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Lebanon and the Arab Uprisings: In the eye of the hurricane, edited by Maximilian Felsch and Martin Wählisch, collects a valuable set of perspectives on Lebanon's political predicament as it is caught again in regional strife. Of interest both to scholars and regional policy specialists, the book lays out in three sections the impact of the Syrian uprisings and subsequent war, Lebanese responses to internal issues resulting therefrom, and finally the country's capacity to make ties to other polities. While the authors in this volume intermittently reference the uprisings that began in Tunisia in December of 2010, the Syrian Civil War is the "storm" referenced in the book's title and in whose eye Lebanon rests.

The Syrian conflict recasts both the political possibilities of the region and strains the internal structure of Lebanese national politics. Internal issues, primarily the grinding opposition between the pro-Assad and anti-Assad political blocs—the March 8 and March 14 Alliances,[1] respectively—the deepening involvement of Hezbollah in the Syrian Civil War, and the arrival of over a million refugees (to date) as a result of the war has produced great anxiety (albeit with little sustained violence) within Lebanon. Informal relations among elites, domestic and international entanglements both by states and non-state actors, the strengths and weaknesses of confessional politics, and the plight of refugees from Syria are the realities around which Lebanese political actors triangulate, keeping an unstable country balanced on crumbling ground.

Chapters in this work survey both the Lebanese state and non-state networks and movements and generally support the premise that informal relations between sectarian Lebanese elites, both ongoing and occasional, drive politics in Lebanon. This is seen most clearly in the chapters by Meier and Zelin, each of which deals with the complex yet informal interactions that drive sectarian balance, transnational affiliation, and the legitimacy of government engagement in Lebanese crises. Whether the informality of these interactions is a result of the country's establishment as an independent merchant republic in the mid-twentieth century or whether it is simply a pragmatic response to the sustained instability caused by Lebanese Civil War, the consistent interpretation of the work's authors is that while formal political institutions are prone to gridlock and stasis, informal relations among the heads of sectarian political blocs serve as the site of compromise and pragmatic accommodation designed to preserve national stability.

Complementing Lebanon's political use of informal mechanisms and exchanges, say the authors, is opacity, a recurring theme in the text. Ranstorp's chapter on the deepening involvement of Hezbollah in the Syrian Civil War describes the organization's initial denial of involvement and subsequent admission thereof only when the organization could claim to be working in Lebanese national interest. Felsch, by contrast, traces the intensification of Christian nationalism in response to similar challenges, as sectarian Christian economic and social leaders create exclusive spaces. Syrian refugees, their numbers, access to resources, and status as subjects of international nongovernmental organizations are similarly difficult to accurately assess; their numbers are estimated because until January of 2015, they were allowed *de facto* free passage into Lebanon.

As *Lebanon and the Arab Uprisings* documents, the resilience of informality limits the functionality of formal politics, as evidenced by the state's recent difficulties in forming a government and its inability to formulate or agree upon legitimate foreign policy or domestic programs for general national benefit. The Baabda Declaration of 2012 was an attempt to set a policy of dissociation from the Syrian uprising, but the declaration was immediately ignored by

Hezbollah. Wilkins notes that "leaders from both political alliances were absent during the dialogue session," suggesting that a formal policy statement was not highly valued. Wilkins, in a discussion of Lebanese-Syrian relations, notes that even during ongoing efforts to set formal foreign policy concerning the Syrian uprising, sectarian leaders provided informal guidance and support on behalf of their respective "sides" of the Syrian conflict. Ruble's chapter on petro-politics highlights Lebanese political disunity through a comparison with surrounding states' more unified engagement with new petrochemical resources. Her suggestion that Lebanon would benefit from a sovereign wealth fund is balanced by her suspicion that "the sectarian divisions in the country make it unlikely that revenues will be spent in the most efficient ways possible."

There are two theories of sectarian politics in *Lebanon and the Arab Uprisings*: one that sees the ongoing contest between March 8 bloc and the March 14 bloc as an enduring source of political conflict cast in new light, and another that depicts Hezbollah as the precipitating actor in the current domestic crisis, focusing on how different parties engage with this new front for Hezbollah's armed wing. As chapters by Fakhoury, Zelin, and Wilkin document, the rise of Sunni jihadi groups and conflict between Sunni and other sectarian parties in Trablus and Saida have also drawn new lines in Lebanon's confessional struggle. That these two incidents, along with bombings in the Beirut suburbs, which are controlled by Hezbollah, are the only immediately visible instantiations of outright hostilities stirred by the Syrian Civil War is at the very least a testament to the new dialogue between Hezbollah and Tayyar al Mustaqbal, the Hariri-dominated Sunni party if not evidence of the value of the pragmatic coordination between Hezbollah and the Lebanese Armed Forces.

Lebanon's new refugee population, displaced from Syria, is commonly seen as a potential disruptor of the confessional balance and has, as van Vliet argues, "exacerbated traditional sectarian patronage networks" as a result of a lack of a single national refugee policy. Meier's chapter on Palestinian refugees from Syria describes this community's doubled refugee status and their uncertain legal status. The unwillingness of any state to allow these refugees to formalize their existence points to the harsher logics of indefinitely long stays in Lebanon. The complex and frequently shifting responses of the Lebanese state to the Syrian refugee crisis, as well as the management of the crisis by a constellation of state actors, international humanitarian organizations, and informal accommodation also demonstrates how the Lebanese tendency toward informal political mechanisms has been applied to the management of this crisis as well. This arrangement also models the pragmatism associated with informal, sectarian politics, in that refugees can challenge the security that Wählisch and Felsch argue is the "lowest common denominator" in Lebanese politics, and are thus afforded space but not formal status.

The impact of the Arab uprisings and Syrian refugee crisis can be seen in the increased focus on the part of both the US and EU to security and stability rather than soft power relations based on cultural exchange and trade, as documented in chapters by Skulte-Ouaiss and Pänke. Skulte-Ouaiss also documents another instance of the centrality of political informality in Lebanon—or what she terms the "schizophrenia"—between the continued warm cultural and economic exchanges between the US and Lebanon contrasted with the suspicion that the US maintains towards Lebanon's complex political landscape. The EU, by contrast, has actively shifted to a more pragmatic position towards Lebanon based on security, replacing its earlier project of cultural exchange and economic engagement. In both cases, the positions taken by global powers do not significantly challenge the informality of internal Lebanese politics.

As the editors say outright, this volume is a "snapshot" of the present situation, and as such offers a great deal of tentative explanation; what may become of the Syrian refugees in Lebanon is unknown, and the authors can only report on the possibility of further deepening of sectarian hostilities to come. Covering, as they do, events in progress, many of the chapters rely heavily on popular media accounts of the ongoing crisis, resulting in a recirculation of a few narratives, the Lebanese Armed Forces fighting jihadists in Saida, for one. In keeping with the attention to current events, most authors opt for data density over broader interpretation, and some chapters would benefit from clearer historical or social contextualization.

Uncertainty is the overarching theme of this volume, as the Syrian Civil War is poised to grind on as it has since 2011. Few of its possible outcomes are likely to improve Lebanon's lot. Losing the status quo with a neighbor to which it has long been attached is unlikely to make Lebanon more stable and less given to sectarian politics, and Marktanner, Wilson, and El-Saghir's model of the cost of the conflict underscores this reality. The Arab uprisings have not significantly altered the central confessional balance in Lebanese politics, though Hezbollah's involvement in the Syrian Civil War, the rise of domestic Sunni jihadist political groups, and the influx of refugees have thrown this system into a new era of looming crisis. As always, Lebanon's ability to focus on national development and a coherent foreign policy is severely limited by the informal, sectarian leaders' management of the crises induced by the Syrian Civil War. This book, nominally setting out to describe the Arab uprisings' impact on Lebanon, winds up above all else narrating a new chapter in Lebanon's long and complex history with Syria. Whether or not this relationship will pitch Lebanon back into strife is unclear, but this volume will help an interested reader understand the precursors to likely outcomes.

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[1] The March 8 Alliance is a coalition of Lebanese political parties more closely allied with the Assad regime, Hezbollah is the largest party involved in the coalition. The March 14 Alliance, formed in 2005 after the assassination of former PM Rafik Hariri is a coalition of Lebanese political parties and independents who oppose the Assad regime in Syria.