Lebanon Essay, Research Paper

The republic of Lebanon, located on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea, is bordered in the north and east by Syria, and bounded by Israel on the south. One of the smaller countries in the Middle East, Lebanon?s area measures 4036 square miles. The country is 135 miles long, and its width is only 50 miles at its widest point. About 89% of Lebanon?s 3,619,971 citizens live in urban areas. Beirut has regained most of its prewar population and is still the country’s largest city. The northern port city of Tripoli is the second largest city, followed by Juniyah, north of Beirut. Becoming independent after World War II, Lebanon flourished under its western free-market economy, and was frequented by tourists from all parts of the globe until its civil war.

With stringent laws regarding secrecy in banking, Beirut became the Middle East?s banking and investment center. During the war, the rest of the Middle East experienced an economic boom, and businesses moved from Beirut to other Middle East economic centers. Since the end of the war in 1991, Lebanon’s economy has begun to revive. Its Gross Domestic Product reached upwards of $17.2 billion in 1998, and has been increasing by an average of 7.7% annually since 1990. Much of this growth can be attributed to Horizon 2000, a multibillion-dollar reconstruction program sponsored by the government to rebuild Beirut’s central district. Exports go mainly to the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Syria, Jordan, France, Italy, and the United States. Imports come from Italy, the United States, Germany, France, Syria, the United Kingdom, and Japan. Lebanon’s chief exports are food and food products, paper products, chemicals, textiles, jewelry, and metal products. Imports to Lebanon include automobiles, trucks, heavy equipment, communications equipment, electronic goods, appliances, machinery, and petroleum and petroleum products.

Religion in Lebanon is does not only serve as one?s preference in worship, but also determines one?s social and political identification. Approximately, 95 % of Lebanese are Arabs; Armenians are the primary minority. Muslims make up about 70% of the population, and are mainly divided into the Sunni, Shia, and Druze sects. Christians make up about 30% of the population, and many belong to the Maronite sect In Lebanon, each sectarian group has its own agenda, political culture, and sworn leaders. Most of the populist speaks Arabic, but its dialect changes some depending on the sect. In addition, English, French, and Armenian are also spoken. Each religion also wants to put Lebanon on a different course. Christians favor the country to have closer ties with Europe, while the Muslims favor closer ties with their Arab neighbors.

However, outside interference by several neighbors, along with the general tensions in the Middle East incited a brief civil war in 1958. Fearing the war may spread from this former British and French controlled colony, the U.S. landed 14,000 Marines on beaches south of Beirut in July 1958. The Marines’ presence helped stabilize the country, and by early August the fighting was finished. After the war, Fouad Chehab, restored confidence and advanced Lebanon’s economic boom. His successor in 1964, Charles Helou, continued much of Chehab’s programs but was thwarted by the severe aftereffects of the Six Day War in 1967 with Israel. The war sent another wave of Palestinian refugees to Lebanon. Although Helou kept Lebanon neutral, the fighting and other Middle East tensions triggered complex domestic conflicts. Neither Helou nor his successor after 1970, Sulayman Franjiyah, could stop them. In 1972 the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) opened its headquarters in Beirut. From southern Lebanon, the PLO launched hit-and-run attacks on northern Israel.

Lebanon?s Civil War began on April 13, 1975, when Muslim gunmen killed several Christian Phalangists at a Beirut church. In revenge the Phalangists, ambushed a busload of Palestinians, killing 27. More brutal battles occurred, prompting military intervention by Syria. A ceasefire in November 1976 temporarily calmed the situation down. However, the PLO continued its attacks on northern Israel. The Israelis responded by invading southern Lebanon in March 1978, and a self-proclaimed security zone on the southern border of Lebanon, which was manned by the South Lebanon Army (SLA), a Lebanese militia sympathetic to Israel. Unfortunately between 1980 and 1982, fighting again intensified in Beirut. In a goal ?pacify? the Palestinians and punish Lebanon for hosting them, Israel launched ?Operation Peace for Galilee,? a full-scale invasion of Lebanon, in June 1982. Israel pushed north to Beirut forcing international mediation, which led to the evacuation of thousands of PLO troops and Syrians from Beirut and Tripoli. A multinational force made up of U.S., French, British, and Italian troops tried to stabilize the situation. Fighting continued sporadically, and in October 1983 more than 300 U.S. and French troops were killed by a truck bomb in Beirut. The bombing prompted the multinational force to withdraw. Violence continued from 1983 to 1985 when Israel withdrew most of its 1983 invasion forces, again leaving a small occupying force in the south. However, a new extremist group, Hezbollah (Party of God), resumed attacks on Israel. The fighting eased between 1986 and 1988, but hostage-taking amid near-anarchy became commonplace.

The beginning of the end of the war came when Lebanon’s parliamentarians met in AtTa’if, Saudi Arabia, in October 1989, where they reached the Ta’if Agreement for a National Reconciliation Charter. They elected a new president, Ren? Moawad, who was assassinated 17 days later and replaced by Elias Hrawi. By October of 1990, the fighting was over. The new Government of National Reconciliation began the delicate task of disarming the militias and restoring stability. In a decade and a half of war, an estimated 130,000 to 150,000 people were killed, 200,000 were wounded, and the country suffered an estimated $25 billion to $30 billion in damage and lost revenues.

Even though the war is over, Lebanese are still subject to 35,000 Syrian occupation troops, and indirect political control by Syria?s new leader Bashar al-Assad. The continued presence of hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees and of Hezbollah guerillas in the recently evacuated Israeli securtity zone in the south still hampers the country?s recovery. Its peace process with Israel has been stalled due to Syria?s intransigence with Israeli and American negotiators. Yet in the recent elections, the Syrian-backed, incumbent candidate, Lahoud was voted out of office and replaced by Hrawi.

The country is still governed under a 1926 constitution with amendments that have been added over the years. The unicameral legislature (the National Assembly) has 128 members, half Christian and half Muslim, and is elected every four years by universal adult suffrage. Under the constitution, the president, who appoints the prime minister is elected by the legislature for a six-year term. There have been no repercussions since the election, which means Lebanon may be starting to creep out of Syria?s shadow, and may soon begin to formulate its own policies.

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