



(U) Lebanon: Domestic Crisis Averted, for Now, in Wake of Prime Minister's Resignation

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Situation remains troublesome in Lebanon (U)

(S//SI) The SINIO* Council advised Lt.Gen. Hayden and the Extended Enterprise leadership on 19 April 2005 of the potential dangers stemming from the ongoing situation in Lebanon. We also shared this SINIO Advisory with the National Intelligence Officer for Warning and the Assistant Director of Central Intelligence for Collection. In the wake of Syria's withdrawal from Lebanon, the anti-Syria opposition has gained momentum, but the effort to form a new government has met serious challenges. If the new government cannot hold parliamentary elections by the end of May, a simmering climate for instability in the fragile country may boil over into a violent power struggle.

(U) Recent months' events in Lebanon continue their overall slide toward a potential crisis. Pro-Syrian Prime Minister (PM)-designate Omar Karami, unable to form a new government after nearly 7 weeks of deadlock, stepped down for a second time on 13 April and moderate Najib Mikati was appointed acting PM on 16 April. Mikati quickly formed a government empowered to hold critical parliamentary elections by the end of May, but its stability is questionable -- the Education Minister resigned on 21 April without explanation. Syrian claims that its hasty withdrawal from Lebanon, in compliance with UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1559, would precipitate a security crisis could still be borne out, and provide justification for Syria to redeploy in response to a Lebanese "request" for Syrian assistance to restore order. While unlikely, the worst-case scenario presents a threat to Lebanon-Israel border security and would deal a blow to the Administration's Greater Middle East Initiative if Lebanon's drive to throw off the Syrian yoke is thwarted.

(U) Since the September 2004 adoption of UNSCR 1559, anti-Syria oppositionists have gathered momentum. Opposition elements in the Lebanese government, sectarian leaders, and supporters from the populace were mobilized, to a degree, and governmental changes began to alarm Damascus. The 14 February assassination of former PM Rafiq Hariri appeared to be the last straw for those opposed to the Syrian presence and who held Syria responsible for Hariri's death. Tens of thousands demonstrated in Beirut, demanding that Syria quit Lebanon, but a Hizballah-staged counter rally drew an estimated 1 million supporters who clamored for Syria to remain. International pressure prompted Syria to implement a withdrawal, which President al-Asad assured the UN would be complete prior to May elections. Failing to form a government, Karami resigned in late February, but was reappointed on 9 March, a sign of Damascus' continued control over Beirut. The appointment of Mikati, a moderate pro-Syrian legislator and confidante of Syrian President Bashar al-Asad, came as a compromise on the part of the opposition, aimed at salvaging the election schedule.

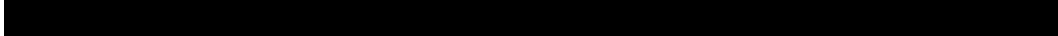
(S//SI) The SIGINT system is responding to these events, but stands to be resource-strained if they deteriorate into cross-border (e.g., Israel-Hizballah) security flare-ups, internal crisis, or threats to U.S. interests or

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Allies. NSA has raised its WATCHCON level for the Lebanon Internal Warning problem from WC IV to WC III.

(U//FOUO) See our website for the complete text:



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(U) Acting Prime Minister Najib Mikati (Reuters)

*(U) SINIO = SIGINT National Intelligence Officer

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