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1975-2008:  
PULLING LEBANON TOGETHER

*George Emile Irani*



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# 1975-2008: Pulling Lebanon Together

George Emile Irani

Almost thirty years have gone by since the adoption by the Lebanese Parliament of the Taif Accord (October 23, 1989). The Taif Accord put an end to a civil war that engulfed Lebanon for more than 15 years. Between 1989 and 2005, the Taif Accord remained largely unimplemented because of internal disputes between Christians and Muslim Lebanese and foremostly because of Syria's heavy-handed manipulation of politics in the country.

In May 2008, clashes erupted between the Iranian and Syrian-supported militia-cum-political party Hezbollah and its allies and the pro-Western forces rallied around the March 14 movement. As a result of these clashes the small Persian Gulf State of Qatar exerted efforts to bring Lebanon back from the brink of civil war. The mediation by Qatar led to the Doha Agreement currently being implemented in Lebanon.

The Lebanese polity is faced today with two clashing visions. The first is a neo-liberal vision based on respect for basic freedoms and an economy based on a capitalist free market; in short, a country reflecting the Swiss model on the shores of the Mediterranean.

The other vision is that of a religiously-inspired Sparta whereby a totalitarian religious ideology, in this case that of Hezbollah, predominates supported by Iran. Hezbollah would like to create an Islamic-inspired state that would give the Shia community in Lebanon its overdue role in power sharing. Basically, we have in Lebanon today the clash between a pro-Western Swiss model confronting a Spartan political and military Iranian-inspired model.

The outcome of this clash will determine the future of the country.

The purpose of this paper is to assess and analyze the internal political and the external geopolitical dimensions of the Taif Accord and whether this Accord has succeeded or failed in giving Lebanon a stable model of governance.

This paper is divided into three parts. In the first part, I will present a brief background to the Lebanese War<sup>1</sup> that began in 1975 and look into the various actors and issues that played a role in this war. I will then look into the various settlement attempts before the Taif Accord. In the second part, I will present and assess the provisions of the Taif Accord related to internal governance issues and Lebanon's regional and global relations. In the third part, I will look at the current situation in Lebanon following the summer 2006 war between Hezbollah and Israel and the aftermath of the May 2008 clashes that led to the Doha Agreement. In my conclusions, I will look at the prospects of creating a central state in Lebanon that would avoid more bloodshed and useless wars for the country.

## The Lebanese War (1975-1989)

Because of its multi-community constitution, Lebanon has long been considered an example of the coexistence of multiethnic and multireligious groups. Nevertheless, there is an inherent corollary to this pluralism that has led some scholars to characterize Lebanon as "precarious", "improbable" and "fragmented".<sup>2</sup>

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1. In this paper I will define the 1975-1989 conflict in Lebanon as the Lebanese War as it not only had an internal dimension but equally regional and global dimensions.

2. This point is raised by David C. Gordon in his *The Republic of Lebanon: Nation in Jeopardy* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1983). For a learned, detailed and well-researched account on the formation of modern Lebanon and its Constitution, see Edmond Rabbath, *La formation historique du Liban politique et constitutionnel: Essai de synthèse* (Beirut: Publications de l'Université Libanaise, 1973); see also his *La constitution libanaise: Origines, textes et commentaires* (Beirut: Publications de l'Université Libanaise, 1982). See also the recently published first comprehensive history of Lebanon in the modern period by Fawwaz Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon* (London and Ann Arbor: Pluto Books, 2007). Another important and scholarly source on the history and contemporary politics of Lebanon are the books of Lebanese historian Kamal Salibi. See his *Modern History of Lebanon* (New York: Praeger, 1964); see also *Crossroads to Civil War: Lebanon 1959-1976* (New York: Caravan Books, 1976); and his *A House of Many Mansions: The History of Lebanon Reconsidered* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

Throughout its history, Lebanon has been a microcosm of changes – socio-political and religious – in the Arab world. As a land of refuge, enjoying a high degree of freedom and tolerance, the Lebanese polity became the testing ground of internecine struggles, opposing Arab regimes and ideologies.

The war in Lebanon itself became a theatre of confrontation for the Arabs and the Israelis. By the end of the 1960s the increasing militancy of Palestinian nationalism trapped Lebanon in the Arab-Israeli-Palestinian struggle: first, passively, Lebanon gave asylum to waves of Palestinian refugees (1948, 1967, 1970, 1971); then, actively, following the Jordanian subjugation in 1970 of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). Moreover, with the involvement of regional powers (Syria, Israel, Iran, etc.), the Lebanese War escalated to the point where Lebanon became by proxy the center of confrontation between East and West.

The Lebanese War, which erupted in 1975 and was ended by the Taif Accord in 1989, is a very complex conflict involving several actors and issues. The strife – which was not of a religious nature – pitted against each other the Maronite-dominated Phalangist Party and its allies, and a Muslim-Leftist coalition, actively backed by Palestinian guerrilla organizations (Fatah, al-Saiqa, and those that rejected any peaceful settlement with Israel).<sup>3</sup>

Domestically, some of the major developments that led to the Lebanese War included (1) a disruption of the demographic balance in favor of the Muslims who called for a reallocation of government posts, (2) social difficulties caused by soaring prices, housing problems and student unrest, and (3) an internal crisis inside the Maronite

Church where the monastic orders contested the authority of the patriarch.

At the regional level, the defeat by Israel of the Arab armies in 1967 led to marked disenchantment with the policies followed at that time by the champion of pan-Arabism, Egypt's President Gamal Abdel Nasser. Beginning in the early 1960s, the major issue in the Middle East became the question of Palestine and its resolution to the satisfaction of the Arabs. In the mid-1970s, following the fourth Arab-Israeli war (1973) and the United States-sponsored peace process in the Middle East, Lebanon became the battlefield for those in favor of or against negotiations with the Jewish state. To complicate the situation further, Palestinian commando groups were transformed into a symbol of righteous revenge.<sup>4</sup>

At the global level, the process of détente that characterized superpower relations in the late 1960s did not fully include the Middle East. A case in point was the shelving of the 1977 joint United States-Soviet statement for peace between Arabs and Israelis based on UN Resolutions 242 and 338, and the exclusion of the former USSR from the Middle East peace process initiated by the United States. Finally, the oil crisis had an important effect on the policies of both producers and consumers, leading to a major but ineffective involvement of Western Europe and Japan in Middle Eastern affairs.

The major events that led to the Lebanese War began with the signing of the Cairo Agreements (1969) between the Lebanese government and the PLO. Palestinian fighters used the Lebanese south as a launching pad for guerrilla attacks against Israeli settlements in Galilee. The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) retaliated after each PLO action, which in turn heightened tensions, first

3. There is an extensive literature available on the Lebanese War. I have selected a few titles in Arabic, French and English. An important and documented chronology of the war, published in Arabic, is the work by Antoine Khuwayri, *Mausu'at al-Harb fi Lubnan, 1975-1981*, 12 vols., published by the author's own Dar al-Abjadiyya lil Sahafa wal Tiba'a wal Nashr, Sarba, Lebanon. An objective French assessment of the first two years of the war (1975-1977) can be found in Albert Bourgi and Pierre Weiss, *Les complots libanais* (Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1978) and their other book which covers the war from 1978 to the Israeli invasion, summer 1982, *Liban: La cinquième guerre du Proche-Orient* (Paris: Editions Publisud, 1983). See also Elizabeth Picard, *Liban, état de discorde, des fondations à la guerre civile* (Paris: Flammarion, 1988). Primary sources written by two major protagonists of the Lebanese War include Kamal Joumlatt, *Pour le Liban* (Paris: Editions Stock, 1978) and Camille Chamoun, *Crise au Liban* (Beirut: n.p., 1977). Among selected books written on the war by Lebanese, see among other titles: Benassar, *Anatomie d'une guerre et d'une occupation : Evénements du Liban de 1975 à 1978* (Paris: Éditions Gallilée, 1978) and his *Paix d'Israël au Liban* (Beirut: Les Editions l'Orient-Le Jour, May 1983). A Phalangist perspective of the first two years of the war can be found in Nicolas Nasr, *Harb Lubnan wa Madaha* (Beirut: Dar al-Amal, 1977), and J.A. Nasr, *Mihnat Lubnan fi Thawrat al-Yasar* (Beirut: Dar al-Amal, 1977). A Lebanese Marxist perspective can be found in Mahdi Amel, *Al-Qadiyya al-Filastiniyya fi Idiolojiat al-Burjuaziyya al-Lubnaniyya* (Beirut, Research Center, Palestine Liberation Organization, 1980) and his *Bahs fi Asbab al-Harb al-Ahliyya fi Lubnan*, vol.1 (Beirut: Dar al-Farabi, 1979).

4. For an interesting and in-depth analysis of Arab politics after 1967, see Fouad Ajami, *The Arab Predicament: Arab Political Thought and Practice since 1967* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

with the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), which clashed with the Palestinians, and then with the Christian militias after 1975.<sup>5</sup> The turmoil in Lebanon also provoked a greater Syrian and Israeli involvement in Lebanese politics and resulted in their direct presence on the ground. Moreover, the Camp David Accords (1978) and the Egyptian-Israeli Peace Treaty (1979) destroyed what was left of Arab unity. This situation was reflected dramatically in the Lebanese arena. The Palestinians were left out of bilateral peace negotiations and had to obtain the backing of those Arab regimes that were willing to champion their cause.

In Lebanon itself, the Egyptian-Israeli entente led to polarization of the conflicting parties and increasing fear of the possibility of the permanent settlement of Palestinians in Lebanon and the partition of the country. By 1982, the major events in Lebanon included the emergence of Bashir Gemayel as a powerful Maronite leader; the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982; and the massacres of Palestinian civilians in the camps of Sabra and Shatila.

### Actors and Issues in the Lebanese War

Because of its formation as a federation of ethno-religious communities, Lebanon cannot be considered a nation-state. Lebanese communities numbering 17, each protective of its socio-religious traditions and prerogatives, have never evolved from a confessional, sectarian "mosaic" to form an integrated political system.<sup>6</sup>

Coexistence between Christian and Muslim communities was first sanctioned by the Lebanese Constitution of 1926 and by the unwritten National Covenant (*Mithaak al-Watani*) of 1943. In Article 95 of the Constitution, which was supposed to be only transitory, it is written that "the communities will be fairly represented in public jobs and the composition of the government."

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The National Covenant of 1943 was more of a political act aimed at the "Lebanonization" of Muslims and the "Arabization" of Christians. It was based on the premise that the Maronites would renounce their allegiance to French protection and the Muslims would forego their dream of unity with Syria. During the discussions on the National Covenant, it was agreed that the president of Lebanon would be a Christian Maronite, the prime minister a Sunni Muslim, and the speaker of the Parliament a Shiite Muslim.<sup>7</sup>

The National Covenant of 1943 was the origin of the misunderstanding between Christians – mostly Maronites – and Muslims in Lebanon. In 1949 a prominent Lebanese journalist, Georges Naccache, writing about the covenant, said that "two negations will never make a nation." This is still applicable to the current situation in Lebanon.<sup>8</sup>

One of the major consequences of the *modus vivendi* worked out in the 1943 covenant has been that confessionalism thwarted any possibility for the creation of a solid Lebanese national identity. In fact, the unwritten agreement had institutionalized the heterogeneous aspect of the Lebanese polity. Unlike Western societies where the primary allegiance is toward the state, in Lebanon citizens have no bearing on the social system if they do not belong to a given religious community and pay allegiance to a *zaim* (leader), whether political or religious.

The communities that constitute Lebanon's basic population are, on the Christian side, the

5. For a detailed assessment of the situation in Southern Lebanon, see George Emile Irani, "Spain, Lebanon and UNIFIL", *Working Paper 21/2008*, Real Instituto Elcano, 20 May 2008.

6. The term "mosaic" to define Lebanon is used by Michael W. Suleiman, *Political Parties in Lebanon: A Challenge of a Fragmented Political Culture* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967); see also Edmond Rabbath, "Du régime communautaire au confessionalisme", *Esprit*, 5-6 (May-June 1983), pp. 74-82.

7. On the National Covenant and its implications, see Edmond Rabat, *Formation historique*, pp. 515-70. See also the excellent book by Antoine Nasri Messarra, *Théorie générale du système politique libanais: Essai comparé sur les fondements et les perspectives d'évolution d'un système consensuel de gouvernement* (Paris: Cariscript, 1994).

8 Georges Naccache, "Deux négations ne font pas une nation!" in his book *Un rêve libanais: 1943-1972* (Beirut: Fiches du Monde Arabe, 1983), pp. 52-58.

Maronites, the Greek Orthodox, the Greek Catholics and the Armenians; and on the Muslim side, Shiite Muslims, Sunni Muslims and the Druzes.<sup>9</sup>

Since 1932, when the last official population survey was undertaken in Lebanon, no formal census has been carried out to analyze the demographic weight of the Lebanese communities. The country has a population of 3,874,050 people. About 39% of the population are Christians, 59.7% Muslims (Shia, Sunni and Druze), while there are also Jewish and Kurdish minorities. Arabs make up 95% of the population, while 4% are Armenian.<sup>10</sup>

The Maronites, the only group among Eastern Christians to have remained united, take their name from a hermit, Maroun, who lived in Northern Syria where he died in 410. Following their persecution, they migrated to Lebanon where they settled in the mountains. There they have been able to maintain their identity as a people and develop a high degree of independence and cohesion. Maronite communion with the Holy See dates back to the period of the Crusades. The spiritual head of the Maronite community is the patriarch of Antioch and All the East. Outside Lebanon, Maronite communities are found in Syria, Cyprus, Egypt and Palestine. Following World War I, Maronites migrated to North America, Latin America, Africa and Australia.

The political weight of the Maronite community goes beyond its numerical importance. In fact, the Maronites believe that Lebanon is their last refuge and that any threat to their presence and privileges would transform the country into another Arab-Muslim state. As an alternative to the failure of the National Covenant, several Maronite personalities advanced solutions ranging from the creation of a federal or a confederal state in Lebanon to the outright partition of the country.<sup>11</sup>

During the Lebanese War, the most important group that embodied and defended Maronite and

Christian aspirations in Lebanon was the Phalangist Party.<sup>12</sup> The Lebanese Phalange Party (*Hizb al-Kata'ib al-Lubnaniyya*) was founded in 1936 by Pierre Gemayel, a leading figure in Maronite and Lebanese politics. From the Phalangist standpoint, the Lebanese entity is a historical fact, having its roots in the trade center of ancient Phoenicia. The pillars of Lebanese nationalism – the 1920 borders, the 1926 Constitution and the National Covenant of 1943 – are incontestable facts and cannot be subject to question. Lebanon should cooperate with the Arab countries, provided that political relations are based on the principles of mutual respect and equality.

When the Lebanese War began in 1975, the Phalangists staunchly opposed the military involvement and political meddling of Palestinian guerrillas in Lebanese politics. In fact, they have called for the abrogation of the 1969 Cairo Agreements (that allowed the PLO to operate freely from Southern Lebanon) and the relocation of Palestinian refugees (there are around 250,000 refugees spread over 12 camps in Lebanon) to the other Arab countries. Most Phalangist Party members are recruited from the Maronite community.

In 1976 the Phalangists joined a larger coalition of major Christian conservative parties known as the “Lebanese Front”. The Front included the National Liberal Party of former President Camille Chamoun, the Guardians of Cedars, the Permanent Congress of the Lebanese Orders of Monks, and other Christian personalities. The Lebanese Front charter stressed “the need to maintain the unity of Lebanon, to re-establish the authority of the law, and to respect private enterprise in the economic sector.”<sup>13</sup>

In order to preserve their presence and survival during the war, the Phalangists and their allies called first on regional powers, then on global intervention, to defend the integrity of Lebanon as a state. In the summer of 1976, the Syrian regime of Hafez al-Assad was invited to intervene in Lebanon.

9. For further details on the communities in Lebanon, see Rabbath, *Formation historique*, pp. 1-144; see also A.J. Arberry, ed., *Religion in the Middle East: Three Religions in Concord and Conflict*, vol.1, *Judaism and Christianity*; vol. 2, *Islam* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1969); see also Luc-Henri de Bar, *Les communautés confessionnelles du Liban* (Paris: Editions Recherches sur les Civilisations, 1983).

10. [www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/le.html#People](http://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/le.html#People)

11. Former President Camille Chamoun had proposed the creation of a Swiss-like system of cantons, political decentralization, or a federal system for Lebanon. Pierre Gemayel, founder of the Phalangist Party, did not share Chamoun's proposed solutions.

12. For an official history of the Phalangist (Kata'ib) Party, see *Tarikh Hizb al-Kata'ib al-; Lubnaniyya, 1936-1946*, 2 vols., put out by the party's publishing house (Beirut: Dar al-'Amal lil Nashr, 1979, 1981). See also Suleiman, *Political Parties*, pp. 232-49.

13. For further details, see Elizabeth Picard, “Rôle et évolution du Front Libanais dans la guerre civile”, in *Maghreb-Machrek*, 90 (Oct-Dec. 1980), pp. 16-39.

The Syrian army played a crucial role in boosting the morale of the conservative Christian militias with whom Damascus had sided to forestall victory by the Muslim-Leftist-Palestinian coalition.

Strengthened by Syria's support, the Phalangists and their allies mounted an attack (June-August 1976) against the Palestinian camps situated in the Christian-dominated sector of Beirut. These camps surrounded an important area comprising 30 percent of Lebanon's industrial capacity. The most important and heavily populated of these camps was that of Tall-Zaatar. It included Palestinian and Shiite refugees from Southern Lebanon.<sup>14</sup>

The Syrian-Lebanese conservative Christian harmony did not last very long – less than two years. In order to counter the Palestinian and Syrian presence in Lebanon – the Syrian involvement was not favorably viewed by some leaders in the Maronite community – the Christian-dominated militia decided to establish close ties with the Israelis.

The Israelis came to the Lebanese Christians' rescue because of their status as a threatened minority in the Near East. The Israeli-Maronite connection goes as far back as the 1930s when some prominent Maronite leaders advocated the creation of a "Christian homeland" similar to the homeland promised to the Jews in the Balfour Declaration.<sup>15</sup>

Two major consequences ensued from this close Israeli-Maronite cooperation. First, there was a shift in alliance between the Syrians and the Lebanese Front. Having entered Lebanon to help the Maronites, the Syrians wanted to exact a high price from the Christian militias, given their relationship with Israel. By 1978, the Christian-populated areas of East Beirut were heavily bombarded by Syrian troops. Then a split erupted inside the Maronite camp itself and took the form of bit-

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## It was not until the 1970s that the Shiite community began playing an active role in Lebanese politics

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ter clashes between the followers of former President Suleiman Franjeh in Northern Lebanon and the Phalangist militias.

Together with the Christian communities in Lebanon, Muslim communities have played an ever increasing role in the country's politics. Unlike the Sunni community, which followed the mainstream teaching of Islam, the Shiites (derived from the Arabic for "partisans", the Shiites being partisans of Ali, nephew and son-in-law of the Prophet, Muhammad) belong to the sect of the Twelvers, which is predominant in Iran. It was not until the 1970s that the Shiite community began playing an active role in Lebanese politics. The catalyst and leader of this community was Imam Mousa al-Sadr, who disappeared in the mid-1970s on a trip to Libya.<sup>16</sup>

Given their status as an underprivileged and docile community until the end of the 1960s, the Shiites then became more organized and challenged the status quo forced on them by the Sunni-Maronite domination of Lebanese politics. Two major institutions were established to channel Shiite demands: the Supreme Shiite Council, which was founded to advocate the community's case on a national level, and Harakat Amal, a politico-military force that became a significant group to be contended with, especially in West Beirut and Southern Lebanon. Following the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon, a third group, Hezbollah (the Party of God) emerged as a major player in Shia and Lebanese politics.<sup>17</sup>

The Druze religion is an offshoot of Shiism. Following their persecution in Egypt, the Druzes set-

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14. Regarding these events and the issues surrounding the Palestinian camp of Tall-Zaatar, see Antoine Khuwayri, *Al-Harb fi Lubnan*, 1976, vol. 2 (Jounieh: Al Bulisiyya Press, 1977), pp. 784-86, 801, 809-10. For the Tall-Zaatar events as seen from the PLO's perspective, see *Tall-Zaatar: The Fight Against Fascism* (Beirut: PLO, Unified Information, Foreign Information Department, 1976) (pamphlet).

15. For a detailed account of the Maronite-Israeli connection and the role of the Maronite patriarch then, see David A. Kerr, "The Temporal Authority of the Maronite Patriarchate, 1920-1958: A Study in the Relationship of Religious and Secular Power", dissertation, Oxford University, 1973, pp. 248-59.

16. Regarding the Shiite community in Lebanon, see de Bar, *Communautés*, pp. 17-24. See also Augustus Richard Norton, *AMAL and the Shi'a: Struggle for the Soul of Lebanon* (Austin, Texas: Texas University Press, 1987).

17. For an excellent account of Hezbollah, its origins and current role in Lebanon, see Walid Charara and Frédéric Domont, *Le Hezbollah: Un mouvement islamo-nationaliste* (Paris: Fayard, 2004); see also Ahmad Nizar Hamzeh, *In the Path of Hizbullah* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2004).

tled in Syria and Lebanon. There are also Druzes who have settled in Israel and serve in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). The Druzes have played an important role in the formation of modern Lebanon.<sup>18</sup> Formed from two clan alliances – the Junblatti and the Yazbaki – the Druzes became unified during the war under the spiritual leadership of the more radical Junblatti Sheikul Aql Muhammad Abu Shaqra. The late Druze leader Kamal Junblatt was the founder and head of the Lebanese opposition before and during the war, and in 1977 was replaced by his son, Walid.

During the war, the Muslim communities in Lebanon did not present a unified front. Nevertheless, both conservative and radical elements were in agreement on fundamental issues. Given the demographic changes that have occurred in their favor since the formation of the Republic of Lebanon in 1920, Lebanese Muslims claimed that the distribution of power in Lebanon has been to their disadvantage. The other issue that united the Muslim communities was their total opposition to the partition of Lebanon and their stress on the Arab identity of the country. The other objectives that united Lebanese Muslims included (1) the consolidation of relations between Lebanon, the Arab countries and the Third World; (2) solidarity with the Palestinian people, though rejecting its permanent settlement in Lebanon; (3) the end of all cooperation with Israel; and (4) the dismantlement of the militias. Furthermore, the Muslims in Lebanon advanced two requests: (1) a major role for the prime minister who, until the Taif Accord in 1989, was considered a rubber stamp to the president's decision; and (2) a better distribution of economic wealth.<sup>19</sup>

Another key issue that stands in the way of total agreement between Christians and Muslims in Lebanon is that of the deconfessionalization of the system. Until now, the traditional Muslim leadership refused to secularize the laws governing personal status (such as civil marriage) and to admit laicism as a *modus operandi* in daily life. The separation of religion from civil life is seen as incompatible with the ideals of an Islamic theocratic state.<sup>20</sup> On the

other hand, the Maronites believe that the abolition of political confessionalism is not enough if not followed by complete secularization. They saw in the Muslim calls for reforms an attempt to dominate Lebanese politics by their sheer numerical superiority. Consequently, for some Christians, Lebanon is considered the last refuge where they could practice their own faith without being subjected to the Islamic majority prevalent in most of the Arab and Islamic countries.

From the military standpoint, the Maronite-dominated Lebanese Front was confronted during the war by the Lebanese National Movement (LNM) (*al-Haraka al-Wataniyya al-Lubnaniyya*). One of the main objectives of the LNM was to be an active and militant advocate for dispossessed Lebanese living in the "misery belt" around Beirut. In its August 1975 "program for the democratic reform of the Lebanese system," the Lebanese National Movement, avocated, among other objectives, Lebanon's complete solidarity with the Palestinians, the adoption of a proportional electoral system and the elimination of political and administrative confessionalism.<sup>21</sup>

The radical-Islamic-Leftist coalition found in the PLO presence in Lebanon a golden opportunity to upset the sectarian equilibrium of the country. Nevertheless, the LNM aims were thwarted by the pervasive confessional nature of the Lebanese body politic, the policies followed by Syria, and the internal bickering that marred relationships between the various Muslim groups and between them and the Palestinians.<sup>22</sup>

Having set the Lebanese War in its local and domestic perspectives, my analysis will now delve into the role and preferences of regional and global powers during the conflict.

In light of the military and diplomatic changes that occurred in the Middle East following the fourth Arab-Israeli war (1973), the Syrian leadership feared that the United States, together with Egypt

18. Regarding the Druze community, see de Bar, *Communautés*, pp. 119-37. See also Kais M. Firro, *The Druzes in the Jewish State: A Brief History* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 1999).

19. For further details, see Khuwayri, *Hawadith Lubnan, 1977-1978*, vol. 6, pp. 664-66.

20. On the debate in Lebanon regarding laicism and secularism, see P.T., "Débat autour de la laïcité au Liban", *Proche-Orient Chrétien*, 27 (1977), pp. 145-56.

21. For a detailed account of the Lebanese National Movement and its program of reforms, see Sami Zhibian, *Al-Haraka al-Wataniyya al-Lubnaniyya* (Beirut: Dar al-Masirat, 1977).

22. For further details, see the excellent book by Walid Khalidi, *Conflict and Violence in Lebanon, Confrontation in the Middle East* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Center for International Affairs, 1979), pp. 75-79.

and Israel, was bent on isolating Damascus from any future settlement of the Arab-Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Lebanon offered a fertile ground for Syria's president, Hafez al-Assad, to enhance his regional stature and prove to the US and its Middle Eastern allies that Syria was an important factor in any future settlement in the area.

The outbreak of the Lebanese War was perceived in Damascus as a threat to Syria's military and political positions against Israel. During the War, the goals of the Syrian leadership were threefold: (1) to prevent a leftist-Palestinian takeover in Lebanon, which would have inevitably led to a conflict between Syria and Israel, (2) to thwart any attempt toward the partition of Lebanon that could threaten the integrity of Syria itself, and (3) to maintain the status quo between the Lebanese warring factions.<sup>23</sup>

Initially successful in their aims, the Syrians found themselves caught in the quagmire of Lebanese and regional politics. Locally, the Alawi-dominated regime in Damascus had intervened in Lebanon to save another minority (the Maronites) from total defeat. The sympathy that the ruling Alawi minority in Syria felt toward its Lebanese Christian allies was not lost on the majority Sunni population in Lebanon and the Arab countries.

Regionally, the war in Lebanon provided Syria's Arab enemies with an excellent opportunity to undermine the Syrian regime. In 1976, Saddam Hussein of Iraq, a bitter enemy of Damascus, extended direct military aid to the Palestinians resisting Syrian intervention. Libya also funneled large amounts of aid to the Lebanese National Movement and its Palestinian allies. Egypt's position was dictated by its fundamental dispute with Syria over the 1975 disengagement agreement with Israel. At the beginning of the Lebanese War, Egypt came to the aid of the PLO despite the latter's vehement condemnation of the unilateral efforts undertaken by Egyptian President Anwar Sadat to negotiate with Israel.<sup>24</sup>

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## The outbreak of the Lebanese War was perceived in Damascus as a threat to Syria's military and political positions against Israel

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Moreover, the Lebanese War was a blow to the Syrian intention to include Jordan and the PLO in constructing an "Eastern front" as a counterbalance to the Egyptian-Israeli entente. Finally, the war in Lebanon led Syria to request further aid and military support from the former Soviet Union in order to counter United States and Israeli schemes to isolate and then drag Syria into the peace process.

Notwithstanding all of the above challenges, and from 1976, the Syrian regime became the ultimate player in Lebanese politics. Damascus shrewdly played one Lebanese faction against the other to maintain its predominant role. This lasted until 2005 when Syrian troops were forced out of Lebanon following the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri.

Israel's objectives in Lebanon were not too different from those of Syria in that both countries loathed any radical change in the Lebanese formula of 1943. For Tel Aviv, the PLO should not be allowed a free hand in Southern Lebanon to disrupt the Northern Israeli settlements. From that point of view, the Israelis used the tactic of increased but controlled tensions in Southern Lebanon. Following each guerrilla attack, an Israeli retaliation ensued, creating an exodus of local populations and increasing pressures on the Lebanese government to take an action similar to that of Jordanian King Hussein when in 1970 he quashed the PLO presence in his kingdom. The weakness of the central government in Beirut led the Israeli authorities to work out some kind of a tacit *modus vivendi* with the Syrians.<sup>25</sup>

With the Likud-dominated coalition in power, Israeli objectives in Lebanon were given a new impetus,

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23. Regarding Syria's policies in Lebanon, see Adeed Dawisha, *Syria and the Lebanese Crisis* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980); Daniel Tschirgi with George Irani, *The United States, Syria, and the Lebanese Crisis*, Research Note no. 8 (Los Angeles: UCLA, Center for International and Strategic Affairs, January 1982); also Itamar Rabinovich, "The Limits of Military Power: Syria's Role", in *Lebanon in Crisis: Participants and Issues*, P. Edward Haley and Lewis W. Snider, eds. (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1979), pp. 55-73.

24. Khalidi, *op. cit.*, pp. 84-86.

25. Regarding Israel's policy in the Lebanese War, see Lewis W. Snider, P. Edward Haley, Abraham R. Wagner, and Nicki J. Cohen, "Israel", in Haley and Snider, *Lebanon in Crisis*, pp. 91-112. Regarding the situation in Southern Lebanon, see George Emile Irani, "Spain, Lebanon and UNIFIL", *Working Paper 21/2008*, Real Instituto Elcano, Madrid, 20 May 2008.

especially by Defense Minister Ariel Sharon. In the summer of 1982 the Israeli army again invaded Lebanon with two far-reaching objectives: (1) destroying PLO bases in Lebanon and (2) installing a friendly Phalangist-dominated regime in Beirut. By the fall of 1982, Sharon's grandiose schemes ended following the tragic killing of Palestinian civilians in the Palestinian camps of Sabra and Shatila.<sup>26</sup>

At the global level, the United States was concerned with preserving the diplomatic gains it had obtained following the October 1973 war. The conflict in Lebanon was viewed in Washington as a sideshow designed to distract those parties who opposed the United States-sponsored peace process in the Middle East. This situation led the late American scholar Malcolm Kerr to write that "perhaps the objective of American policy has already been achieved with the simultaneous neutralization of Egypt, Syria, and the Palestine Liberation Organization. Instead of fighting Israel, they are now fighting each other, and the PLO is struggling for its very existence."<sup>27</sup>

At the beginning of the Lebanese War and until the end of the Carter administration, the United States allowed regional powers ample discretion, mostly Syria and Israel. Washington attempted to establish a situation of controlled equilibrium in Lebanon itself by mediating between Syrians and Israelis in order to avoid a possible confrontation between their armies.<sup>28</sup>

### The Road to Taif

Between 1985 and 1989 factional conflict worsened in Lebanon as various efforts at national reconciliation failed. Heavy fighting took place in the "War of the Camps" in 1985 and 1986 as the Shia Muslim Amal militiamen sought to defeat PLO groups from major strongholds in Beirut and other Lebanese cities. In 1987, fighting broke out again in

Beirut opposing PLO, leftist and Druzes militiamen allied against Amal's presence in the city. This led to further Syrian military intervention. In 1988, violent clashes occurred in Beirut opposing the two main Shia groups, Amal and Hezbollah.

On the political front, Prime Minister Rashid Karame, who was heading a government of national unity following failed peace efforts in 1984, was assassinated in June 1987. Amin Gemayel, whose term as President of the Republic ended in September 1988, appointed Maronite General Michel Awn as acting prime minister. Gemayel's decision contravened the 1943 unwritten National Pact whereby the prime minister ought always to be a Sunni Muslim. Lebanese Muslims totally rejected this move and heavily placed their support behind Salim al-Hoss, a Sunni leader who had succeeded Karame. At this stage, Lebanese politics became polarized between two governments: one headed by a Christian prime minister living in East Beirut and the other government headed by a Sunni Muslim in West Beirut.

The Lebanese War ended when favorable regional and international actors (both Arab and Western) opted for a resolution of the crisis. The war also ended by sheer exhaustion as most Lebanese civilians and various warlords had had enough of the devastation that Lebanon had known since 1975. Moreover, the international consensus was that, in order to control external interferences in the country, the Lebanese needed help to settle their disputes.<sup>29</sup>

In the course of the Lebanese War several attempts were made to settle the conflict. The Lebanese parties alone put forward more than seventy reform proposals. Regional and international mediators also tried to put an end to the conflict. Among them we find regional mediators from Syria, Saudi Arabia and Egypt. At the global level the US, France, Germany and the Holy See played an important role at stopping the bloodshed.<sup>30</sup>

26. For further details on Sharon's policy in Lebanon, see Amos Perlmutter, "Begin's Rhetoric and Sharon's Tactics", *Foreign Affairs* (Fall 1982), pp. 67-83. For further details on the 1982 Israeli invasion see "The War in Lebanon", special issue of the *Journal of Palestine Studies*, vol. 11, no. 4; vol. 12, no. 1, pp. 44-45 (Summer/Fall 1982). On the massacres of Sabra and Shatila, see Amnon Kapeliouk, *Sabra and Chatila: Enquête sur un massacre* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1982).

27. US Congress, Senate, 94th Congress, 2nd session, "Prospects for Peace in the Middle East", *Hearings before the Subcommittee on Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs of the Committee on Foreign Relations* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1976), p. 246.

28. For further details on US policy during the Lebanese War, see Roger W. Stookey, "The United States", in Haley and Snider, eds. *Lebanon in Crisis*, pp. 225-48. See also Jonathan Randall, *Going All the Way: Christian Warlords, Israeli Adventurers, and the War in Lebanon* (New York: Viking Press, 1983).

29. For further details, see Fawwaz Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon*, chapter 13.

30. For further details on Vatican diplomacy during the Lebanese War, see George Emile, *The Papacy and the Middle East: The Role of the Holy See in the Arab-Israel Conflict, 1962-1984* (Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), chapter 3.

As was stated earlier in this paper, the Lebanese War encompassed both internal and external dimensions. The internal dimension dealt mostly with power sharing, and constitutional, political and socioeconomic reforms. The external dimension centered on Lebanon's role and relations with its neighbors and the country's role in the Arab-Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The various settlement plans, both internal and external, which were devised before Taif, tried to find a solution to one or both of these dimensions.

The settlement plans that were devised before the Taif Accord are the following:<sup>31</sup>

- The National Dialogue Committee (September-November 1975). The committee, which included veteran Christian and Muslim Lebanese politicians, failed to agree on the basic issues affecting Lebanon (identity, sovereignty, power-sharing, political reform and security issues).
- The Constitutional Document of President Suleiman Franjeh (February 1976). This document dealt mostly with internal issues such as enhancing the power of the prime minister, and advocated parity between Christian and Muslim representatives in the Lebanese Parliament and decentralization of the central administration. This document did not tackle the regional dimension of the Lebanese War.
- The Riyadh and Cairo Summit (November 1976). This Arab summit that saw a consensus between three regional players, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Egypt, led to the end of the first phase of the Lebanese War. As a result of this summit the Arab Deterrent Force (ADF) was created for peacekeeping purposes in Lebanon. Syrian forces had the largest forces in the ADF. The summit also dealt with the issue of disarming the militias and collection of heavy weapons.
- The Lebanese Parliamentary Document (April 24, 1978). This document reflected a consensus reached by various members of the Lebanese Parliament around the issues of Lebanese unity, sovereignty, reconciliation and reforms.

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## Gemayel's decision contravened the 1943 unwritten National Pact whereby the prime minister ought always to be a Sunni Muslim

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- The Fourteen Points of Consensus for a National Accord (March 1980). This document was drafted jointly by President Elias Sarkis and Prime Minister Salim al-Hoss. It included general principles dealing with national sovereignty and political reforms but did not specify the instruments to achieve these goals.
- The May 17, 1983 agreement between Lebanon and Israel. Brokered by the then US Secretary of State, George Shultz, this document came in the aftermath of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon. It tried to remove Lebanon from the Syrian sphere of influence and foster open diplomatic relations between Lebanon and Israel. This agreement elicited the vehement opposition of Syria and its allies in Lebanon. The agreement was abrogated in March 1984.<sup>32</sup>
- The Geneva and Lausanne National Reconciliation Conferences (1983). These conferences were held under Syrian sponsorship with Saudi Arabia acting as an observer. These conferences were an attempt to find a common denominator between the pre-war political leadership and the warlords who emerged during the conflict. Another result of these two conferences was the abrogation of the May 17 agreement between Lebanon and Israel. Participants at these conferences drew up a plan that dealt with the internal and regional issues affecting Lebanon.
- Ministerial Declaration of the National Unity Government (May 23, 1984). Participants in the Lausanne and Geneva conferences constituted the core of the National Unity Government headed by Prime Minister Rashid Karame. The declaration included reforms advocated in the Constitutional Document of 1976.
- The Damascus Tripartite Agreement (December 28, 1985). Under Syrian sponsorship represen-

31. For further details on the pre-Taif Accord settlement attempts, see *Working Paper: Conference on Lebanon, American Task Force for Lebanon*, Washington, DC, June 27-30, 1991. See also the excellent reader by Antoine Nasri Messarra, *Genèse de l'accord d'entente nationale de Taef (22.1.1989 et 5/11/1989: Documentation fondamentale sélectionnée sur le changement constitutionnel au Liban (1975-1990))* (Beirut, Lebanon: Lebanese Foundation for Permanent Civil Peace distributed by Librairie Orientale, 2nd revised edition, 2006).

32. For an extensive chronology, bibliography, documents and maps related to the 17 May 1983 agreement between Lebanon and Israel, see *Lebanese Israeli Negotiations: Chronology, Bibliography, Documents, Maps* (Antelias, Lebanon: CEDRE, The Lebanese Center for Documentation and Research, 1984).

tatives of the three major militias in Lebanon (Lebanese Forces, Amal, and the Progressive Socialist Party/PSP) were invited to Damascus to seal a cooperation agreement between Lebanon and Syria and provided for political, military, security and economic relations between the two countries. This agreement failed following heavy opposition by the Christian establishment and some sectors of the Muslim community.

- The Murphy-Glaspie Missions (fall 1987 to summer 1988). These were two US missions led separately by Richard Murphy, Assistant Secretary of State, and US Special Envoy April Glaspie (later US Ambassador to Iraq). The purpose of these missions was to help the Lebanese formulate a platform for political reform and prepare for the 1988 presidential elections. Both Murphy and Glaspie shuttled between Damascus and Beirut in order to find a solution that would satisfy all parties to the conflict. Their quest was unsuccessful as the Lebanese were quarrelling over the potential candidate for the presidency and the nature of political reforms.

The major problem affecting all these attempts at settlement before the Taif Accord was that they addressed one or the other dimension of the Lebanese conflict: internal and external. At that time the basic issues of internal reforms got mired in the debate on presidential powers in Lebanon. The Christians, despite their numerical inferiority, wanted to maintain the prerogatives of the presidency. The Muslims, aware of the demographic change in the country in their favor wanted to give more power to the positions of the prime minister.

Political sectarianism was another controversial issue. Because of a lack of agreement between Christians and Muslims, today it still constitutes an important obstacle to creating a Lebanese national identity. Moreover, there was a lack of consensus on Lebanon's Arab identity and its relations with Syria. Another important issue was the question of the Palestinian presence in Lebanon. This is still a thorny issue in Lebanese politics even if there is a general consensus among the Lebanese against settling the Palestinian refugees in the country.

## The National Accord Document for Lebanon (Taif Accord)

This document was the result of major horse-trading between the US and Syria with Saudi Arabia playing the role of the broker. The Taif Accord (adopted by the Lebanese Parliament on October 23, 1989) consolidated Syrian hegemony over Lebanon with US and Saudi blessing.<sup>33</sup> The Taif Accord was stillborn as its provisions were never implemented because of heavy Syrian interference in Lebanese politics and the short-sightedness of Lebanese politicians. The Accord reflected the regional and global balance of power in the region. At that time the US wanted to put an end to the festering Lebanese war in order to settle the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Following Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait in 2000, the US intervened militarily in what came to be known as the first Gulf War. The Syrian regime decided to participate in this war along with the US and as compensation Lebanon was offered as a prize for Syrian support. By 2000, *Pax Syriana* was in total control of Lebanon.<sup>34</sup>

In Michael Kerr's words, the Taif Accord "brought an end to a civil war; it defined Lebanon as an Arab state; it imposed and Arabized the regulation of the Agreement; it legalized Syrian political and military ascendancy in the country; and it was a written document."<sup>35</sup>

The Taif Accord was an attempt to achieve the following aims: (1) restoration of Lebanese national political and administrative institutions; (2) structural and institutional reform of the Lebanese political system; (3) reinstating Lebanon's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity by calling for the withdrawal of all non-Lebanese forces from the country; and (4) consolidating the special relationship between Lebanon and Syria.

In its preamble, the Taif Accord, as incorporated into the constitutional amendments approved in September 1990, states that Lebanon is "the final homeland for all its citizens." This was in answer to Christian concerns that one day Lebanon could become part of Greater Syria, an old dream of the Syrian leadership. The preamble also states that

33. For the full text of the Taif Accord, see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taif\\_Agreement](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taif_Agreement)

34. For an interesting analysis of the Taif Accord, see Michael Kerr, *Imposing Power-Sharing: Conflict and Coexistence in Northern Ireland and Lebanon* (Dublin, Ireland: Irish Academic Press, 2005). Taif is a mountain resort in Saudi Arabia.

35. Kerr, p. 160.

Lebanon “is Arab in belonging and identity.” This was another answer to some, especially in the Christian community, who have always denied the Arab identity of Lebanon. The preamble also states that the Lebanese economy is based “on a free system that guarantees individual initiatives and private ownership.” The issue of Lebanon’s economic orientation has become starker in recent years in light of Hezbollah’s prominent role in Lebanese political and military life. The choice today is between a Spartan state-controlled and ideologically-orientated model akin to Hanoi (Vietnam) or the neo-liberal free globalized model offered by Hong Kong.

At the institutional level, the major change brought by the Taif Accord is the balance of power between the president, prime minister, the Council of Ministers and the Parliament. Though not mentioned in the Taif Accord, the assignment of these positions is still based on the unwritten National Pact (1943) whereby the president is always a Maronite, the prime minister a Sunni Muslim, and the speaker of the Parliament a Shia Muslim.

The Taif Accord answered one of the major grievances of Lebanese Sunni Muslims by reducing the powers of the president of the republic and giving bigger prerogatives to the prime minister.

The power of the Parliament was also enhanced as a major concession to the Shia community. The speaker of the Parliament will be elected for the entire four-year term of the assembly. This gives the speaker major freedom to maneuver and stay above the political push and pull of Lebanese politics. The power of the speaker was recently demonstrated when the current speaker Nabih Berri shut down the Parliament for almost a year. Another important change introduced by Taif is creating parity between Christian and Muslim representatives based on 50:50 proportionality. Before Taif, seats in the Parliament were 54 for Christians and 45 for Muslims.

The Taif Accord called for the creation of a special committee headed by the president of the republic to “achieve the elimination of confessional politics.” Following the election of a Parliament on a national non-sectarian basis, a Senate will be created to represent most of Lebanon’s major sects. The Taif

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Accord in its attempt to reinforce the system of checks and balances calls for the creation of a constitutional council and a council for economic and social development to ensure a national participation of various sectors of society in the review of national planning policies.<sup>36</sup>

The Taif Accord dealt with the issue of putting an end to the internal strife and called for the disbanding of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias. It affirmed the need to reassert state sovereignty by giving the Lebanese Armed Forces a major role. It also asserted the right of every displaced Lebanese to return to his or her home or region. The question of state sovereignty and the disbanding of militias is still haunting Lebanon twenty years after the adoption of the Taif Accord.

The Taif Accord consolidated Lebanon’s ties to Syria and acknowledged the need for Syrian forces “to assist the forces of the legitimate Lebanese government to spread the authority of the State of Lebanon.” It legitimized and redefined the role of Syrian armed forces in Lebanon and set a time frame of two years for Syrian troops to leave Lebanon (by September 21, 1992). Syrian troops were forced out of Lebanon in early 2005, which was another major breach of the Taif Accord.

Lebanon’s relations with Israel will be governed by the truce agreement concluded on 23 March 1949. The Taif Accord called for “making efforts to reinforce the UN Forces in Southern Lebanon to insure the Israeli withdrawal and to provide the opportunity for the return of security and stability to the border area.” It indirectly rejected a separate peace treaty between Lebanon and Israel. The Taif Accord did not deal with the Palestinian presence in Lebanon

36. American Task Force for Lebanon, p. 92.

thus keeping this issue as the Achilles' heel of post-war Lebanon.

As stated earlier, the Taif Accord was not implemented due to Syrian heavy-handed interference in Lebanese affairs. The Syrian regime adopted the policy of divide and rule in order to maintain its hegemony over Lebanon's political and economic situation.

The non-implementation of the Taif Accord led to several important developments dramatized by the assassination of Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri in February 2005 and the forced withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon. Thanks to his worldwide business network, Hariri played a key role in the reconstruction of Lebanon. He enjoyed close ties with the Saudi royal family being himself holder of a Saudi passport. Hariri also had close ties to the Syrian regime. Before his assassination he began to reassert Lebanon's sovereign rights and to call for Syrian respect for Lebanon's political integrity. Meanwhile, Syria, together with its regional ally Iran, succeeded in consolidating the power of Hezbollah (Party of God) the Shia political-cum-military party.<sup>37</sup>

### The Summer 2006 War between Hezbollah and Israel

There are several factors to explain the events that led to the summer 2006 war between the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) and Hezbollah (Party of God): 1) the internal situation in Lebanon following the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafiq al Hariri in February 2005, 2) the emergence of Iran as a major player in the Middle East following the US war in Iraq, 3) the role of Syria that has never accepted its forced ousting from Lebanon in the spring of 2005, 4) Israel's concern with the Palestinian reality, and 5) the US administration's inability to implement the *global war on terror* and the uncontrollable situation in Iraq and Afghanistan.<sup>38</sup>

Since the end of the civil war in Lebanon (1975-1989) the country has gone through a period of amazing reconstruction shepherded by the late

Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri. Thanks to his contacts and global friendships, Hariri brought back to Lebanon a respect it had lost and a role it used to have. The major drawback though was that Hariri focused on the rebuilding of stones at the expense of reconciliation between the Lebanese.

In fact reconciliation between Lebanon's various communities did not really take place. The Christians especially came out feeling defeated and betrayed while the Sunnis and the Shias came out with more control of power levers in Lebanon. Unlike South Africa and some Latin American countries, there has never been a truth and reconciliation commission created to "police the past" in Lebanon.<sup>39</sup>

The other major fault line in this Lebanese scenario is Hezbollah's ever growing role and influence on the Lebanese scene. Created following the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon, Hezbollah became a major linchpin of the resistance against the Israeli occupation of Lebanon. The party's leadership succeeded, thanks to Syria and Iran's help, in creating a large network of institutions to answer the various social and humanitarian needs of the population of Southern Lebanon.

Hezbollah became the paramount military and social power in Southern Lebanon mostly dominated by Lebanese Shias. Calls to send Lebanese troops to the border with Israel were always faced with resistance. Lebanon's President Emile Lahoud (Syria's major ally in Lebanon) has always argued that sending Lebanese troops to the border would be tantamount to acting as defenders of Israeli security. The summer 2006 war between Israel and Hezbollah demonstrates how wrong this reasoning was. This is why, after almost one month since the beginning of the Israeli campaign, Lebanon's government has offered to send 15,000 Lebanese army troops to the border.

Following the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri (February 2005), a UN Security Council resolution 1559 was adopted,

37. For an excellent account of Hezbollah, its origins and current role in Lebanon, see Walid Charara and Frédéric Domont, *Le Hezbollah: Un mouvement islamono-nationaliste* (Paris: Fayard, 2004); see also Ahmad Nizar Hamzeh, *In the Path of Hizbullah* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2004). To understand Hezbollah's ideology, its internal structure and international policies, see Sheikh Naim Qassem, Hezbollah's Deputy Secretary-General, *HIZBULLAH: The Story from Within* (London: SAQI books, 2005); see also George Emile Irani, "Spain, Lebanon and UNIFIL," *Working Paper 21/2008*, Real Instituto Elcano, Madrid, 20 May 2008.

38. For a recent and thorough analysis of Lebanon, see Fawwaz Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon* (London and Ann Arbor, MI: Pluto Press, 2007).

39. For further details on reconciliation in Lebanon, see George E. Irani, "Acknowledgement, Forgiveness, and Reconciliation in Conflict Resolution," in *Chronos*, 5 (2002), pp. 195-220.

calling for the exit of all foreign troops from Lebanon (in this case meaning Syria) and the dismantling of Hezbollah as a militia. The rationale being that Israel had ended its occupation of Southern Lebanon and the Hezbollah resistance movement had become moot. This was not Hezbollah's interpretation. For the Shia-dominated militia, Israel was still in occupation of the Shebaa Farms (an area of around 20-25 kilometers in Southern Lebanon) which justified maintaining its weapons.<sup>40</sup>

Because of the weakness of the central government in Lebanon the country had become a favorite ground for armed groups to create a state within a state. This was the case of the PLO in Lebanon for at least 25 years until Arafat and his men were forced out of Beirut in the mid-1980s. Then we had a Lebanese brand supported by Iran and Syria: Hezbollah.

### Iran and Syria: Regional Spoilers?

Since the advent of the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979, regional politics in the Middle East have changed. Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini wanted to export his brand of fundamentalist Islam throughout the Middle East and the Muslim world. Lebanon with its large Shia community became a favorite target of Teheran entreaties. Following the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon, the Iranian regime took advantage of the mistakes committed by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) to consolidate its influence in the Land of Cedars.

The US invasion of Iraq in 2003 consolidated Iran as a major player in the region. The Shiite arc of influence now extended all the way from Teheran to Basrah, to Beirut. The Iranian regime took advantage of the fragmentation of Iraq to extend its influence and presence in Southern Iraq.

Teheran is waiting to see how US president-elect Barack Obama (both with the issue of Iraq and the Iranian nuclear weapons program) will determine his behavior in Iraq and the Middle East. Hezbollah is a convenient instrument for Iran's disruptive policies against US interests in the region.

Another major player is Syria. The Syrian regime has never formally acknowledged Lebanon as a sovereign entity. Proof has always been the absence of embassies between Syria and Lebanon. In 1976,

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with US and Israeli support, President Hafez al Assad of Syria sent his troops to Lebanon to maintain a state of controlled tensions. The Syrians played willing Lebanese factions one against the other to maintain their supremacy. With Washington's tacit support Syrian suzerainty over Lebanon lasted for thirty years.

Syria's pre-eminent role in Lebanon was challenged by the late Prime Minister Rafiq al Hariri. Hariri, who had never had a viable relationship with Emile Lahoud, Syria's appointed president of Lebanon, was incensed by Syria's decision to renew Lahoud's presidential mandate; an unconstitutional move. To reverse this trend, Hariri lobbied hard with his European and American friends to have the UN adopt a resolution calling for the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon and the disarming of Hezbollah.

In the spring of 2005, following al Hariri's assassination, Syria was forced to pull out its troops from Lebanon. Moreover, the Syrian regime is facing the prospect of an international tribunal that will be investigating all the assassinations that have taken place in Lebanon since Hariri's death, including of course his killing.

### Israel and Lebanon

Since the advent of Ariel Sharon to power in Israel and throughout his period in power the Palestinian issue became a foremost concern, especially the demographic dimension of the conflict. Sharon then decided to build a wall (or "separation fence" in official Israeli description) around most of the West Bank creating a new fact on the ground. He also decided to undercut Hamas' regional connections. Since the beginning of the second uprising

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40. For an excellent legal interpretation of the Shebaa Farms status, see Marie Ghantous, *Le Statut Juridique des Hameaux de Chebaa: Dans le Cadre du Droit International Public Applicable aux Etats Nouveaux* (Beirut, Lebanon: Moukhtarat, 2005).

*Intifadah* (2001), pro-Syrian and pro-Iranian groups such as Hamas and Hezbollah had forged a close political and military alliance. The victory of Hamas early in 2006 in the Palestinian legislative elections had forced the Israelis to get rid of Hamas and undermine its legitimacy as a democratically elected force in Palestine.

Israel's military decision to beat Hamas in Gaza and the West Bank and Hezbollah in Lebanon falls within the objectives stated by the Bush administration in its *global war on terrorism*. This war was weakened by the resurgence of the Taliban in Afghanistan and the break-up of Iraq because of the rampant civil war going on in Baghdad and the southern part of the country.

The summer 2006 war between Hezbollah and the Israel Defense Forces was a harbinger of the new realities emerging in the Middle East. First, the war in Lebanon was the longest confrontation between the Israeli army and an irregular militia. Usually wars between regular Arab and Israeli armies lasted between one and two weeks. As a result of the summer 2006 war, Hezbollah has emerged as a major player in future Lebanese and regional politics.

### From Taif to Doha: Pulling Lebanon Together

In early May 2008 a major labor strike was declared in Lebanon and Hezbollah's followers went on a rampage burning tires and shooting at rival political forces and the Lebanese army. These developments took place amidst open accusations by the Lebanese government that the Shiite nationalist religious militia had created its own telephone network in areas under its control. This is in total contravention of Lebanese laws. The government headed by Fuad Siniora ordered Hezbollah to dismantle this network. Hezbollah replied that the communication is part of its struggle against Israel.

Clashes in Lebanon extended to several areas in the country including Beirut, the Shouf Mountains and Tripoli, the major city in Northern Lebanon. The clashes led to the death of more than 80 Lebanese and extensive economic damage.

Recent violence in Lebanon has brought to the fore once again a fundamental lesson: no faction in Lebanon, however strong it is militarily, can impose its vision on the rest of the country. This is one of the basic lessons Hezbollah, the Iranian-backed Shiite militia-cum-political party, has learned. Fundamentally, Hezbollah's Iranian masters have advised the Shiite militia to show restraint and refrain from overthrowing the current status quo in Lebanon. Moreover, Hezbollah's credibility has been affected because its weapons, which are usually used to fight Israel, have been turned against fellow Lebanese.

Despite its limited success to force the government to rescind its recent decisions, Hezbollah was confronted with the bitter armed opposition by the Druze community in Mount Lebanon and the Sunni salafi militias in Northern Lebanon. Sunnis and Druzes have come out from this latest battle as more unified especially in the Druze case and more radicalized in the case of the Sunnis in Tripoli and Beirut.

Lebanon was brought back from the brink of civil war thanks to the efforts of the small Persian Gulf State of Qatar.

Qatar has been playing a role well beyond its size. The Qatari leadership has been very active on several fronts: reconciling Syria and Saudi Arabia; consolidating relations with Israel; mediating the current conflict in Yemen; and currently hosting a peace parley on Lebanon.

The Emir of Qatar convened the major Lebanese factions to meet in his country and once again hammer out a solution to the basic issues facing the Lebanese polity. On May 21 2008, representatives of the pro-Western majority coalition, also known as March 14, reached an agreement with the pro-Syrian opposition coalition also known as March 8.

The Doha Agreement regarding Lebanon is a short-term victory of sorts for the Lebanese people.<sup>41</sup> The Qatari leadership deftly used their regional and global connections to help bring about this agreement. Certainly, Qatar has filled a

41. For the full text of the Doha Agreement see [www.nowlebanon.com/NewsArticleDetails.aspx?ID=44023&MID=115&PID=2](http://www.nowlebanon.com/NewsArticleDetails.aspx?ID=44023&MID=115&PID=2).

void left by the absence of the Bush administration that limited itself to issuing various statements calling for calm in Lebanon. As for the EU, especially France, Italy and Spain, they decided to stay on the sidelines, concerned by the fate of their peacekeeping troops operating within UNIFIL.

Here are the major points of the Doha Declaration:

1. The Lebanese Parliament will convene to elect Lebanese Army commander General Michel Suleiman as President of Lebanon. He was elected on May 25.
2. A national unity government of 30 members will be formed including the ruling coalition and the opposition. Here Hezbollah and its allies have scored a major point as they obtained veto power ("blocking third") over major government decisions.
3. Get rid of the current electoral law and the adoption of a previous law adopted in 1960 that divides Lebanon into small electoral districts.
4. The parties in Doha have agreed that they will not resort to weapons to achieve political aims. This is a victory for the majority as the issue of Hezbollah's weapons will need to be discussed.
5. The newly elected president will initiate a national dialogue to discuss the basic issues facing Lebanon

The Doha Agreement has bought a period of reprieve for Lebanon that will last until the spring of 2009. By then we will have a new US president and legislative elections in Lebanon.

Meanwhile, stability in Lebanon hinges on the resolution of potential issues that could be tripwires for further conflict: 1) Hezbollah's weapons and its disarmament. UN Resolution 1559 calls for the disarmament of all militias in Lebanon; 2) Lebanon's bad relations with the Syrian regime. Lebanon is asking Damascus to respect its sovereignty and agree to the definitive drawing of borders between the two countries; 3) the issue of security in the Palestinian refugee camps; 4) the cessation of hostilities between Hezbollah and Israel that has yet to be turned into a permanent ceasefire; and, 5) the UN created international tribunal to try suspects in the killing of former Prime Minister Rafiq al Hariri

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## Lebanon is still a turbulent mosaic wracked by internal and external manipulations

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(February 14, 2005) and other assassinations of Lebanese anti-Syrian figures.

### Conclusions

Sixty years after it obtained its independence (1943) Lebanon is still searching for its role in a globalized world. Created by the French, mostly to protect Lebanese Christians, Lebanon is still a turbulent mosaic wracked by internal and external manipulations. Since the beginning of the Lebanese War (1975) till today the issues marring the creation of a modern state in Lebanon are still unresolved. These issues cover the questions of identity, sovereignty, power sharing, political reform and relations with the region and the world. Here are some recommendations in light of this 30-year historical overview and assessment of contemporary Lebanese history.

1. There is still a clash of visions regarding Lebanon's identity. Is it a modern democratic state based on the respect for basic freedoms? Or is it a new Sparta dominated by a religiously-inspired totalitarian vision of the world? This issue will not be settled soon as the Lebanese will have to agree on what kind of country they want. In 1943 the challenge was to "Arabize" the Christians and "Lebanonize" the Sunni Muslims. Today the challenge is how to reconcile a Lebanese national identity with an Iranian-inspired religious and political model. The Lebanese have gone through periods where allegiance to the state was strong to a period where sectarianism has prevailed. This is the situation today. Will it last?

2. At the beginning of this century the notion of sovereignty is being challenged by all kinds of centripetal and centrifugal forces. The challenge for Lebanon is to define its own national interests and consolidate a consensus among its

citizens. In the last thirty years Lebanon's sovereignty was violated mostly by its neighbors, Syria and Israel, and by non-state actors such as the PLO and Hezbollah. In the early 1950s, Lebanon was faced with two stark visions: following a pro-Western policy dominated by the Cold War or a pan-Arab vision. Today the visions have shifted. Is Lebanon a pro-Western state or is it part of a large pan-Islamic mostly Iranian vision?

**3.** Power sharing. Here lies one of the major issues in contemporary Lebanon. The basic problem is demographic and its impacts on the issue of governance. Until 1975, power sharing was mostly between the Maronites and the Sunnis. Following the Taif Accord, the Shias have become key players in Lebanese politics with Hezbollah receiving orders from Iran. Some Lebanese observers (mostly Christians) have advocated making Lebanon a federal or a confederal state. Isn't the country geographically too small for that? Is this a viable option?

**4.** Political reform. This issue has become a leitmotiv each time Lebanon faces a crisis. There is a need to develop a new leadership that is

willing to shed sectarian interests for the sake of national welfare. Lebanon is too dominated by clan and sectarian allegiances that are cynically used and encouraged by the warlords of Lebanese politics.

**5.** Security issues. Since Taif the issues related to security are still the same. How do you reconcile the presence of a heavily-armed externally supported militia (Hezbollah) with a sovereign state? How do you reconcile Syrian, Iranian and Israeli objectives? The answer to this question will be crucial for Lebanon's security and survival.

Lebanon will keep on limping from crisis to crisis until an internal, regional and global equilibrium is found. In the meantime, the Land of Cedars will still be an important place to look at and learn lessons from, especially that most societies in the world today have become multiethnic and multireligious. Europeans ought to closely learn the lessons of Lebanon as their societies are becoming more diversified and where followers of Islam could become important players in the continent's future. As the French would say *à bon entendeur, salut!*

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