against international communism'. It believes in the 'Phoenician destiny' of Lebanon, seeing the Christian population as different from and essentially superior to the Arabs of the region.

Gemayel, now 74, a member of parliament and an ex-president of Lebanon, remains the political head of the Phalange. His son, Bashir, is its aggressive military leader, commanding a well-trained militia (estimated as being at least 12,000 strong), armed and supplied principally by Israel. His eldest son, Amin, is also a leading member. Like his father, he often seems embarrassed by Bashir's megalomania.

violence'.

The Phalange controls the Maronite enclave occupying most of the northerly Mount Lebanon area. Its headquarters are at Jounieh.

The National Liberal Party, *Al Ahrar*, is led by a Maronite lawyer and businessman, Camille Chamoun. It was founded in the mid-1940s after Chamoun broke from Raymond Edde's Constitutional Bloc. Chamoun seeks an alliance with 'whoever allows the Christians to rule'. The NLP is committed to 'bringing the Palestinians to heel' and 'distributing' them among the Arab states. It wants 'a state based on Christian democracy'.

The NLP has long opposed the Syrian presence in Lebanon and is an especially vocal supporter of Haddad's Christian enclave in the south. The Chamoun family's traditional base was among the Maronite population of the town of Damour and the coastal area of the Shouf, south of Beirut.

The Zghorta Liberation Army of Suleiman Franjeh draws upon traditional support in and around the northern town of Zghorta. Franjeh was president of Lebanon during the civil war. Though he has cooperated with the other rightwing organisations, Franjeh has opposed Phalange plans for the partition of Lebanon and for collaboration with Israel. He enjoys good relations with Syria.

In January 1976 the organisations of the right formed a Front for Liberty and Man, and two months later announced the formation of the Lebanese Front (LF), creating a unified command, and declaring a general mobilisation of all Lebanon's Maronites. The LF was based upon the Phalange, the NLP of Chamoun, and Suleiman's Zghorta Liberation Army. It also included the small Maronite Order of Monks under Father Sharbel Qassis, the Guardians of the Cedars under Fuad Chemali and Etian Saqr, and the Maronite League of Shahr Abu Sleiman.

The organisations of the LF cooperated militarily during the civil war, when it was estimated that their joint backing from Israel reached some \$100m, but by 1978 the alliance had begun to break up. In May 1978 Franjeh's ZLA withdrew, and one month later members of Franjeh's family and 30 supporters were killed by the Phalange in the first of a series of incidents that led to a bloody vendetta. In 1978 and repeatedly in 1980 Phalange and NLP fighters also clashed in open battles over

territorial control within their Maronite enclave. By 1981 the Phalange had established its hegemony over the rightist forces.

Today the nominal president of the Lebanese Front is Camille Chamoun, but real power lies with the commander of the unified military wing, Bashir Gemayel.

An undeclared wing of the Lebanese Front is the militia of Saad Haddad. Haddad — a major in the Lebanese Army during the civil war — declared a 'State of Free Lebanon' in the area of the south bordering Israel, carrying with him a large section of regular Maronite troops. After the invasion of 1978 Israel put its 'security belt' under Haddad's control. This enclave is now thoroughly integrated into Israel economically, and is de facto a military extension of Israel northwards into Lebanon.

Although a participant in the Joint Committee for Military Cooperation, along with the PLO, the LNM and ADF, Amal, 'Hope', is a distinct movement. It is supported by many of the Shiite Muslim population, and has replaced the traditional Shiite leaders like Kemal Assad, with the backing of the clergy of the Shiite Higher Council.

Amal has enjoyed a swift rise to its present prominence. It was founded by Imam Musa Sadr on the basis of his Movement of the Deprived, which expressed the growing resentment of the many Shiites from South Lebanon who have traditionally been the most underprivileged in Lebanese society. Sadr, who had come to Lebanon from Iran in 1957, disappeared in mysterious circumstances in 1978. Assuring his 'return' is still a priority for Amal, whose present leader is the lawyer Nabih Berri.

Amal was formed with the support of the Syrians, the LNM and the Palestinian movement, but today Amal, mistrusting its secularism and socialist ideals, distances itself from the left. Although Amal's charter declares a formal support for the Palestinians and militant opposition to Israel, Sadr insisted to the PLO's Yasser Arafat that 'Jerusalem will be liberated only at the hands of believers'. During the civil war Amal played no military role.

Today Amal has some thousands of men under arms, especially in the south and among the 300,000 displaced Shiites of south and west Beirut. There have been many clashes with the PLO and Lebanese left, which have encouraged both the Israelis and the Lebanese right to look for agreements with Amal on the basis of a

common commitment to the partitioning of Lebanon on a confessional basis.

Fitting into none of these categories, the small militias of the traditional Sunni Muslim leaders are of some significance. They represent the continuing influence of rural landowners who until the civil war headed the official organisations of the Sunni community. Most prominent are the Reform Pioneers of Saeb Salam, and the supporters of Rashid Karami.

When fully mobilised it is estimated that the Lebanese militias, together with those of the Palestinian movement, are able to rally some 100,000 fighters — one for every 30 of the Lebanese population.

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