



Approving a President: Hezbollah and the Lebanese Political System

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This article examines the current presidential deadlock in Lebanon, and the important role Hezbollah has played. The ties between Syria, Iran, and Hezbollah influence the outcome of the election and have the potential of deep repercussions for stability in Lebanon and the region as a whole. In light of the growing instability attributed to the Syrian civil war, the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, and the deterioration of political stability, it is vital that the Lebanese deadlock situation be rectified as soon as possible. This article outlines the possible economic, political and security effects of the ongoing presidential deadlock, and analyzes Hezbollah's role.

* The views expressed in this publication are solely those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the International Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT).

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INTRODUCTION

Lebanon has been in a state of political paralysis since the end of Michel Suleiman's term as president in May of 2014. The current parliament has been unable, or unwilling, to identify and elect a candidate that garners the necessary number of votes for more than twenty-five attempted elections. The current standstill has been the longest in the history of the country and largely attributed to the unsettled civil war in Syria and the instability in the region.

The following paper will consist of three major parts. Part one will give relevant background information to set the complex contextualization of Lebanese politics in the scope of the country's history. The second part will outline the current Presidential deadlock that has paralyzed the country, including a profile on the current fifteen candidates that have their name in the running for election. The third and final part will attempt to forecast the future of Lebanon in three separate contingencies: the election of a pro-Hezbollah government, the election of an anti-Hezbollah government and finally what will happen if the deadlock continues in the current atmosphere of instability and shifting power dynamics in the region. The final contingency will break down the influence of the elections on the political, economic and security of Lebanon considering the influence of Iran and the Syrian conflict, especially if the Assad regime loses power.

The land of Cedars has been in a constant state of conflict since the French occupation ended. The small country has faced down many invaders and occupiers, a civil war, and multiple years of violent acts terrorism. Is a peaceful resolution to the current political standoff possible? Can Hezbollah maintain autonomy and support within Lebanon as it continues to fight outside battles? The Syrian refugees have become a drain on the Lebanese economy and the lack of a Commander in Chief has hurt Lebanon's ability to address the increasing number of Sunni terrorists using Lebanon's Syrian border as a staging area for attacks and using the refugee camps as recruiting grounds.

BRIEF HISTORY OF LEBANON

The League of Nations mandated Lebanon and Syria to the French after World War I, and it remained under the control of the French from 1920 until independence in 1936¹. Political and civil instability has defined Lebanon since its inception, especially after independence. The most recent political standoff that has gripped the country is not the first presidential deadlock². In the short history of the independent country of Lebanon, there have been three presidential deadlocks, including the current situation. Each of these were during a time of crisis within the country whether it was civil war or guerilla attacks on different institutions. The Lebanese political system assigns certain positions of power to representatives from the Maronite, Shia and Sunni populations in the country in order to level the political playing field³. This setup was meant to create a governing body that does not allow one part of the population to oppress the other parts because each group has equal representation in the government.

The country's population is made up of 54% Muslim (27% Shia, 27% Sunni) and 40.5% Christian with a heavy Maronite presence, and this distribution dictates the power structure within the country in order to have equal representation politically to avoid the sectarian tensions that could cause civil war⁴. At the top of the power structure there is a Maronite Christian President, a Shiite Muslim Speaker and a presidentially appointed Sunni Muslim Prime Minister that hold the majority of the decision making power⁵.

¹ Olmert, Yossi. 1996. "A False Dilemma? Syria and Lebanon's Independence during the Mandatory Period", *Middle Eastern Studies* 32(3): 41-73. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4283807>.

² Library of Congress – Federal Research Division. Edited by Thomas Collelo, December 1987. Accessed June 2015. <http://www.ghazi.de/independ.html>

³ Bordenkircher, Eric. 2013. Kings, Queens, Rooks and Pawns: Towards Deciphering the Lebanese Political Chessboard. *Review of Middle Eastern Studies* 47 (2): 202-209. <http://re5qy4sb7x.search.serialssolutions.com/?genre=article&issn=21513481&title=Review%20of%20Middle%20East%20Studies&volume=47&issue=2&date=20131201&atitle=Kings%2C%20Queens%2C%20Rooks%20and%20Pawns%3A%20Towards%20Deciphering%20the%20Lebanese%20Political%20Chessboard.&spage=202&sid=EBSCO:hlh&pid=%3Cauthors%3EBordenkircher%2C%20Eric%3C/authors%3E%3Cui%3E101064075%3C/ui%3E%3Cdate%3E20131201%3C/date%3E%3Cdb%3Ehlh%3C/db%3E>

⁴ Indexmundi.com. Accessed December 22, 2015.

http://www.indexmundi.com/lebanon/demographics_profile.html.

⁵ BBC.com. Accessed December 22, 2015. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-14647311>.

The parliament, ministers in the Council of Ministers, and the High level civil and defense service position are all split up on a confessional basis as well. Parliament elects the President through a minimum of 86 votes (2/3rds), or if there is a second vote in the same session then a candidate only needs 51%⁶. The President is the guarantor of the application of the constitution, head of the state, and commander in chief of the armed forces⁷. In the absence of a president, all of his decisions go to his cabinet and any decision must be approved by all cabinet members unanimously. The Confessional government, meant to be a temporary solution to the power dynamic between Lebanon's religious sects, has not been reformed or reordered and it continues to create tensions between the Sunni, Shia and Christian populations. This system has faced a large amount of scrutiny from the Lebanese public and the international community, and many of the current candidates have reforms built in to their platforms.

The Civil war broke out in 1975 due to sectarian violence that plunged the country into chaos for thirty years. A year after the conflict began, Syria entered Lebanon in a claim to promote peace and support the existing Lebanese government⁸. UN Peacekeepers including US, French and British troops also entered the theater in 1978. Israel also entered into the fray due to the significant number of attacks that were being staged in Southern Lebanon and carried out in Israel. As the war progressed and orderly society degraded, the UN and the US called to remove their troops after multiple embassy bombings and attacks on personnel early in 1984⁹. Outgoing President Gemayel placed power in the hands of Maronite General Michel Auon, who ruled over Lebanon until January of 1990 when Syrian air force attacked the Presidential Palace

⁶ Central Intelligence Agency. Accessed June, 2015. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/le.html>.

⁷ *The Lebanese Constitution*. Promulgated May 23, 1926 with its amendments. Updated 1995. <http://www.presidency.gov.lb/English/LebaneseSystem/Documents/Lebanese%20Constitution.pdf>.

⁸ The Encyclopaedia Britannica. Accessed June 2015. <http://www.britannica.com/place/Lebanon/Civil-war#ref386586>

⁹ Zenko, Micah. 2014. "When Reagan Cut and Run: The forgotten history of when America boldly abandoned ship in the Middle East" *Foreign Policy* February 7. <http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/02/07/when-reagan-cut-and-run/>.

and Auon fled to France¹⁰. This action was the official end of the Lebanese civil war, and left the rebuilding of trust and cooperation to the nation.

The Taif agreement that called each militia group to disband, except for Hezbollah, was made in Saudi Arabia in 1991¹¹. The Syrian army remained in Lebanon, acting as an occupational force that exercised control over the society and referred to Lebanon as Western Syria, even after the end of the civil war. The building ill will towards the Syrian occupation came to a head when ex-Prime Minister Rafik Hariri was assassinated in a car bombing that has since been proven to have strong ties to known members of Hezbollah. Hariri was an instrumental player in the push to disarm Hezbollah and his assassination sparked anti-Syrian protests and rallies nationwide. Soon after the anti-Syria movement began, the Syrian army pulled out of Lebanon in 2005, leaving the country to stand on its own for the first time since the outbreak of civil war in 1975¹². This act in and of itself opened up a power vacuum that needed to be filled, and for all intents and purposes Hezbollah and the Lebanese army both vie to fill the role.

Syria's expulsion from Lebanon did not end the violence in the country. In 2006, members of Hezbollah kidnapped two Israeli soldiers which renewed active conflict between Israel and Hezbollah for a thirty-four-day war, now referred to as the Second Lebanon War, which severely damaged southern Lebanon's infrastructure and caused high casualties in the region. Slowly but surely, the pro-Western March 14th party gained power in parliament and began the unity government, but lost traction when the government briefly collapsed due to the resignation of all Hezbollah representatives and associated ministers in 2011, just before the Syrian conflict began. In order to rebuild the government quickly, members of Hezbollah dominated a newly appointed

¹⁰ The Encyclopaedia Britannica. Accessed June 2015.

<http://www.britannica.com/place/Lebanon/Civil-war#ref386586>.

¹¹ Lebanon Profile- Timeline. 2015. *BBC*, April 29. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-14649284>.

¹² "Syrian Troops Leave Lebanese Soil." 2005. *BBC*, April 26. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/4484325.stm.

cabinet and used their power to hide the accused murderers of Rafik Hariri¹³. In the summer of 2012, violence from Syria began to overflow into Beirut and Tripoli with clashes between Sunni and Alawite factions. The Last President, Michel Suleiman, was elected after a six month deadlock that only ended with armed conflict in Beirut and other cities around Lebanon, and now, after his term, Lebanon is facing another Presidential deadlock that has already lasted more than a year with no clear front runner¹⁴.

The Syrian conflict's spill over started a new chapter of chaos for Lebanon. By April of 2014, there were over one million refugees in Lebanon, making one out of every five people in Lebanon a refugee, and that number continues to grow¹⁵. Militants fighting in Syria began staging their attacks and recruiting members in the Lebanese border lands as the Syrian conflict escalated and continued. On top of the internal sectarian issues, the spillover also pulled Hezbollah into the conflict, garnering support for Assad from Hezbollah's leader, Hassan Nasrallah, in public declarations of victory in Syria stating, "It is our battle, and we are up to it"¹⁶. 2013 and 2014 saw a series of bombings, assassinations and attacks in and around Lebanon as Islamic militant groups such as the Islamic State approached the border and recruited from within Lebanon and the continued actions of Hezbollah within Syria. As of May 2014, the country entered its third Presidential deadlock, creating a potent power vacuum at a time when the instability in the region is only intensifying. This current situation is stretching into the longest period Lebanon has faced without an acting President, and the stakes continue to get higher as the violence in the region increases.

¹³ Blanford, Nicholas. 2010. "Did Hezbollah Kill Hariri?" *Foreign Policy*, April 1. <http://foreignpolicy.com/2010/04/01/did-hezbollah-kill-hariri-2/>.

¹⁴ Varzi, Changzi M. 2015. "Lebanon: One Year, No President, Many Problems." *Al-Araby*, May 27. <http://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/features/2015/5/28/lebanon-one-year-no-president-many-problems>.

¹⁵ United Nation High Commissioner for Refugees. 2014, "Syrian Refugees in Lebanon Surpass One Million" *UNHCR.org* April 3. <http://www.unhcr.org/533c15179.html>.

¹⁶ Barnard, Anne. 2013. "Hezbollah Commits to an All-Out Fight to Save Assad" *The New York Times* May 25. <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/26/world/middleeast/syrian-army-and-hezbollah-step-up-raids-on-rebels.html? r=0>.

Current Governmental Power Distribution

Operating within this structure are three main factions that have the strongest inter-party relationships and most influence on the government as a whole: the March 14th coalition, the March 8th coalition and Walid Jumblatt's bloc and within each of these coalitions there are multiple political parties operating with different interests.

The March 8th coalition is pro-Syria and by extension pro-Hezbollah¹⁷. The Hezbollah political party is a part of the March 8th alliance and it stands in opposition to the March 14th coalition, an anti-Syrian and anti-Hezbollah group. Hezbollah has historically reacted with threats and violence to any challenge to their *modus operandi*. Most notably and most recently, a United Nations investigation and tribunal that used cell phone meta data to track an organized group of conspirators tied the group to the assassination of ex-Prime Minister Rafik Hariri¹⁸. These conspirators had strong ties to Hezbollah and have been tried in absentia for their suicide bomb attack that killed many people¹⁹. The assassination has been tied to Hariri's work on UN Resolution 1559 that ordered Hezbollah to disarm and Syria to leave Lebanon, which challenges the autonomy and activities of the group. The group answered this challenge with violence, which contradicts their public persona defined by their pledge to protect and serve the Lebanese people, regardless of religion. It also demonstrates their true goal as gaining power and control rather than caring for the welfare of all Lebanese people, not just Shia.

BRIEF HISTORY OF HEZBOLLAH

Hezbollah declared their official existence in the Open Letter of 1985, in which they detailed their ideology and methodology. Their three main focuses

¹⁷Nassif, Nicolas. 2014. "Lebanese Presidential Elections: Looking for a President, Not Just a Candidate." *Al-Akhbar*, April 24. <http://english.al-akhbar.com/node/19522>.

¹⁸Bergman, Ronen. 2015. "The Hezbollah Connection." *The New York Times*, February 10. http://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/15/magazine/the-hezbollah-connection.html?_r=0.

¹⁹Ibid.

were Jihad, belief in Islam, and the jurisdiction of the Jurist Theologian²⁰. The organization was founded as a militia, fighting in the Lebanese civil war, hoping for the expulsion of all western forces from Lebanese land and the establishment of an Islamic State based off of the Iranian model²¹. Even before their official coming out memorandum, Hezbollah had been actively carrying out terror operations in Lebanon including the bombing of the US embassy in 1983 and the US-French contingents of the Multinational Force stationed in Lebanon during the civil war, killing 241 American Marines²². Hezbollah's Shia ideology immediately created close ties between the organization and Iran, who trained, funded, and advised Hezbollah as it grew in strength and scale²³.

Even in its early years, Hezbollah was not only perpetrating acts of violence, they were also fostering an efficient and effective social services program. The organization institutionalized itself and galvanized support for its cause through impressive social welfare organizations and religious organizations, doing everything from healthcare and trash collection to funding schools and cultural centers and electricity²⁴.



Many members of the Shia community turned first to Hezbollah, and second to

²⁰ Council on Foreign Relations. Accessed July, 2015. <http://www.cfr.org/terrorist-organizations-and-networks/open-letter-hizballah-program/p30967>.

²¹ Council on Foreign Relations. Edited by Jonathan Masters and Zachary Laub. Accessed June, 2015. <http://www.cfr.org/lebanon/hezbollah-k-hizballah-hizbullah/p9155>.

²² Wiegand, Krista E. "Reformation of a Terrorist Group: Hezbollah as a Lebanese Political Party." *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 32 (8): 669-680. Doi: 10.1080/10576100903039320. <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/10576100903039320> 2009.

²³ Levitt, Matthew. 2005. "Hezbollah Finances: Funding the Party of God" *Terrorism Financing and State Responses: A comparative Perspective* February. <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/hezbollah-finances-funding-the-party-of-god>.

²⁴ Ibid.

the Lebanese government during the civil war on to present day. With this type of influence on civil society, Hezbollah had to make a tough decision about transitioning into a political party after the cessation of the civil war. In 1990, Hezbollah demonstrated its adaptability by reworking their organizational goals to fit in to the status quo of the Lebanese confessional system. The smooth structural transition was made easier by support from the Lebanese population and by the omission of Hezbollah's military wing from the Taif agreement's call for disarmament.

Hezbollah's transition from terror organization to legitimate political party was eased, considerably, by its relationship with Syria. The fledgling Lebanese government was back by Syria and was too weak to make any major decisions without Syria's approval. Due to Syria's support, Hezbollah was permitted to participate in the 1992 Parliamentary elections, and they were not forced to disarm their militant wing that was still operating in Southern Lebanon against Israel. Hezbollah toned down its political rhetoric and gave up the establishment of an Islamic state in return for full participation in the government, a chance for the Shia voice to be heard. They created a coalition with the Amal movement, a pro-Syrian group led by Nabih Berri and a member of the March 8th Alliance, and the group had electoral success in each election that they have participated in since 1992²⁵.

Many politicians and other members of the Lebanese community recognize that Hezbollah is stronger, more effective and has more resolve than the Lebanese army and has significant influence on the political sphere as well. This became evident when the Lebanese government overtly supported Hezbollah's fight to regain control over contested Shebaa Farm territory that is also claimed by Israel²⁶. This operational freedom is a double edged sword for Lebanon. In 2008, after eighteen months of sit-ins in an attempt to achieve veto power in the cabinet, Hezbollah members invaded Beirut and killed sixty-five

²⁵ National Council on US-Arab Relations. 2015. "Background Guide: Joint Cabinet Crisis – March 14 vs. March 8" *NCUSAR.org*. <http://ncusar.org/modelarableague/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/JCC-Background-Guide.pdf>.

²⁶ Borzi-Hedges, Samantha. "The Meaning of the Shebaa Farms Dispute" *Active Measures*. The Institute of World Politics. www.iwp.edu.

people over the six days it controlled the city, before being granted their wishes²⁷. In 2005, ex-Prime Minister Rafik Hariri was assassinated by car bomb that UN investigators tied to Hezbollah as possible retaliation for his work on United Nations Resolution 1559, which called for the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Lebanon and free and fair presidential elections without foreign meddling²⁸. Through the years following the Taif Agreement, Hezbollah has demonstrated its ability to bend the will of the Lebanese government to their will through political violence or political strategy.

Lebanon's Historical ties to Syria and Iran

Since its inception in the early 1980s, US intelligence has shown that Hezbollah has been supported financially through bank transfers and strategically through weapons and training sessions with the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)²⁹. Even today, Hezbollah's governing council, Majlis al-Shura, holds one seat that is occupied by a member of the IRGC and influence all final decisions on operations and actions³⁰. These links support a strong tie between Hezbollah and Iran, especially when analyzed in the context of their shared Shia ideology. The power dynamic between the two entities is strongly skewed towards Iran, casting Hezbollah as Iran's main proxy in the region, used as a means of inciting conflict with Israel. The relationship between Syria's Assad regime, the leaders of Hezbollah and the Iranian government makes Hezbollah a force that has allies in very strong governments within the region. The current Syrian crisis has shifted the power dynamics between Hezbollah and Syria, but the necessity of maintaining a pro Hezbollah

²⁷ Majidyar, Ahmad K. "Is Sectarian Tensions Plunging Lebanon onto a New Civil War?" *The Shi'ites of the Middle East: An Iranian Fifth Column* American Enterprises Institute.

<https://www.aei.org/feature/the-shiites-of-the-middle-east-an-iranian-fifth-column/>.

²⁸ "Security Council Declared Support for Free, Fair Presidential Election in Lebanon; Calls for Withdrawal of Foreign Forces There." 2004. United Nations Security Council on Resolution 1559. UN.org, September 2. <http://www.un.org/press/en/2004/sc8181.doc.htm>.

²⁹ Wiegand, Krista E. "Reformation of a Terrorist Group: Hezbollah as a Lebanese Political Party." *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 32 (8): 669-680. Doi: 10.1080/10576100903039320. <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/10576100903039320> 2009.

³⁰ Samii, Abbas William. 2008. "A Stable Structure on Shifting Sands: Assessing the Hizbullah-Iran-Syria Relationship" *Middle East Journal* (62): 1. <http://www.sino-west.org/sjtu/Stable.pdf>. Doi: 10.3751.62.1.12.

ally in a neighboring country has incited the Lebanese paramilitary group to participate in the conflict.

Hezbollah depends on both states for financing, weapons, and training. The support that Hezbollah receives from these two allies is not solely in material or combat training. Iran's strong presence in the Middle East as one of the most stable countries in the region, on top of the new nuclear deal with the United States, legitimizes Hezbollah socially and politically within and outside of the Lebanese power structure³¹. In many ways, Syria was the bridge that allowed Iran to build Hezbollah, help the group amass and maintain power, and influence the Lebanese government³². The historical ties to Syria, especially during Syria's occupation of Lebanon, kept pro-Hezbollah politicians in positions of power through international, regional and internal pressure from the Assad regime. The group's ability to avoid disarmament after the Taif agreement can be attributed to its strong ties to both the current occupying force, Syria, and the regional powerhouse, Iran. On top of the legitimacy that this alliance lends to Hezbollah, the large Shia populations in Iran, Iraq and other countries around the region actively participate in Hezbollah's operations as well³³.

As the radical Sunni groups terrorize the region, the importance of maintaining the Iran, Syria, Hezbollah triangle increases. The constant threat that groups such as the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria and al-Nusra Front pose to the Shia population is significant enough for Hezbollah to enter in to the Syrian conflict despite the political and social critiques it is receiving on the home front. The current Lebanese political crisis keeps the government at a standstill, and makes Lebanon vulnerable to the threat of violence. Hezbollah continues its external operations with minimal repercussions to their political status due to the importance of Iran and Syria's support for any possible

³¹ Salem, Paul. 2014. "The Missile East in 2015 and Beyond: Trends and Drivers" The Middle East Institute. <http://www.mei.edu/content/article/middle-east-2015-and-beyond-trends-and-drivers>.

³² Amidror, Yaakov. 2007. "The Hezbollah,-Syria-Iran Triangle." *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 11 (1): 1-5. <http://www.rubincenter.org/meria/2007/03/Amidror.pdf>.

³³ House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee. 2007. *Global Security: The Middle East*. Great Britain: House of Commons.

presidential candidate. The larger internal threat is that Sunni militias are now targeting Lebanese Shia population because of their participation in the Syrian conflict³⁴. The historical ties that bind these three powers together are strong enough to maintain a fragile status quo, but none of these powers are willing to fully commit to meddling internally in the other's affairs except for Hezbollah in the Syrian crisis.

Modern Day Hezbollah

Hezbollah classifies itself as a political party with a militant wing established in 1985 with the Open Letter. After this initial statement, Hezbollah sat through eight clandestine conclaves and eventually published its second Manifest in 2009 in order to become a viable political entity within Lebanon. The group expressed a more inclusive view about Lebanon's population. Throughout that time, Hezbollah has been actively trying to expel western influence from Lebanon and the Middle East, set up a Shia Islamic State, build pan-Islamism, and tear down imperialism through Jihad and martyrdom³⁵. Their views on relations with Christians, other Muslims and Jews are complex and have shifted in many ways as the political landscape dictated, but their main goals remain the same. Christians would be afforded their human rights, both social and religious freedom, but would not have access to politics. Jews living in Muslim countries, under Muslim rules are afforded basic human rights similar to the Christians, but the group does not acknowledge any Jews in Israel. In Hezbollah's view, Israel is full of Zionists, a group that can be chased out of their country and annihilated³⁶

Critics of Hezbollah have made accusations about the group derailing the election of a president unless they are certain that the election will end

³⁴ Lamb, Franklin. 2014. "Gloves Come Off in Lebanon: Sunni-Shia Bellum Sacrum Fault Lines Deepen." *Foreign Policy Journal*: online. <http://www.foreignpolicyjournal.com/2014/11/01/gloves-come-off-in-lebanon-sunni-shia-bellum-sacrum-fault-lines-deepen/>.

³⁵ Ladki, Nadim. 2009. "Hezbollah Cuts Islamist Rhetoric in New Manifesto" *Reuters* November 30. <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-lebanon-hezbollah-idUSTRE5AT3VK20091130>.

³⁶ Alagha, Joseph Ellie. 2011. *Hizbullah's Documents: From the 1985 Open Letter to the 2009 Manifesto*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

favorably. The tight connection between Hezbollah, Iran and Syria is a further point of contention in the political and social rhetoric surrounding the Party of God³⁷. Hezbollah's association with the assassination of popular politician Rafik Hariri has challenged their position in Lebanese society by contradicting their purported role as caregiver and protector of the Lebanese population. The military arm of Hezbollah continues to oppose the disarmament orders from the United Nations outline in Resolution 1559 and they defy police and Lebanese Army officials in favor of operational autonomy and protecting their own members from outside punishment. By making and keeping the army and police force impotent, Hezbollah casts itself in the role of protector and upholder of law and order in an increasingly chaotic domestic situation. Through the group's attempts to liberate Shebaa farms and defy Israel, it has demonstrated that it has more freedom to act than the Lebanese Army in controversial international conflicts.

Hezbollah militia fighters are currently actively fighting in Syria to support the waning Assad regime. They are especially interested in maintaining control over the land that borders Lebanon. The group is heavily supported by Iran and is active in most of the major theaters throughout the Middle East. The militia, in tandem with the Syrian army, has been directly confronting al-Nusra Front and the Islamic State in the city of Qalamoun and the surrounding area, and they have been having marginal success pushing the Sunni terrorist organizations back out of the region³⁸. Hezbollah's continued involvement in the Syrian conflict faces criticism back inside Lebanon, especially on the political front. The former President of Lebanon, Michel Suleiman, spoke out against Hezbollah's involvement in the Syrian conflict, citing the group's involvement for increased internal tension between Sunni and Shia groups³⁹.

³⁷ "Siniora: Iran, Hezbollah blocking presidential vote." 2015. *The Daily Star*, April 21. <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2015/Apr-21/295176-siniora-iran-hezbollah-blocking-presidential-vote.ashx>.

³⁸ "Hezbollah Gains New Ground in Qalamoun." 2015. *The Daily Star*, June 12. <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2015/Jun-12/301768-hezbollah-makes-fresh-gains-in-qalamoun.ashx>.

³⁹ "Lebanese President Urges Hezbollah to Pull Out of Syria." 2013. *Reuters*, June 20. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/06/20/us-syria-crisis-lebanon-idUSBRE95J0CD20130620>.

Even now, the Shia population is increasingly targeted by Sunni Militias based in Syria because of Hezbollah's actions in Syria over the past four years⁴⁰. The group was founded as a militia for protecting and promoting Lebanon's Shia population, and is now being accused of ignoring its original purpose in order to do Iran's bidding in Syria. However, if the Assad Regime falls, Hezbollah loses major ground politically and militarily.

The overwhelming number of refugees is also changing the demographics of the country, putting strain on the already tense relations between the Sunnis, Shias and Maronites. There are more than 1.5 million Syrian Sunni refugees that have entered into Lebanon since 2011, and the increasing numbers of Sunni radical groups that are operating in Lebanon challenge the Shia community⁴¹. Hezbollah's participation in the Iraq/Syria crisis has angered its constituents at home, while simultaneously making the Lebanese Shia a target for active Sunni militia groups and inviting the external conflict into the country⁴². The increasing use of violence and the lack of support that Hezbollah is receiving create a dangerous situation for Lebanon. Hezbollah's constituents will continue to critique the group as Shia suffer at the hands of Sunni groups with no protection from a Hezbollah that is spread thin in Syria and Lebanon. The decrease in support will urge Hezbollah to act in order to regain its power domestically, increasing the likelihood that they will strike out violently against the Sunni population. This change in demography may also have an impact on the Sunni population's ability to use sheer volume to pressure Lebanese politics, putting even more pressure on the current political system, especially with the current presidential deadlock.

PRESIDENTIAL DEADLOCK

After more than twenty-four fruitless parliamentary sessions called solely to elect a new President to succeed Michel Suleiman, Lebanon still does

⁴⁰ Schenker, David. 2015. "Hezbollah's Growing Domestic Woes." *The National Interest*, July 21. <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/hezbollahs-growing-domestic-woes-13377>.

⁴¹ Spyer, Jonathan. 2014. "The Shia-Sunni War Reaches Lebanon." *The Jerusalem Post* via *The Middle East Forum*, October 17. <http://www.meforum.org/4858/the-shia-sunni-war-reaches-lebanon>.

⁴² Ibid.

not have an acting President. Suleiman's term ended on May 25, 2014 and the country has been at odds attempting to replace him since before the cessation of his time in office. In the absence of a President, the cabinet has taken over making any presidential decisions, but coming to a unanimous decision is difficult with such opposing views within the cabinet, and this problem keeps the government stalled over the smallest decision. This power vacuum has established a caretaker government that cannot unanimously agree on any course of action and does not have the power to reform the electoral system. Each coalition blames the other for blocking the threshold and removing the quorum as a secondary path to electing a president. This is the longest period without a president that Lebanon has ever faced, lasting more than the previous 408-day record. The longer the deadlock persists, the more the stability of Lebanon, and the Middle East region, is threatened.

The Presidential deadlock has created a power vacuum in the state of Lebanon, and it has characteristics of each of the transition patterns that are affiliated with a changing power structure. Most obvious is the top down transition, tied to the Syrian conflict and the spread of Islamic radicalism and insecurity associated with the Islamic State. The conflict has increased the number of refugees in the country and has effected the economy and has pulled the conflicts closer to the Lebanese border by serving as a staging area for different groups operating in Syria. The already fragile power structure of the Lebanese government is attempting to handle these threats without the authority or decision making capabilities of a commander in chief. In his or her stead, the government must rely on unanimous consent of the cabinet for action. The exercise of power has been directly challenged by external interference from these two conflicts, and if it continues, the destabilization will open up opportunities for niche actors to begin to fill the power vacuum, such as Hezbollah. The group has already proven its ability to effectively serve the needs of the community during the civil war, and they have maintained the necessary financial and social capital to do so again.

Characteristics of internal transition are also present in the current Lebanese political and civil society. These general characteristics include a cabinet crisis, an election period or a competitive battle between established companies⁴³. In the Lebanese context, the cabinet is in crisis, without a leader and with increasing pressure to make decisions with little hope of the necessary unanimity. There is clearly turmoil caused by the open-ended presidential election and the extended election period that continues to drag out the process. Hezbollah has already demonstrated its ability to shut the government down when all Hezbollah associated cabinet members resigned at once in protest of certain policies, leaving the threat of governmental collapse well within their political repertoire. This power transition adds to the overall instability of the country, allowing for a larger gap between any event and the government's reaction by disrupting the decision making process and silencing the Maronite population. The lack of representation for this part of the population at the top of the power structure in Lebanon will only intensify the effects of any tension or perceived slight.

There are currently no indicators of a bottom up transition. The characteristics of a general bottom up transition are a technological innovation destroying the market for existing technology, or environmental activists publicly denouncing a certain company or industrial sector on moral grounds. This situation could easily materialize within the agricultural or technology sector. The more likely situation would be a steep decline in foreign investment due to the lack of leadership and an uncertain future for the country. This type of economic decline would effect unemployment levels, which are already seeing high numbers due to the number of refugees that are given asylum in Lebanon. Though this power transition is not apparent within the Lebanese society, the risk looms large as the office of the president remains unfilled, and Lebanon goes without a necessary economic plan and unclear budget.

⁴³ Avelino, Flor and Jan Rotmans. 2009. "Power in Transition: An Interdisciplinary Framework to Study Power in Relation to Structural Change." *European Journal of Social Theory* 12(4): 543-569. London: Sage Publications. Doi: 10.1177/1368431009349830.

PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES

The Lebanese Four:

In the end, the election will come down to four main candidates: Michel Aoun, Samir Geagea, Amine Gemayel, and Suleiman Frangieh. These four have the notoriety and support that would have the capability of catapulting any one of them into the office of President when the current deadlock breaks. Aoun and Geagea's oppositional stances will be an obstacle to achieving the number of votes they require to achieve a 2/3rds majority within the parliament, but their strong backing by the most influential coalitions a very strong indicator of electoral ability. The second heat of candidates who have presented the strongest platform and garnered the most public support seems to consist of Riad Salameh, Jean Kahwaji and Jean Obeid. These men are the strongest second string contenders in the current environment because of the economic, political and national security knowledge and prowess that each possess. The support of the coalitions, prominent Lebanese figures outside of politics, and Berri and Jumblatt will give weight to one candidate over another if the race moves down into these candidates. The rest of the candidates have a less defined rank within the race, but each offers important policy changes and specialized experience that could set them apart as the Presidential deadlock continues to put the country in a political crisis.

Candidate 1: General Michel Aoun is a candidate that is strongly supported by Hezbollah⁴⁴. This relationship is controversial. Critics accuse Aoun of being controlled by the group rather than his own ideas on policy while supporters use the group's ability to protect and care for the country as a necessary relationship for a president to maintain.

Statements from the Secretary General of Hezbollah, Hassan Nasrallah, have made it very clear that the power vacuum will continue if parliament does not support the candidate, and he went so far as to suggest that Aoun should be

⁴⁴ Hashem, Ali. 2015. "Senior Hezbollah Official Speaks Out." *Al-Monitor*, May. <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/05/hezbollah-ready-war-israel-syria-army-michel-aoun.html#..>

the only consideration for president in order to end the deadlock. Auon's opposition emphasizes his strong ties to Iran⁴⁵. The accusations proclaim that he would do what was best for Iran, rather than what was best for Lebanon, especially as the threat to Shia Muslims increases in the region with the increasing power of Sunni militias and terrorist organizations such as the Islamic State. His supporters cite his military career as proof that he has a nuanced understanding of national security that is becoming more and more important to maintaining stability within Lebanon. He has called for Lebanon Statistics to poll the country to find out where the Christians of the nation stand on the presidential candidates, and hinting at reform and popular elections. He is ranked fourth in Executive Magazines analysis of who would have the most positive effect on the economy, meaning his purported policies would help balance the current budget. Auon is one of the "Lebanese Four", along with Suleiman Frangieh, Amine Gemayel, and Samir Geagea, who are considered the top choices in this current election.

Candidate 2: Suleiman Frangieh is a staunch March 8th coalition member who supports the coalition's favorite: Michel Auon. He also has close ties to Hezbollah. Following in his father and grandfather's footsteps, Frangieh has been actively involved in politics for years and has served as a member of parliament and the head of Al Marada, an influential political party⁴⁶. He has been quoted saying that he will only act according to Auon's candidacy, so if Auon is up for a vote, Frangieh will support him rather than garnering support for himself. His stance decreases the likelihood that he will present a strong case for himself, but his prior experience, successes and notoriety will fuel his campaign and Auon's. Frangieh is ranked third out of seven ranked candidates in Executive Magazine's analysis of economic policy and their positive effect on the Lebanese economy. If Auon has alienated too many members of

⁴⁵ Aziz, Jean. 2015. "Will Lebanon Finally Get a New President" *Al-Monitor* December 8. <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/12/lebanon-president-elections-hariri-jumblatt-franjieh.html#>.

⁴⁶ Moulahazat. 2014. "Six Months of Vacuum" *Moulahazat.com*. <http://moulahazat.com/page/9/>.

parliament due to his close ties to Hezbollah, he is the strong second choice candidate for the March 8th coalition to fall back on in a round of voting. Due to his family history and political performance, Frangieh is one of the Lebanese four, a frontrunner for the election.

Candidate 3: Amine Gemayel is a staunch member of the March 14th coalition who has already served one term as president from 1982-1988, for which he was elected almost unanimously by 77 of the 80 parliamentary members present⁴⁷. He was exiled after transferring power to the military rather than a Syrian backed candidate and spent years in the US and France lecturing and researching reforms for the Lebanese political system. When he returned to Lebanon in 2000, he was a major part of starting the March 14th movement⁴⁸. Gemayel is ranked sixth out of the seven candidates ranked in who would have a positive influence on the Lebanese economy according to Executive Magazine, but he has a negative overall score which is calculated as positive influence minus negative influence⁴⁹. This score does not bode well for the Lebanese economy should Gemayel be elected. He has also served as the head of the Kataeb Party for years before stepping down, opening himself up to coalition support and increased dialogue with other political parties⁵⁰. Gemayel is another member of the Lebanese Four, making him a frontrunner for the position, due to his previous political successes and commitment to meaningful reform.

Candidate 4: Samir Geagea is a strong member of the March 14th coalition, who is openly critical of Hezbollah, the Syrian regime, and the March 8th coalition. He was wrongly imprisoned for a bombing, but was released after eleven years, and before that he served as the chief of Lebanese

⁴⁷ Amine Gemayel Official Website. Accessed July 2015. <http://www.aminegemayel.org/>.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ O'Sullivan, Domhnall. 2014. "Ziyad Baroud – A Candidate In Waiting?: Former Minister Still Silent on Presidential Race." *Executive Magazine*, April 24. <http://www.executive-magazine.com/economics-policy/ziyad-baroud-candidate-waiting>.

⁵⁰ Kataeb Official Website. Accessed July, 2015. <http://www.kataeb.org/en/tags/amine-gemayel>.

Forces after overthrowing the former chief for accusations of corruption⁵¹. Samir Geagea has stood against Syrian occupation and Hezbollah's supremacy since he was old enough to join the Lebanese Forces, a Christian militia group that fought throughout the civil war. He was framed by Syrian proto-government in 1994 for a bombing charge that put him in jail until the Syrian occupation ended and his once rivals became his supporters⁵². Unlike other politicians during the Syrian occupation, Geagea refused all Syrian bribes and preached only Lebanese sovereignty, which he continued to do after his eleven years in prison as well. He presents a solid and consistent pro-democracy stance in contrast to many of the March 8th coalition candidates. Even with support and a commendable resume, Geagea's relationship with his opposition, or more aptly lack thereof, would create an even more hostile political situation that would be very dangerous with the established instability due to the regional context, shaky economic standing, and the fallout from the extended power vacuum. His extreme rhetoric has caused a lack of consensus on his policies, and will stand as a road block for his proposed policies and the chances of meaningful reforms to the system. He is ranked seventh out of the seven candidates ranked in his positive influence on the Lebanese economy, which was calculated to be a negative overall score for his potential policies. Even with his extremely liberal views, Geagea is a frontrunner for the Presidency, making him the final member of Lebanese Four.

March 14th Coalition

Candidate 5: Robert Ghanem is aligned with the March 14th coalition, but he is not fiercely for Hezbollah or the March 8th coalition. His perceived public neutrality in terms of Hezbollah and the March 8th coalition give him an upper hand within the parliament compared to individuals such as Geagea and Gemayel who have publicly expressed their disapproval of both groups. He has even gone so far as to say that he would vote for either Geagea or Auon in the

⁵¹ Samir Geagea Official Website. Accessed July, 2015. <http://www.samirgeagea.com/>.

⁵² Abdul-Hussain, Hussain. 2010. "Lebanon's Samir Geagea: A Maverick." *The Huffington Post*, June 9. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/hussain-abdulhussain/lebanons-samir-geagea-a-m b_530976.html.

election as long as their programs encompass a majority of his values⁵³. He has had legal training and has served as the minister of education and the secretary of the committee for Foreign Relations, giving him a strong political presence and good political contacts and experience. His lack of strong opinions towards March 8th and Hezbollah may alienate some more staunch members of the March 14th coalition within the parliament, but it may also give him a moderate position among the extremes that could serve him well if he does get elected. His economic policies were not ranked, but his lack of involvement in the economic field might affect support for his economic policies during the election process.

Candidate 6: Boutros Harb is an outspoken member of the March 14th coalition with little to no chance of support from March 8th coalition because of his public opinions and his critiques of the March 8th coalition's Syrian ties and his open disdain towards Hezbollah. Harb is one of the pillars of the March 14th coalition and a candid voice against Syrian cooperation within the Lebanese government. He has served as both Minister of Labor and Minister of Telecommunications and is a well-known and respected politician within Lebanon⁵⁴. As the Minister of Labor, he has been directly involved with the economic realities that are facing Lebanon, and he has been working to attract the necessary foreign investment to keep the country growing⁵⁵. Harb will have a difficult time being elected over other influential players from his coalition because he lacks the notoriety of Geagea and the moderate standing of Ghanem. Press coverage shows that Harb does not have the same support within the parliament and within the media as Geagea or Auon, and he cannot cross party lines like other, more neutral candidates may be able to. His economic policies were not ranked for their influence on society, but his

⁵³ "Robert Ghanem Seeking Presidency." 2014. *NOW news*, April 10.

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/archive/542867-robert-ghanem-seeking-presidency>.

⁵⁴ Mikdashi, Maya. 2011. "Boutros Harb for President." *Jadaliyya*, Jan 11.

<http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/457/boutros-harb-for-president>.

⁵⁵ "Tough Calls." 2014. *The Business Year*. <https://www.thebusinessyear.com/lebanon-2014/tough-calls/interview>.

experience with unemployment and foreign investment give his policies legitimacy, as his political experience gives his candidacy legitimacy.

Independent

Candidate 7: Jihad Azour is the ex-finance minister, as well as a respected economist and politician. He is the nephew of fellow candidate Jean Obeid. He was highly recognized for his financial ministry reforms and development projects before he became minister⁵⁶. Though he is not directly affiliated with a specific coalition or political party, he has proven his political and economic abilities while serving as minister. His lack of affiliation could serve as a major obstacle or a benefit to his electoral bid by showing his independent ideas, but isolating him from the total support of any specific coalition or party. The Lebanese press has not covered his bid for president as thoroughly as many of the other candidates, but he is well known to many individuals in the country. His lack of affiliation with a particular party or coalition could be positive and negative. He could use his lack of affiliation to show that he is more concerned with the wellbeing of Lebanon than with the religious or international politics that are engrained into the coalitions. It could also reduce support from within the parliamentary system, especially from those who are strongly affiliated with one coalition or another. He was not ranked on his economic policies influence on society, but he has a promising economic track record due to his personal experience in the field.

Candidate 8: Ziyad Baroud is not associated with any one political party, which holds the same pros and cons as many of the possible candidates⁵⁷. He has the support of some powerful players within the Lebanese political environment, most notably and publicly from Clovis Maksoud. Maksoud is a former ambassador and permanent observer of the League of

⁵⁶ President-2014. 2014. "Jihad Azour Biography" *President-2014.com*. <http://www.president-2014.com/en/candidates/jihad.azour>.

⁵⁷ "Possible Candidates in Lebanon's Presidential Race." 2014. *The Daily Star*, March 15. <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2014/Mar-25/251254-possible-candidates-in-lebanons-presidential-race.ashx>.

Arab States at the United Nations and its chief representative in the United States for more than 10 years. Baroud has achieved International recognition for his leadership capabilities, including “*Commandeur de Numéro de l’Ordre Civil du Mérite*” by the King of Spain Juan Carlos I in July of 2011, “*Officier de la Légion d’Honneur*” by former French President Nicolas Sarkozy in October 2010, “*Grand Officier de L’Ordre National du Mérite de la République Française*” in 2009, and in 2007, he was named Young Global Leader by the World Economic Forum⁵⁸. He is pro-transparency and has had a major role in creating the decentralization policy after he stepped down from minister of the interior, demonstrating his commitment to reforms from within the system⁵⁹. In line with his belief in governmental transparency, he supports reform that would allow the public to directly elect a president in Lebanon, “I believe that [such an election] could make Lebanese more involved in the process. It would make the process more Lebanese, and we could find ways to make it possible for every single Lebanese to cast his vote in an efficient way”⁶⁰. Finally, his economic policy is ranked second for the most positive influence on the economy by polls and analysis in the Executive magazine.

Candidate 9: Marwan Charbel is another candidate independent of coalition or political party. He is a well-respected security officer with an intimate understanding of the intricacies of Lebanese security, which might sway votes in his favor due to the increasing internal and external security threats in Lebanon. Charbel’s political experience as the minister of the interior gives him experience within the governmental structure and contacts within the parliament. His supporters are attracted to his honesty, which sets him apart from the other candidates whose true motives and backers are constantly being

⁵⁸ Ziyad Baroud Official Website. Accessed July, 2015. <http://www.ziyadbaroud.com/en/content/about-bio>.

⁵⁹ O’Sullivan, Domhnall. 2014. “Ziyad Baroud – A Candidate In Waiting?: Former Minister Still Silent on Presidential Race.” *Executive Magazine*, April 24. <http://www.executive-magazine.com/economics-policy/ziyad-baroud-candidate-waiting>.

⁶⁰ O’Sullivan, Domhnall. 2014. “Ziyad Baroud – A Candidate In Waiting?: Former Minister Still Silent on Presidential Race.” *Executive Magazine*, April 24. <http://www.executive-magazine.com/economics-policy/ziyad-baroud-candidate-waiting>.

criticized. The assumption about his transparency within the political sphere is mainly due to his public statements and speeches. Charbel tends to make spontaneous outbursts that acknowledge his true feelings about any given topic, and he routinely makes ill-advised and controversial statements. These statements appear to be from a man who is willing to speak the truth regardless of any consequences, but many of these statements may stand in the way of any real bid for President, especially the ones in reference to the increasing crime rate and the relationship to the new Syrian and Iraqi refugees⁶¹. He was not ranked on his economic policies influence on society, as he does not have the same experience within the field as many other candidates have.

Candidate 10: Roger Dib is a neutral candidate who is not directly associated with any given coalition or political party. Dib is a well-known politician who has held multiple political offices, including Minister of the State. In addition to his political experience, he has extensive expertise as the founder and director of the Near East Consulting Company (NEGC). His abilities as both a politician and businessman are well respected within Lebanon and he maintains many relationships within Parliament that could support him in his bid. He faces the same obstacle that other candidates who are not affiliated with a specific coalition or party face as he enters into the election process. The coalitions are dedicated to their candidates, and for an independent, that loyalty may be difficult to break through. Even with this risk, he is a qualified candidate who has a strong resume. His economic policies are not ranked, but he has some experience within the field, and is a successful businessman, which gives his policies some degree of legitimacy⁶².

Candidate 11: General Jean Kahwagi maintains the support of both the March 8th coalition and the March 14th coalition. As a decorated General, he is

⁶¹ Nazzal, Mohamed. 2012. "Marwan Charbel: I Am Not A Racist." *Al-Akhbar*, April 27. <http://english.al-akhbar.com/node/6703>.

⁶² Schellen, Thomas, Joe Dyke, and Benjamin Red. 2014. "A President for Lebanon's Economy: Poll Reveals The Voice of the People." *Executive Magazine*, May 5. <http://www.executive-magazine.com/economics-policy/president-lebanons-economy>.

relying heavily on his military prowess for support and propulsion into the presidency⁶³. The current security threats facing Lebanon do create a unique opportunity for him to use the fear of attack as a reason to be elected. Of the international powers that are invested in the outcome of this election, including Syria, Iran and the US, none have vetoed his name or Obeid's. This support gives him a strong chance at becoming a consensus candidate, and with his moderate stance, cross party approval, and security experience, he stands a decent chance in the election. Even with the international and national support he has gained, Kahwagi has little to no experience in the field of economics, which may be a major obstacle to his election. His ability to sell his National security prowess as the most important skill the country needs, rather than a candidate with significant economic experience will be very important⁶⁴.

Candidate 12: Damianos Kattar is another candidate that Clovis Maksoud, a former ambassador and permanent observer of the League of Arab States at the United Nations and its chief representative in the United States for more than 10 years, supports. Kattar is independent of any one political party or coalition, and he has served as a former Minister of Finance and Minister of Economy and Commerce⁶⁵. He has reached consensus candidate status because he is supported by Aounis and members of the March 8th coalition, as well as being recognized by the March 14th coalition. Kattar's chances for election are strongly tied to the fact that he never openly criticized the March 8th coalition or their beneficiaries. He has successfully maintained relations with the group, which may push him towards majority support⁶⁶. Kattar has created a political buzz among many reform focused and independent minded Lebanese people, and this support has been translated to the parliament, but it may not be enough

⁶³ Schenker, David. 2014 "Lebanon's Presidential Race" *The Washington Institute* May 1. <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/lebanons-presidential-race>.

⁶⁴ Saoud, Ghassan. 2014. "Michel Auon: The Last Strong Presidential Candidate?" *Al-Akhbar* April 19. <http://english.al-akhbar.com/node/19481>.

⁶⁵ "Three Candidates for Lebanon's Presidency." 2014. *Al-Monitor*, May. <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/05/lebanon-election-deadlock-alternatives.html>.

⁶⁶ "Could Damainos Kattar Ride to the Rescue." 2007. *Beirut Spring*, November 11. <http://beirutspring.com/blog/2007/11/11/could-damianos-kattar-ride-to-the-rescue/>.

due to his comparable lack of notoriety. Kattar's economic policies have not been ranked, but his previous experience in the field will be an important aspect of his candidacy. He may not have the same notoriety for his economic prowess and successes as Salameh, but his political ties and experience to back it up.

Candidate 13: Nadine Moussa is the first women to run for the position of President in Lebanon. She is independent of political party or coalition, and proclaims to be focused on challenging, “the tribal and patriarchal rules of the Lebanese political system and show the public that it's possible for women outside of the traditional political world to take part in it”⁶⁷. Her role as an activist and a lawyer puts her in a special position to present programs for popular reform efforts, especially programs that focus on women's rights and position in society. She has served as a member of parliament, but has held no minister position and has little economic experience as well. She faces the same obstacles and benefits as other candidates who are unaffiliated with any coalition or party, but she also faces the discrimination due to her gender within the patriarchal structure of the parliament. Her economic policies have not been ranked for their influence on society, but her lack of experience in both the economic and political sphere's will be another obstacle to her candidacy.

Candidate 14: Jean Obeid is a moderate candidate who is supported by Walid Jumblatt, leader of the influential Progressive Socialist Party, and the Hezbollah affiliated Nabih Berri, the current speaker of the Parliament, which gives him strong recommendations for President. Obeid is a former member of parliament and has had limited success as the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Emmigrants. As a career politician, he has been exposed to the country's economic sector, but he has had little personal experience within the field. He has strong ties to Saudi officials and in the case that one of the four front

⁶⁷ “Will Nadine Moussa be Lebanon's Next President.” 2015. *Al-Monitor*, March. <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/03/lebanon-first-woman-president-elections.html#>.

runners don't make it, Obeid would be a strong second phase contender⁶⁸. He has strong regional connections that could swing support in his direction, but it is not a strong contender in first phase elections. His economic policies have not been ranked for their influence on society, but his lifetime of political knowledge has been purported to make up for some of his economic shortfalls. He is a secondary favorite with supporters from both the March 14th and the March 8th coalition including Frangieh and Auon.

Candidate 15: Riad Salameh is an independent candidate for president, and will face some difficulties due to a lack of public ties to either major coalition or any political party. However he does have notoriety due to his role and recognition of his successes as the veteran governor of the Central Bank since 1993. Salameh is considered an economic 'hero' after civil war because he was able to stabilize the country's economy throughout the conflict and beyond. He is the final of the three candidates that Clovis Maksoud publically supports, which carries significant political clout. Riad Salameh maintained economic stability throughout the civil war and beyond, demonstrating a nuanced understanding of the complexities of the economic field and his ability to positively influence it. He continues to govern the Central Bank adeptly as Lebanon faces economic strain associated with political and regional upheaval, such as the current refugee crisis and the increasing number of conflicts in the area. He also boasts eclectic support that bridges the oppositional groups, which allows him to present himself as a possible consensus candidate. Salameh's economic policies are top ranked out of the seven candidates analyzed to have an overwhelmingly positive influence on the Lebanese economy by a study done by Executive Magazine.

Candidate 16: Joseph Tarabay is an independent, though somewhat lesser known, candidate who is not affiliated with any one coalition or party.

⁶⁸ Saoud, Ghassan. 2013. "10-Horse Race to Lebanon's Presidential Palace." *Al-Akhbar*, December 27. <http://english.al-akhbar.com/node/18033>.

This neutrality allows Tarabay to have the ability to establish ties with a myriad of different political parties and coalitions, rather than alienating any one particular group. He has experience in opening dialogues between conflicting parties by mediating a number of significant political disputes, and he has honed his economic expertise while working as a banker for many years. His economic know how will be good for his candidacy, considering Lebanon's budget needs some serious work and the economic climate for investors has become volatile, and foreign direct investment has dropped by 23%, due to increasing internal tensions and the external conflicts present at the Lebanese borders⁶⁹. However, not belonging to a coalition can also hurt his electoral prospects because both the March 8th coalition and the March 14th coalition are very focused on their own candidates. Also, his economic expertise and policies not as highly regarded as Salameh's expertise and policies, which have been demonstrated more publically than Tarabay's. It will be difficult for an outsider to make large gains within the presidential race in the current political environment.

OUTCOMES AND FALLOUT

Economic: The unrestricted free market economy has remained strong and growing, and the World Bank forecasts a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth of 3.6 percent by 2017⁷⁰. The GDP is 72% service, 21.1% industry and 6.3% agriculture with banking and tourism as two main service industry mainstays⁷¹. As the instability of the country increases, tourism will decrease which will lower the GDP and raise unemployment, especially considering the

⁶⁹ United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. 2014. *World Investment Report 2014: Investing in the SDGs: An Action Plan*. Switzerland: United Nations.
http://unctad.org/en/PublicationsLibrary/wir2014_en.pdf.

⁷⁰ The World Bank. Accessed July, 2015. http://data.worldbank.org/country/lebanon#cp_gdp.

⁷¹ Kasparian, Robert. "Economic Accounts of Lebanon 2010" *Dinance.gov.lb*.
<http://www.finance.gov.lb/en-US/finance/EconomicDataStatistics/Documents/National%20Accounts/National%20Accounts%20English%202010%20for%20publication.pdf>.

steep drop in foreign direct investment that has already been reported at 23%⁷². There are currently massive fiscal and current account deficits in Lebanon, closely associated with the presidential deadlock and the inability to pass a budget without a sitting president⁷³. The president stands to influence the economy heavily, and each of these candidates should be considered carefully based on the amount and type of influence that they will have on the economy should they be elected⁷⁴. The president has a strong influence over the economic circumstances of a country, and due to the increase in refugee's and the possibility of military engagement in the near future, Lebanon's economic health should be of primary importance. Both refugees and war, and the infrastructure associated with the two, are very expensive. With that in mind, the continued political paralysis has hindered international investment and delayed major industrialization projects, putting Lebanon in a very vulnerable position internally, regionally, and internationally.

Security: Security has evolved into a major concern for any possible future president of Lebanon. Although the country has been anything but peaceful since its inception, the continued chaos caused by the Syrian civil war, ISIS growing command in the region and the influx of refugees into camps that are rich recruitment ground for a myriad of different extremist organizations that are operating in the region⁷⁵. The lack of a commander in chief poses a significant security threat due to lack of action. According to Lebanese law, the cabinet makes presidential decisions in the absence of a sitting president, but they must come to a consensus on those actions before they can be performed. As the president makes all final military decisions, and the cabinet has been

⁷² United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. 2014. *World Investment Report 2014: Investing in the SDGs: An Action Plan*. Switzerland: United Nations.

http://unctad.org/en/PublicationsLibrary/wir2014_en.pdf.

⁷³ "Lebanon." 2015. The Economist Intelligence Unit. Accessed August, 2015.

<http://country.eiu.com/lebanon>.

⁷⁴ Schellen, Thomas, Joe Dyke, and Benjamin Red. 2014. "A President for Lebanon's Economy: Poll Reveals The Voice of the People." *Executive Magazine*, May 5. <http://www.executive-magazine.com/economics-policy/president-lebanons-economy>.

⁷⁵ Blanford, Nicholas. 2012. "Lebanon's Security Concerns over Syria." The Washington Institute: online. <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/lebanons-security-concerns-over-syria>.

historically divided there is the threat of inaction due to an elongated decision making process. The Syrian conflict and the encroaching Islamic State crisis are both putting pressure on the cabinet to make key military decisions that they have yet to agree upon. Add to the external security threats the internal threat of Hezbollah lashing out violently, and the country is facing a very fragile peace.

Over the past few years, Hezbollah has proven that they are willing to take over Beirut and kill an ex-prime minister if the political tone of the country is not tipped in their favor. Under these circumstances, as long as the presidential deadlock persists, Hezbollah has more to gain from the election of their candidate, especially if Assad falls. Should the Syrian government lose to the rebels, Hezbollah will lose a key ally who has not only helped fund operations, but cleared a path for Iran to easily access Hezbollah strongholds in the South. The loss of this key route puts increased pressure on Hezbollah to have a friend in the Presidential office to allow them to remain armed and continue their internal and external activities. In this same vein, Hezbollah's militia has been acknowledged to be more effective and efficient than the Lebanese army, and if Hezbollah feels threatened enough to use force to maintain their status quo, they would be able to do so within Lebanon. Hezbollah has already demonstrated that it is adept at and not afraid of causing physical and political strife to achieve favorable political ends.

Political: Reformation of the current Lebanese system is the only way to effect real change in the power dynamics and in civil participation from the Lebanese people. This current presidential deadlock is a toxic situation for the country and its people, and the underlying problem that this crisis is stemming from is political power. The current political system has limited participation of the governed and the confessional power sharing technique keeps the different religious sects separate and in constant contention with one another. Many of the current candidates are calling for reforms to the current governmental system and proposing that more of the electoral power be placed in the hands

of the civilians⁷⁶. The current deadlock proves that the confessional system has some serious downsides, and the political structure cannot survive if the political power is not shared equally. In the current crisis, the Christians are unrepresented in the upper echelons of power, leaving them at a severe disadvantage legislatively. The Parliament has not fulfilled its obligation to elect a president, and the people of Lebanon are suffering because of the larger regional powers and tensions at play. The election could have major political fallout, but up until this point, it has instigated a much needed conversation about reforming the electoral process and other necessary governmental reforms.

FORCAST FOR STABILITY

Anti-Hezbollah: If an anti-Hezbollah president comes to power, there will be increased tension between the different coalitions. Hezbollah will take a very defensive stance, and if the new President does not tread lightly when dealing with the organization, the tenuous, cobbled together peace that barely exists in the country will come to a swift and final end. Should the March 14th representative come to power and push for Hezbollah to surrender its weapons or attempt to police some of its actions along the borders with Israel and Syria, Hezbollah will answer with violence. The reaction will be strong and destructive, similar to the internal clashes of 2008. An internal conflict would be crippling for the political and economic system as Hezbollah would fight, indiscriminately, to achieve autonomy in the area. Again, Hezbollah has shown that it will go to extremes to maintain and increase the group's status and power within Lebanon.

In this context, the most peaceful transition of power would take place if and only if a March 8 coalition representative took power. More specifically, Hezbollah has publicly backed General Michel Auon as their ideal candidate

⁷⁶ "How Viable is Lebanon's Presidential Poll." 2015. *Al-Monitor*, July. <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/07/lebanon-president-election-vacuum-poll-christian-druze-sunni.html#>.

for the next President of Lebanon. If this election goes to plan, Hezbollah will maintain their hold over Lebanese politics and will continue to go untested by the Lebanese military and police. If a March 14th candidate or a reformist who is not linked to the group is elected, there might be enough political power to reform, but the more likely scenario is that Hezbollah will use political and paramilitary pressure to minimize the president's actions in order to remain untouched by any unfavorable reforms.

Pro-Hezbollah: The pro-Hezbollah candidate may save the country from some form of violent repercussion, but there will be huge risks associated with the outcome. The candidate will then be indebted to Hezbollah and their benefactors in Iran and Syria, effecting policy and the chance to change things for the better in Lebanon by opting for the outcome that benefits his international backers. On top of this issue, there will be a psychological fall out from a win of this type. Due to the blatant public threats Hezbollah issued about the electoral process, if the Lebanese government cowers to Hezbollah's strong arm tactics, it will become clear that the government is not formed for the sake of all the people, but for the profit of the politicians and other international parties. Though the internal power transition may be more peaceful if Hezbollah is appeased, there would be major regional repercussions for this demonstration of the group's power over the official Lebanese government. With such strong ties to Iran and Syria, and its current involvement in the Syrian conflict, Hezbollah has made a number of enemies who are now targeting Lebanese Shia in escalating attacks regionally⁷⁷. The election of a pro-Hezbollah candidate may intensify these tensions, especially within Lebanon between the Sunni and Shia populations which would drive instability and increase the likelihood of targeted sectarian violence.

⁷⁷ Lamb, Franklin. 2014. "Gloves Come Off in Lebanon: Sunni-Shia Bellum Sacrum Fault Lines Deepen." *Foreign Policy Journal*: online. <http://www.foreignpolicyjournal.com/2014/11/01/gloves-come-off-in-lebanon-sunni-shia-bellum-sacrum-fault-lines-deepen/>.

No President: In a sustained power vacuum, there is substantially more risk for the government to fall to an oppositional group or power. There is also an increased risk for a coup, either internal or external and the instability of the political structure of a government in a power vacuum creates uncertain economic and civil environments. Lebanon faces increasing pressure from each of its borders, Israel in the south, ISIS and Syrian rebels to the east and the north, which all need to be dealt with swiftly, but without a commander in chief there are no boundaries or orders to be followed. The sheer volume of refugees coming in to Lebanon from Syria and Iraq has changed the demographics of the country, skewing the Islamic community towards majority Sunni. The deadlock in today's society is the longest period of time Lebanon has been without a sitting president. The biggest obstacle to elections, as many politicians readily admit, is the outcome of the Syrian conflict which will swing the power dynamics within the country greatly⁷⁸. Lebanon is heavily influenced by the international actors who have a stake in the country, and in the mind of many Lebanese the Syrian conflict has become a proxy war between the west and Iran. When there is a clearer winner, then the elections are more likely to take place, in favor of the candidate that reflects the change in the power dynamic.

CONCLUSIONS

Throughout this paper, the current political crisis facing Lebanon has been outlined, the possible outcomes of the crisis as well as how Hezbollah plays in to the larger political structure in Lebanon. This situation is dangerous, but there is hope of reform. Many of the candidates have woven reform into their platform, and Clovis Maksoud summed up many political figures feelings about the potential of this election when he observed that the current stalemate could, "result in the promotion of candidates with independent judgment,

⁷⁸ Nash, Matt. 2014. "Complete Guide to Lebanon's Presidential Election." *NOW news*, March 25. <https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/Reports-Interviews/540670-complete-guide-to-lebanons-presidential-election>.

objective policies and enlightened decisions, and prepare the ground for the future generations of Lebanese,” and he hopes that, “It can enable a system of government predicated on a secular constitution, good governance, immunity from political paralysis and the dangers of the sectarian divide”⁷⁹. The escalating violence in the region and the precedent for political violence set by Hezbollah inside of Lebanon challenge this optimistic view of the deadlock. Lebanon has overcome a similar situation in previous years, but there is more to lose in this new regional environment. The longer the deadlock goes on, the more opportunity for bilateral dialogue and shifting allegiances, but there is also more opportunity for the realization of internal and external threat to Lebanese stability that is currently in a very vulnerable state.

Even with the call for reform and the emphasis on the necessity to respect the confessional power sharing structure, one sentiment remains at the forefront of many Lebanese minds. The longer the presidential deadlock continues and the more the government caters to Hezbollah and the group’s benefactors, the more the people lose hope. One man summarized the realities of being a civilian in the current fragile environment, he openly exclaims, “When have we had real security? What will the president do to protect us from crazy militants? The only real source of security - even for those who do not admit it - is that Hizballah is powerful enough to repel any serious threat,” he says⁸⁰. The legitimacy of the government is being challenged by the autonomy of Hezbollah and its ability to outshine official forces and civil institutions. Instability caused by the ongoing presidential deadlock only intensifies the current chaotic environment and opens Lebanon up for more and more of the regional instability to seep in and cause complete chaos.

⁷⁹ “Three Candidates For Lebanon’s Presidency.” 2014. *Al-Monitor*, May. <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/iw/originals/2014/05/lebanon-election-deadlock-alternatives.html#>.

⁸⁰Varzi, Changzi M. 2015. “Lebanon: One Year, No President, Many Problems.” *Al-Araby*, May 27. <http://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/features/2015/5/28/lebanon-one-year-no-president-many-problems#sthash.UXrkU6ZK.dpuf>.

APPENDIX

Definitions

The key definitions to be aware of throughout this paper are power vacuum, power transition period, a series of transition patterns, Sunni Islam, Shia Islam and Maronite Christianity. Understanding the general differences between religions and the types of transition patterns will help set the stage for the Lebanese case. The presence a power vacuum and many of the series of transition patterns, both internally and externally will help to illustrate the precarious situation Lebanon has found itself in. The threats to Lebanon loom large as sectarian tensions within the country converge with the violent conflicts outside the country during a time of political confusion and vulnerability. Understanding some of these key terms will help decipher the arguments made hereafter about the instability Lebanon will face in the future.

A ‘Power Vacuum’, as defined in *Power in Transition* by Avelino and Rotmans, is considered, “a situation in which a contingency impedes the exercise of systemic power; the environment confronts actors with a new situation while they are not able to mobilize the necessary resources to deal with it; power vacuums are temporal disruptions in the exercise of power⁸¹”. Lebanon faces a power vacuum caused by the absence of a commander in chief in a situation that the acting cabinet is not able to agree on or legally equipped to handle. The external situation in Syria and Iraq, as well as the internal situation with Hezbollah, has effectively disrupted the exercise of power of the official government, while shifting power into the hands of Hezbollah as a defense force as well as a providing civil services.

During the transition period, as the official government slowly loses systemic power and is unable to exercise power over their people, niche actors begin to form networks and employ innovative, radical power over the population. The key transition patterns to be aware of are *top down*, *internal*,

⁸¹ Avelino, Flor and Jan Rotmans. 2009. “Power in Transition: An Interdisciplinary Framework to Study Power in Relation to Structural Change.” *European Journal of Social Theory* 12(4): 543-569. London: Sage Publications. Doi: 10.1177/1368431009349830.

and *bottom up*. The top down transition is defined by landscape changes, such as, “an international crisis, a terrorist attack, a natural disaster or the emergence of a new foreign market”⁸². An Internal transition is defined by a clash between regime-actors, such as, “a cabinet crisis, an election period or a competitive battle between established companies”⁸³. Finally, the bottom up transition is defined by the niche actors challenging the regimes, such as, “a technological innovation destroying the market for existing technology, or environmental activists publicly denouncing a certain company or industrial sector on moral grounds”⁸⁴. Avelino and Rotmans journal article *Power in Transition* uses these three transitions and their definitions as the basis for their discussion of power vacuums, and I will do the same.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

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