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LEBANON: Election on Track Likely to Hold Strong with New Funding

Summary: The Lebanese general elections will take place on 15 May. The International Monetary Funds (IMF) agreed on funding Lebanon \$3 billion over many years, which will likely stabilize Beirut's economic position. This stability will likely lead to a power shift in Lebanon, probably forcing Hezbollah out of the top position. However, Hezbollah may act and retaliate to hold its strong position over Beirut.

Background: On 7 April, the IMF concluded its 11-day visit to Lebanon with an agreement to fund \$3 billion over the next four years. The reform contains various stages, with the first stage of reform occurring in the banking and financial sectors due to Lebanon's poverty and currency crisis. Around 75% of the country fell into poverty and the currency lost more than 90% of its value. This sector reform acts in response to how much the banking sector lost, totaling around \$70 billion. Hezbollah exploited the currency plummet to make money and fund its operations to take full control of the country. With the upcoming election on 15 May, the financial sector represents a large part of the next elected leaders. Beirut's shift towards financial reform negatively impacted Hezbollah, limiting the organization's influence.

Hezbollah Changing its Focuses: Hezbollah likely shifted its focus from Israel to domestic opponents due to the upcoming election. The recent support from Western countries to allies within Lebanon likely poses a threat to Hezbollah because of its loss of support throughout the country while Western countries back its opponents. The shift of aim from Hezbollah likely relates to the anticipation of the 15 May election. The election remains on track to occur on schedule, but Hezbollah will likely try to delay or postpone. The attempt to delay the election may come in the form of a Hezbollah-backed coup attempt.

Lebanese Armed Forces Capabilities: Comparing numbers between the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) and Hezbollah would likely show that Hezbollah would win in an unsupported fight. With Hezbollah overseeing the entire country and no decisions passing without Hezbollah's approval, outside help would likely prove necessary. The latest funding from the IMF will disperse throughout different sectors of Lebanon, likely to give the LAF an external boost needed to diminish some of Hezbollah's power in the upcoming election. Due to the new funding, the opponents of Hezbollah inside Lebanon will likely have a better chance this election, should the election remain timely. With the European Union (EU) sending observers for the election, this will likely deter Hezbollah, but not rule out all possibilities of a Hezbollah-led coup.

Outlook and Implications: The LAF and Hezbollah remain deadlocked, which will likely raise tensions since Hezbollah's domestic enemies continue to gain power. Overall, having two enemies this close in a power grab could likely prove fatal for Lebanon, especially if Hezbollah overpowered the LAF. The LAF on its own likely lacks the capabilities to overthrow Hezbollah, but should the likelihood of a Hezbollah coup to delay or sabotage the election increase, the LAF will most likely gain enough support from the EU to push back the organization. The Western investment in Lebanon will likely prompt the granting of EU support should such a conflict occur.

[Tucker Jones]

IRAN: Tehran Threat Will Most Likely Strengthen Abraham Accords Countries

Summary: On 28 March, the member countries of the Abraham Accords convened in Jerusalem to exhibit unity against Tehran and its proxies as the Tehran nuclear deal nears completion. The summit signals unity and will likely bolster the member countries regional security.

Development: On 28 March, the Abraham Accord signatories Abu Dhabi, Rabat, Manama, Washington, as well as Cairo, discussed potential capabilities to deter Tehran and its proxies. Jerusalem, as well as some Arab countries, worry that the arising Tehran nuclear deal will give the country the means to build a bomb and increase Tehran-backed guerillas. As a result, the summit discussions consisted of plans for increased security ties, along with increased commercial ties. The normalization and the overwhelming realignment of Middle Eastern powers accelerated since the war in Ukraine. However, Jerusalem's involvement in the summit and its place in the Abraham Accords brought a feeling of betrayal from Palestinians as the Arab countries normalize relations with Jerusalem. In solidarity with Palestinians, after Amman's government declined an invitation to the foreign ministers meeting, King Abdullah visited the Israeli-occupied West bank.

Analysis: The threat of Tehran will almost certainly improve relations between Abraham Accords members as they try to mitigate their security vulnerabilities. The summit displays Arab countries' acceptance of Jerusalem, which likely indicates normalizing ties with Jerusalem. The belligerence of Tehran will most likely push states in the region to unite against Tehran and its proxies. It may also cause other countries who see Tehran as a threat to cooperate with Jerusalem or join the Abraham Accords. This will likely cause the countries to shed their historical inhibitions leading to progress in the Middle East Peace Process.

[Olivia Theige]

MEXICO: Displaced Ukrainian Refugees in Tijuana Likely to Seek to Move North

Summary: Mexico continues to experience an influx of asylum-seeking Ukrainian citizens, and many of them will almost certainly seek to enter the United States.

Development: On 6 April, the Ukrainian refugees arriving in Tijuana, the largest northern border city, doubled to over 2,000. Following Moscow's invasion of Kiev in February, Ukraine's citizens evacuated by the thousands to nearby countries offering asylum with Mexico as a primary destination. While considerable amounts of refugees arrive in the country every week, the main concentration of arrivals centers in Tijuana where the government houses refugees in temporary shelters. On 1 March, 3,000 citizens reportedly crossed the San Ysidro border at Tijuana. Broadcasting from Mexico City motivated Ukrainian citizens to travel to Mexico sparking the current Kiev-Mexico City trend. The border region of Tijuana already suffered from immigration fluctuation before the influx of Ukrainian refugees.

Analysis: The arrival of Ukrainian citizens into Mexico almost certainly will continue to increase, and many of those immigrants almost certainly chose Mexico as a steppingstone to gain entry into the United States. Following the recent authorization by Western powers for Ukrainians to cross Mexico's northern border, another surge of refugees likely could arrive. Current levels of immigration to the region remain high but manageable though probably not for long. Should the region become too unstable, the border or the city could halt Ukrainian arrivals and temporarily shut down the border to asylum seekers.

[Dyanna Henriquez]

FRANCE: First-Round Election Results Likely Indicate Increasing Polarization

Summary: The close results in the first-round presidential election indicate a growing political shift to both the far left and right, likely resulting in a tight race leading to the second-round elections.

Development: On 10 April, results from France's first-round presidential elections showed that Macron won 27.6% of the vote while his primary competitor Marine Le Pen won 23.4%, moving both onto the second round of elections on 24 April. Polls currently forecast that Macron will likely win with 51% of the vote in the second round, with Le Pen gaining 49%, but that a victory either way would remain within the poll's margin of error, according to Al Jazeera. Le Pen, a member of the far-right National Rally party, continues to capitalize on disenchantment with Macron and focus on economic issues. Other significantly right- or left-leaning candidates performed well, with more moderate candidates performing unexpectedly poorly. The third place far-left candidate Jean-Luc Melenchon, who missed the cut-off for the second round of elections, declined to fully endorse Macron, but instead stated that no votes should go to the far-right. Macron, currently focusing on the Ukraine-Russia conflict, remains a pro-Europe and NATO candidate while Le Pen represents those feeling less enthusiastic about both.

Analysis: The unexpected success of more extreme candidates indicates growing political decisiveness within France and will likely prove challenging for Macron to overcome. Critics may view Macron's primary focus on Ukraine instead of on the election and any other domestic matters as a reason for supporting Le Pen, who may make promises of putting France first. The first-round election results indicate that the growing political divide and support for more extreme groups will likely continue to increase. With the second-round election polling extremely close, Macron may pivot to focus more on campaigning and winning over those who voted for Melenchon. Le Pen will likely work to secure the votes of those who supported other far-right candidates in the first round and continue to capitalize on disenchantment with Macron. Macron's success in wooing the supporters of Melenchon will likely indicate his ultimate performance in the second-round election. Should Macron win, he will almost certainly face increased pressure from both far right and left groups.

[Alli McIntyre]

HONG KONG: Censorship Will Almost Certainly Continue as Enforced by Authorities

Summary: Hong Kong's authorities' increased arrest rate for journalists will likely continue to increase, despite outdated and autonomy limiting laws.

Development: On 11 April, authorities arrested Allan Au, a veteran journalist for sedition. Au said his reporting on Hong Kong likely contributed to his arrest. Hong Kong authorities arrested six individuals in the past week on the same charge for clapping at the result of a court hearing. The basis for these accusations come from a law enacted in Hong Kong's British colonial era and a national security law enacted by Beijing in 2020, according to Aljazeera. As a result of this legislation, several journalism groups shut down or experienced the dismissal and arrest of executives.

Analysis: The censorship enforced by Hong Kong's authorities will almost certainly continue and worsen as time goes on. The enforcement of the national security law by Hong Kong authorities displays an almost certain support of Beijing's interference with Hong Kong's autonomy. As a result, news outlets in Hong Kong will probably publish with intense scrutiny and lapses in such will likely result in heavy legal consequences.

[Savannah Gallop]

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. Currently, Professor Dale R. Avery, a former career intelligence analyst, 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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Alli McIntyre, a senior in the GSIS program, currently serves as EE's Editor in Chief. For questions or comments, contact the team at editorsee@gmail.com or Professor Avery at 928.777.4708. If you use material from this publication, you should attribute: Eagle Eye Intelligence Edition 406, a publication created by students at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Prescott, Arizona.



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