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LEBANON: Reform Delays May Deteriorate Governance, Enable Hezbollah

Summary: Delays in reforming and reinstating the Lebanese government will almost certainly undermine governance and may facilitate Hezbollah's pursuits of domestic political control. Unrest continues as Lebanon struggles to recover from the Beirut explosion, cabinet resignation, and the COVID-19 pandemic. The international community seeks to aid Beirut in its recovery, but the formation of a new administration will probably stall as protests and partisanship persists, further inhibiting progress towards Lebanon's recovery.

Governance Dilemma: On 26 September, Prime Minister-Designate Mustapha Adib resigned after failing to form a government. This follows the 4 August explosion in Beirut and subsequent departure of the Lebanese government, which prompted political instability. French President Emmanuel Macron visited Lebanon after the explosion in an attempt to aid Beirut's restoration efforts. Despite Macron's assistance through reform proposals and guidance, a new administration has yet to form. The French maintain the opportunity for an economic aid package contingent upon significant reformation to promote reconstruction. While the ruling class struggles to overcome a partisan impasse, violence between supporters of different political factions become more frequent.

Domestic Unrest: Growing political strife in combination with Beirut's inability to prevent the explosion or manage COVID-19 indicates that anti-regime protests will probably continue. The public views the explosion as an example of negligence by the government and may seek to dismiss the majority of its political leadership. Disillusionment with slow economic growth, corruption, and mismanagement will grow unless regulatory bodies implement considerable reforms. Some remain concerned that grievances will not be addressed despite international calls for change due to sectarian divides between religious groups in the government.

International Involvement: The French will probably maintain pressure on Beirut to reform but direct aid may diminish as initiatives stagnate. On 1 September, France proposed an outline for policy change, and Macron established a December deadline to audit progress towards a new Lebanese government. International involvement sparked a mixed response domestically with some calling for self-determination while others accepted foreign assistance. Previous efforts to provide aid contingent upon reformation failed, signaling Lebanon's resistance to change.

Hezbollah's Control: Deficiencies in the current system and political vacancies may allow Hezbollah to leverage its involvement in providing social services and building infrastructure to gain political influence. Although Hezbollah almost certainly seeks to expand political control, its success hinges on the support of the domestic population and failure of French engagement. Recent statements by Macron and French President Michel Aoun signal France's shift to harsher opposition towards the Lebanese terrorist organization and political party, potentially impeding its efforts to gain support.

Outlook and Implications: Governance will continue to deteriorate if Beirut defers efforts to reform despite public and international calls for political change. The potential further destabilization of Lebanon may spread through the Levant, exacerbating existing conflicts and tensions. If Beirut succeeds in reforming, it may regain domestic political support and foreign economic aid through France and the International Monetary Fund. Sustaining a pattern of religiously-derived partisanship could prove dangerous as Beirut refocuses limited resources to solving bureaucratic issues, restricting its ability to combat COVID-19, rapid inflation, and rising poverty rates.

In the absence of legitimate political authority, Hezbollah may seek to gain influence through new cabinet members and by replacing traditional state functions such as healthcare and education. Hezbollah and the Amal Movement, Lebanon's primary Shi'ite political groups, probably contributed largely to the current political gridlock by demanding the appointment of party members to minister positions. An increasingly critical international community may minimize the impact of Hezbollah's political and paramilitary operations, thereby reducing its control in the region despite probable Iranian support.

The stagnant political situation in combination with diminishing stability may motivate a more severe international response. France may accept a direct role in realizing reforms, mitigating corruption, and forming a new Lebanese government if it deems necessary to prevent irreversible damage. Paris may alter its position to explicitly condemn, oppose, and sanction Hezbollah as it continues to impede progress and endanger regional security.

[Riley Coder and Autumn Champlin]

JORDAN: Dissolution of Parliament Prior to Elections Unlikely to Satisfy Public

Summary: The dissolution of Parliament by King Abdullah II signals government attempts to ease civil disapproval, though the act will probably not resolve widespread frustration over lasting economic hardships.

Development: On 27 September, King Abdullah II dissolved the country's Parliament ahead of the scheduled 10 November parliamentary elections. Pro-government officials and businessmen primarily make up Amman's Parliament, while other opposition groups experience restrictions that hinder participation in elections. The upcoming elections will occur during a time of economic contraction as the country battles the lasting effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. While Amman responded quickly to the outbreak, the economy continues to struggle under high unemployment rates and poverty. The expected economic shrinkage combined with public distrust of the government exemplifies the importance of the November elections.

Analysis: The dissolution of the current Parliament will probably do little to mitigate public discontent and distrust. While its dissolution allows for new potential candidates in the 10 November elections, similar candidates with parallel platforms will likely fill the vacancies left by prior pro-government members. The restrictions imposed on opposition groups may fuel the civil unrest in reaction to perceived government corruption. Due to current economic turmoil, the November elections will prove essential in guiding the country through uncertainty. However, the probable lack of political change may leave Jordan in a vulnerable state for the foreseeable future.

[Tim Fergus]

KUWAIT: Death of Emir Sheikh Sabah May Prompt Political Instability

Summary: The death of Emir Sabah may prompt an increase in hostilities among neighboring Arab States including Iran and Qatar and may increase political pressure on the new leader of Kuwait, Emir Sheikh Nawaf.

Development: On 29 September, Emir Sabah died, leaving the leadership of the country to Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf. Kuwait controls the world's sixth-largest oil reserve, providing the country with economic independence and advantage within the region. Bordering Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and the Persian Gulf, Sabah established strong foreign policy stances and a bold reputation among the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) during crises. Under Sabah's leadership, Kuwait successfully conducted diplomatic relations as a mediator amongst Middle East affairs and restored Kuwait's economic stability.

Analysis: Under newly appointed Emir Sheikh Nawaf's rule, Kuwait will likely remain disengaged from regional conflicts, but the loss of Sabah will almost certainly diminish the effectiveness of its diplomatic efforts between warring nations. Neighboring enemies, Iran and Qatar, may capitalize on the transition period to undermine Kuwait's regional political posture. Actions may include the pursuit of expanding oil territory and political disputes resulting in exacerbated geopolitical tensions. To combat this, members of the GCC may reinforce diplomatic efforts or alternative measures in absence of the former Kuwait leader.

[Clarisse Joy Absalon]

ARMENIA-AZERBAIJAN: Clashes Indicate Ankara's Increasing Military Ambitions

Summary: Escalated conflict in the Nagorno-Karabakh (N-K) region will likely prompt further Turkish military intervention in the South-Caucasus. Probable Turkish military successes in the region may empower Ankara to utilize military intervention in other Southwest Asian conflicts.

Development: On 27 September, conflict erupted in the disputed N-K region bordering Azerbaijan and Armenia. Ankara continues to support Azerbaijan's struggle with Armenia for control of the volatile region. On 29 September, Yerevan claimed Ankara's air force shot down an Armenian jet, provoking a denial from both Ankara and Baku. Armenia also claims Turkey is utilizing Bayraktar UCAV drones which Ankara used extensively in Syria and Libya. Russia, Armenia's primary ally in the conflict, continues to avoid active military intervention in the conflict and instead urged the two countries to enter diplomatic talks.

Analysis: Ankara will probably continue providing direct military support for Yerevan as the N-K conflict continues to grow. The Turkish military will probably increase involvement efforts, seeking more influence in the region. Turkish successes in the N-K conflict coupled with those in Syria and Libya will likely embolden further intervention in the N-K region and elsewhere, if not challenged by other regional powers. However, Turkey will probably not intervene in the conflict further if any reasonable chance of military retaliation from Moscow or Western nations exists. Turkey will almost certainly increase direct military involvement in the N-K conflict if Yerevan appears to be gaining operational dominance.

[Max Olson]

SAUDI ARABIA: Opposition to Iran May Prompt Strengthening Ties with Israel

Summary: Saudi Arabia's King Salman bin Abdulaziz accused the Iranian government of exploiting international nuclear agreements and placed blame on Iranian proxies such as Hezbollah for the region's instability. This will probably escalate tensions and may lead to the strengthening of ties between Saudi Arabia and Israel.

Development: On 23 September, Abdulaziz attended a UN meeting in which he blamed Iran for conflict in the Middle East. Abdulaziz accused the Iranian government of exploiting international nuclear agreements and said that Iran targeted Saudi's oil facilities. Relationships with Israel historically remain strained with Riyadh blocking travel for Israeli citizens. However, Abdulaziz indicated support for the Israeli-Palestine effort, softening relations between the two countries.

Analysis: Abdulaziz's statement in stark opposition of Iran and its regional activities may prompt the strengthening of diplomacy between Israel and Saudi Arabia to oppose Tehran's aggression. If Israel and Saudi Arabia were to compromise diplomatically, it would bolster the regional influence of anti-Iran members of the Gulf Cooperation Council. Strengthening relationships between the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and Israel may dissuade Iran's aggressive regional proxy operations and facilitate efforts to achieve peace in the Middle East.

[Maggie van Dyken]

YEMEN: Prisoner Exchange May Lead to Future Diplomatic Talks and Further Violence

Summary: The warring parties of Yemen agreed to release over 1,000 conflict-related prisoners following a week of diplomatic talks. The agreement encourages further negotiations but also risks intensifying violence in the Marid region.

Development: On 26 September, Sana'a and Ansar Allah rebels agreed to release 1,081 conflict-related prisoners, following a week of talks in Switzerland, although a prisoner swap has yet to occur. The negotiations come after the 2018 Stockholm talks, where both sides agreed to a similar but larger deal. However, the Stockholm agreement remains unfulfilled. The Swiss summit also secured promises from both sides to reconvene for future diplomatic talks. These actions coincide with Ansar Allah's intensifying a campaign to seize the oil rich Marid region of northern Yemen.

Analysis: The diplomatic summit and agreement will probably not resolve increased conflict in the Marid region, but may set a trend for further talks amidst growing international pressure to end the Yemeni conflict and the resulting humanitarian crisis. Ansar Allah may bolster its operations in the Marid region to maintain diplomatic leverage in further negotiations with Sana'a. Though talks continue to fail, the international community will probably continue to push for a diplomatic reconciliation of the increasingly complex conflict.

[Will Moody]

About GSIS

Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University's (ERAU) Bachelor of Science in Global Security & Intelligence Studies (GSIS) degree program at our Prescott Campus blends both academic and professional studies to equip students with the knowledge and skills necessary to become future leaders in intelligence, security, and law enforcement. The program provides students with a sound foundation in the liberal arts, including international relations, foreign languages and cultures, international law, foreign policy, political and military history, and other essential topics.

About EE

Eagle Eye Intelligence (EE) is an intelligence and research organization led by the students of the GSIS program at ERAU in Prescott, Arizona.

Dr. Philip E. Jones founded EE and Embry-Riddle's GSIS program in 2002, following a career with the Central Intelligence Agency and consulting work in international development and global security. Professor Dale R. Avery, a former career intelligence analyst at the Central Intelligence Agency and Office of the Director of National Intelligence, serves as EE's faculty advisor.

EE strives to provide actionable intelligence and analysis to its customers during the academic year. We are driven by a number of goals – continuous development, nonpartisanship, interdisciplinary studies, global awareness, and professionalism.

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The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors, and do not represent the position Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University or the College of Security and Intelligence.

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