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Executive Summary

With a worsening economy, political instability, and increasing regional tensions, Lebanon has become increasingly at risk of government collapse as we move into 2020. Although the possibility of stability remains possible, this instability has remained a constant in Lebanon's history, and prospects for change remain unlikely. This report analyzes structural data and recent events to provide an overall assessment of the state and potential for conflict. Ultimately, this report notes that without economic and political stability, civil unrest within Lebanon will increase. This report also finds that should regional conflicts continue to influence Lebanese action, the state will fall further into future instability.

Background

After gaining its independence from France in 1958, sectarian tensions in Lebanon intensified, eventually culminating in civil war. The war lasted from 1975 to 1990, during which time Lebanon was invaded by both Syria and Israel. In July 2006 further conflict erupted between Hezbollah and Israel, this time lasting 34 days. Following multiple resurgences to conflict, and various regime changes, Lebanon finally has a stable government as of January 2019. In October 2019, however, the government announced new tax measures triggering protests calling for social and economic reforms around government corruption. Prime Minister Saad Hariri resigned on the 13th day of protests and a new government headed by Hassan Diab was formed in January 2020.

Internal Stakeholders

Hezbollah: Currently backing the Lebanese government, Hezbollah is increasingly scrutinized by the public over worsening economic opportunities and high levels of corruption. Challenges to its position within Lebanese politics could lead to government collapse and political instability. Hostile relationships with external entities contribute to future conflict.

Hassan Diab/National Unity Government: The new government under Diab is controlled exclusively by Hezbollah and its allies, a first in Lebanese politics; potentially increasing internal and external tensions with Iran, Israel and the opposition.

Civil Society/Public: The 2019 anti-establishment protests, discontent with the high levels of corruption, worsening economy, and lack of political alternatives to the established elites led to the resignation of former Prime Minister Hariri. The crisis will likely continue if the new government retains the same problems as its predecessor.

AMAL Movement: This is the Lebanese political party associated with Lebanon's Shia community and is one of the largest Shia parties in parliament. It has faced significant allegations of corruption from both parliamentarians and the public.

External Stakeholders

Syria: Lebanon's foreign policy is heavily influenced by Syria. Syria occupied Lebanon for 29 years (1976-2005), retreating during the Cedar Revolution. Syria's protracted conflict has produced over 1.4 million refugees hosted by Lebanon, causing economic and political strain. Any worsening of violence in Syria would have a direct impact on Lebanon.

Israel: The recent change in government could lead to increased tensions in the region, given Israeli opposition to Hezbollah. Additionally, Israel and Lebanon have a history of politically motivated violence, including a ground invasion.

Iran: Hezbollah receives funding and resources from the Iranian government, providing them influence in the Lebanese government. Iran's support could lead to increased tensions with Saudi Arabia, especially with the formation of a Hezbollah-backed National Unity Government in 2020.


United Nations (UNHCR): Refugees have further strained the Lebanese economy and social structures. In 2015, the Lebanese government ordered the UNHCR-UN's refugee governing body- to suspend the registration of Syrian refugees.


Key Indicators


 High Risk

 Moderate Risk

 Low Risk

 Situation is worsening

 Situation is stable

 Situation is improving

Governance and Political Instability



Stabilizing Factors	Level of democracy: Polity IV score of 6 (stable at 6 since 2005). Elections deemed relatively free and fair by Freedom House. A confessionalism power-sharing agreement is constitutionally protected and ensures religious representation in Cabinet and the Executive.
Destabilizing Factors	Regime Durability: Lebanon has a history of regime instability. The Presidency was vacant from 2014-2016 and there were no parliamentary elections from 2009-2018. In October 2019, Saad Hariri resigned as prime Minister following countrywide anti-establishment protests calling for his resignation. On January 21, 2020 a new government was formed under Hassan Diab. Restrictions on Civil and Political Rights: Score of 9 out of 14 on Freedom House restrictions on civil and political rights index. While sectarian political representation is legally protected within the confessionalism government structure, competition outside the established political elite is suppressed and the introduction of alternative parties prevented.
Assessment	Corruption and lack of alternatives to the established political elite are major sources of frustration among the general public and played an integral part in the 2019 anti-government protests. These frustrations with the government are not expected to evaporate with the new Diab Government. The potential for violence and further anti-government protest is plausible if not likely.

Economic Performance



Stabilizing	Oil and gas: The new government approved external companies' exploration of oil and gas. They can submit oil bids to explore resources in Lebanon.
Destabilizing Factors	Conditions: Economic conditions are worsening, with a decrease in foreign investment and a relatively steady, yet unsustainable level of debt. Trade within the state has deteriorated leading to high reliance on imports, low revenue from exports, and dwindling GDP growth within the state. Unemployment: High youth unemployment rates have also significantly contributed to the civil unrest.
Assessment	With a dwindling economy, Lebanon risks weakening its overall economic performance, which may lead to further instability. However, by exploiting its newfound oil opportunities, Lebanon could see an increase in overall exports as a percentage of GDP, and hopefully a boost in its economy as well.


History of Armed Conflict





Stabilizing Factors	Decline in sectarian violence: During the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990), the Lebanese Armed Forces fragmented along sectarian lines and gave way to a new sectarian militia order. These militias subsequently set off a vicious spiral of sectarian violence, with minor clashes growing into larger massacres. Even though Lebanon's political system remains deeply sectarian, there has been little sectarian violence since the end of the Civil War. Ongoing protests are largely a rebuke of the sectarian order, with members of all political and sectarian groups.
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	<p>Unified LAF: The Ta'if Accord, signed in 1989, brought an end to the civil war and called for the disarmament and disbandment of all political and sectarian militias in Lebanon. By 1992, Christian and Druze militias were disbanded, while the Lebanese Forces, the Amal Movement, and the People's Liberation Army all assimilated into the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF). Since then, the LAF has slowly consolidated its position as the only major non-sectarian institution.</p>
Destabilizing Factors	<p>Syrian Civil War: Spillover from the Syrian Civil War has substantially affected Lebanon's security. In August 2014, insurgents from the Islamic State and Jabhat al-Nusra crossed from Syria into Lebanon and captured the town of Asral. Conflict also arose in several cities between members of the Alawite community who supported Assad and members of the Sunni majority.</p> <p>Hezbollah and Israel: An armed conflict between Hezbollah and Israel broke out in 2006, resulting in the death of over 1,000 Lebanese, the majority of whom were civilians. In September 2019, Israel and Hezbollah traded cross-border fire for the first time in four years, with both sides claiming to have caused casualties. Absent a permanent ceasefire agreement, tensions may escalate and threaten to drag both parties into renewed conflict.</p> <p>Mass protests: In October 2019, thousands of protesters assembled in cities across the country, calling for an end to government corruption and a sectarian political system. In response, military and security forces engaged in an excessive use of force, rape threats, and arbitrary arrests of protesters.</p>
Assessment	<p>Despite a tumultuous and violent history, the current risk of armed conflict in Lebanon remains low. Hezbollah and Israel have both reiterated that they do not wish to revisit the level of violence seen in 2006, and the Lebanese Armed Forces have proven effective at pushing back spillover from the Syrian civil war. However, if Diab's government fails to introduce necessary reforms, Lebanon will most likely be wracked by a renewed wave of heavy protests, potentially leading to increased civil conflict.</p>

Militarization	
Stabilizing Factors	<p>Military aid: Foreign military investment has continued to provide Lebanon with improved military development. Military aid has also resumed from Saudi Arabia and other states, which helps to foster military strength and security within the region.</p> <p>Domestic cooperation: The Lebanese Armed Forces continue to work with domestic allies, which may increase domestic security if cooperation proves effective.</p>
Destabilizing Factors	<p>Regional Tensions: Conflicts in neighboring states threaten the stability of Lebanon as the country may become involved in a conflict it does not wish to take part in. We may see a heightened militarization in response.</p> <p>Hezbollah: As the group is involved in several regional conflicts, Lebanon may become complicit in their actions as the cooperation between the LAF and Hezbollah increases. Furthermore, Hezbollah itself provides a security risk to Lebanon, as they may become induced to regain political control of the state in the future.</p>
Assessment	<p>Lebanon has remained rather stable in their military expenditure and has shown a gradual decline in their number of military personnel related to their growing population. Lebanon's involvement in regional tensions may increase, which may lead to a growing state involvement in the conflict, and their linkages to Hezbollah may see the state become increasingly militarized as a result.</p>

Population Heterogeneity 	
Stabilizing	Cultural and linguistic homogeneity. Lebanon's population is 95% Arab, with most residents speaking Arabic.
Destabilizing Factors	<p>Religious heterogeneity. An estimated 61.1% of the Lebanese population is Muslim, while Christians and Druze make up 33.7% and 5.2% of the population, respectively. The Muslim population, meanwhile, is evenly split between Sunnis and Shia. Efforts to respect religious sensitivities and to share power between the various communities are imperative, considering the country's history with religious conflict.</p> <p>Refugees. The presence of 1.4 million Syrian refugees in Lebanon has acted as a destabilizing force. There have been numerous reported cases of Christian municipalities forcibly evicting Syrian Muslims from the area. Growing tensions between Lebanese and Syrian communities are rooted particularly in economic and sectarian concerns. These tensions, in turn, have resulted in growing pressure for repatriation and return, despite the situation in Syria not yet being conducive to return.</p>
Assessment	While it is true that the protest movement has not splintered along sectarian lines, it is also true that tensions between Lebanon's various religious groups remain high. The immense number of refugees hosted in the country has exacerbated already-existing tensions and fissures in Lebanese society. Furthermore, increasing tensions between Iran and the Sunni Arab world may feed into discord between Sunni and Shia Lebanese. If sectarian fissures in society are deepened as a result of divisive rhetoric (from the new government or Hezbollah, for example), this could lead to further instability in Lebanon.

Demographic Stress 	
Stabilizing Factors	Population growth: The total population in Lebanon has gradually increased since 2015, reaching 6.85 million people in 2018. Lebanon's population growth rate has significantly decreased within the last 10 years reaching 0.54%. Lebanon's gradual population increase poses no significant contribution to conflict.
Destabilizing Factors	<p>Population Density: The population density has been on a steady increase reaching 669 people per sq. km of land 2018; meaning that most people are concentrated in a small area, in this case the urban area.</p> <p>Urban Population: Urban population has slightly increased from 5.76 million in 2015 to 6.07 million people in 2018 comprising 88.1 and 88.6% of the total population respectively. The significant concentration of the population in the urban area could contribute to destabilization; especially increased competition for limited resources.</p> <p>Youth Bulge: Given the current climate, Lebanon's slowly declining, albeit large, youth bulge of 26.1% (percent of the population ages 0-14 years) is a cause for concern as it creates a dependency on already constrained resources. Coupled with the high youth unemployment rate, it contributes to the demand for scarce services which can lead to unrest. So far, this demand has manifested in the 2019-2020 protests.</p>
Assessment	Lebanon's large youth bulge and high concentration in the urban area are a cause for concern given its current economic status. With a large youth bulge creating dependency on scarce resources coupled with high unemployment rates especially among youth, Lebanon's demographic stress could have catastrophic consequences. This has already manifested in the recent protests.

International Linkages 	
Stabilizing Factors	<p>Economic and Regional Organizations: Lebanon has extensive membership in international and regional organizations. Some of the more significant ones include, the Arab Monetary Fund (ABEDA), Group of 77 (G77), League of Arab States (LAS), International Criminal Police Organization (Interpol) and International Monetary Fund (IMF). Lebanon is an observer of the World Trade organization and has been actively pursuing accession to the WTO since 1999.</p> <p>United Nations: Lebanon and the UN cooperate heavily. It is a member of UNCTAD, UNESCO, UNIDO, UNRWA, and the UNHCR. UNHCR works closely with the Government of Lebanon and numerous other national and international partners in providing protection and assistance to the 1.4 million refugees and stateless persons that reside in Lebanon as a result of the Syrian conflict. Lebanon is now UNHCR’s largest single-country operation.</p>
Destabilizing Factors	<p>Syrian Conflict/Refugee Crisis: The Syrian Civil War (2011 -) has had serious destabilizing effects on Lebanon. The current refugee population is 1.4 million, with most of the management administered through the UNHCR. This intense demographic shock has led to security challenges, as well as economic strains in order to aid those in need.</p> <p>Israel: Israel and Lebanon have a contentious relationship. Israel invaded Lebanon in 1982 during the civil war and triggered the 2006 Lebanon War through a ground invasion. Over 1,000 Lebanese and 150 Israelis were killed in the conflict. Israel continues to be significantly involved in Lebanese sectarian politics, due to Hezbollah and Palestinian involvement there.</p>
Assessment	While membership in international organizations provides stability, Lebanon remains a country surrounded by neighbouring protracted crises and conflict. The active involvement of neighbouring state groups in Lebanese politics, either directly or through party allegiances, has further contributed to instability (Israel and PLO in particular).

Human Development 	
Stabilizing Factors	<p>Life Expectancy: Average life expectancy is 78 years (77 males / 80 females). This is above regional averages and comparable to OECD country levels.</p> <p>Infant Mortality: Infant mortality rate has steadily declined from 8.8 in 2010 to 6.4 in 2018.</p>
Destabilizing Factors	<p>Water and Sanitation: According to WHO and UNICEF, less than half (47%) of Lebanon’s population has access to safely managed drinking water and only 21% of the population uses safely managed sanitation services.</p> <p>Poverty: Approximately one third of Lebanese people live in poverty and the World Bank estimates this number could rise to 50% if the economic situation worsens. Food insecurity remains a significant problem, where 49% of Lebanese still worry about access to food.</p> <p>Education: Nearly 75% of Lebanon’s elementary age students attend private schools due to the lack of quality resources in the public system. Lebanon’s UNDP Education Index score in 2018 was 0.604 out of 1, reflecting struggles to increase the quality and completion rate of education since the end of the civil war.</p>
Assessment	Human development conditions and HDI remain poor, even relative to Lebanon’s MENA neighbours. Disaggregation of human development indicators point to an overwhelming need gap among refugee populations, who experience greater need across all areas of development. The situation remains stable and improving now, as health and well-being levels have steadily and consistently been improving.

Environmental Stress



<p>Stabilizing Factors</p>	<p>Rate of Deforestation: Lebanon’s rate of deforestation has practically remained the same from 2013 to 2016 with the forest covering 13.4% of the land. There are efforts to revive the Cedars of Lebanon which are heavily protected and considered a UNESCO world heritage site. However, these efforts will not be seen within the next 50 years (UNESCO).</p>
<p>Destabilizing Factors</p>	<p>Water Supply: While Lebanon is among the few countries in the Middle East that historically had adequate water supply with its various bodies of water and ample rainfall, it is predicted to face water shortages within the next ten years if the government does not improve its water management.</p>
<p>Assessment</p>	<p>Given the government’s mismanagement of water resources coupled with pollution led by inadequate waste disposal and sanitation systems will continue to contribute to the tensions in Lebanon. With many people fighting over limited water resources, this could contribute to the state of unrest within Lebanon.</p>

Scenarios

<p>Best Case Scenario</p>	<p>The protest movement remains unified and does not divide along sectarian lines, and protesters will continue to employ non-violent tactics. Hassan Diab’s government will engage with protesters and institute reforms that they are calling for. Hezbollah advances a Lebanon-first policy and puts the country’s domestic priorities ahead of Iran’s priorities. Hezbollah supports protesters’ demands for reform instead of trying to maintain the status quo. They ignore rising tensions between Iran and the US, and refrain from attacking Israel on Iran’s behalf.</p>
<p>Worst Case Scenario</p>	<p>Hassan Diab’s government fails to institute the necessary reforms to satisfy protesters’ demands. Frustrated by the government’s response, protesters adopt more violent tactics. The army, in turn, responds by suppressing protesters with the use of violence, eventually leading to civil war. Hezbollah becomes embroiled in rising Iran-US tensions, and launches an attack against Israel, which it sees as inseparable from the US. This, in turn, prompts Israel to launch a violent counterattack.</p>
<p>Most Likely Scenario</p>	<p>Hassan Diab’s new government institutes some cursory reforms in order to appease protesters. Protesters are reticent to push too hard for reforms, out of fear that the country descends into the chaos seen during the civil war. Consequently, protests dwindle after some time. If Hezbollah retains its minor position in government, it will refrain from large-scale violence. Further, Western states recognize the importance of keeping Lebanon afloat in a region wracked by war and will provide the country with necessary financial aid.</p>

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