

LEBANON: AT THE EDGE OF ANOTHER CIVIL WAR

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Abstract

As the 2006 Israel attack divided Lebanese people into pro-Hezbollah and pro-Western lines, Lebanon has fallen into chaos among its sectarian groups for the first time after the 1975 Civil War. As the eruption of violence in May 2008 left at least 81 people dead and as Lebanon was politically paralysed, the opponent parties decided to withdraw from step back the Gulf Emirate of Qatar. To manage the inherent problems of a country having 17 religious minorities, a weak central state built on power-sharing and a violent history, it is essential to determine the internal and external factors influencing the country's political situation. In this context, this article argues that any agreement reached by the outer forces for Lebanon's peace and stability ignores the Lebanese reality and lacks an enduring solution to the long unresolved conflicts in the country. To understand the underlying factors causing conflicts in the country, it is crucial to note internal and external dynamics constituting modern Lebanon's politic structures' weaknesses.

Key Words

The 1943 National Pact, the 1975 Lebanon Civil War, the 1989 Taif Agreement, the 2006 Israel attack, Syria, Hezbollah.

Introduction

The conflicts that had left Lebanon politically paralysed and without a head of state were ended with a deal reached on 21 May 2008 in the Gulf Emirate of Qatar. Both parties now declare that the real winner of this deal was Lebanon and the agreement was welcomed by Syria. Yet many observers agree that most of the gains in the Qatar talks seem to have been won by the opposition, an alliance led by Hezbollah, the Shia party-cum-militia, but also including a powerful Christian party and pro-Syrian leftists.¹ In order to reach an enduring peace and to find a lasting solution for the conflicts that may spark civil war again, it is necessary to evaluate Lebanon's

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¹ From The Economist print edition, "Peace For a While", *Economist*, 22 May 2008, available at http://www.economist.com/displaystory.cfm?story_id=11412809&fsrc=nwl, (accessed on 9 June 2008).

internal and external dynamics in a historical context. An analysis starting with the 1943 National Pact would be helpful to grasp the delicate political balance among the sects. The article intends to demonstrate the failures of this agreement as it overlooks the demographic changes in the population. Besides, intensified Syrian influence via Hezbollah and as a response, an aggressive Israel concerned about its own security, are all important external dynamics affecting Lebanon. As the last conflicts reminded us of this country's fragile political situation; the international community is concerned about the destabilizing factors that may come from the region. Lebanon is important in terms of Middle East's current and future strategic situation since she not only causes concerns about the stability of the overall region, but also reflects wider tensions in the Middle East.

This paper aims to attract attention to the internal and to some extent, the external dynamics of Lebanon bringing her at the edge of another civil war after 18 years. The 1943 National Pact allocating public offices among the confessional groups according to their population and growth, Syria's influence on Lebanon's political structures with Taif Agreement and historical alignment between the countries are especially analyzed while underlining the Lebanon's religiously diverse population.

The 1943 arrangement and the 1975 Lebanon Civil War

The area including modern Lebanon has been, for thousands of years, a melting pot of various civilizations and cultures. Originally home to the Phoenicians, and then subsequently conquered and occupied by the Assyrians, Persians, Greeks, Romans, Arabs, Ottoman Turks and most recently the French, Lebanese culture has over the millennia evolved by borrowing from all of these groups. In 1920, as Lebanon was free of Ottoman rule, the League of Nations gave France a mandate over Lebanon and the era of French rule which lasted for the next several decades was introduced. It was also a period of two world wars paving the way for basic developments that have had a lasting effect on the Lebanese system. Firstly, the expansion of the country's borders brought mainly Sunni and Shiite Muslims into a system that had been dominated by Maronites and Druze. "The Christian Communities that coexisted on Mount Lebanon have sought to preserve their ethnic difference, both in the past, from the Sunni-dominated empires, and in the present, through Maronite rejection of Arab nationalism".² Secondly,

² Michael Kerr, *Imposing Power-Sharing: Conflict and Coexistence in Northern Ireland and Lebanon*, Dublin Irish Academic Press, 2005, p. 18.

the 1926 Constitution was adopted and it has remained partly intact up to the present.

Lebanon's population is the most religiously diverse in the region. 17 sects, or confessions, are recognized, although the exact composition of the current population is not known because no national census has been conducted since 1932. The first Lebanese president after independence was Bishara al-Khoury, elected in the summer of 1943. Khoury was Maronite and had good relations with the Sunni Muslim Community, including the renowned Sidon-Beirut based Sulh family. Riad Sulh was chosen by Khoury to be his first Prime Minister, and he had proposed a new Christian-Muslim governing formula in 1942. The National Pact-according various sects politically- proposed by Sulh, although unwritten and unofficial, has become a pivotal part of the constitution and the Lebanese political system.³ It was a kind of system for power sharing. It is claimed that the Lebanese Civil War, that sparked in 1975, arose from the long and unresolved crisis within the country that had been developing ever since independence from France in 1943. The 1943 arrangement allocated public offices among confessional groups according to demographic and political weight.⁴ The presidency was always reserved for a Maronite, the prime ministership for a Sunni, and the parliamentary speakership for a Shi'i. Still Lebanon succeeded in avoiding conflict by disregarding differences over identity and by neutralising foreign intervention in Lebanese politics. The Christians agreed not to tie Lebanon too closely to France and the West and the Muslims not to seek Lebanon's unity with other Arab states, especially Syria.

There are many rival interpretations of the meaning, causes and consequences of Lebanon's National Pact.⁵ Many scholars assess the National Pact as temporary and see it as the result of a Muslim-Christian cooperation for independence from French rule. This assessment also shows the weakness of this agreement. Because those who brokered the Pact and their successors became completely reliant on its consociational framework for the fulfilment of their economic interests and positions of power, though the Pact was meant to be only a temporary mechanism.⁶

³ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁴ Simon Haddad, "Cultural Diversity and Sectarian Attitudes in Post-War Lebanon", *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, Vol. 28, No:2, (April 2002), p. 210.

⁵ Kerr, *op.cit.*, p. 20.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

Due to the fact that Lebanon is a precarious republic, regional and communal identifications are often stronger than national ones. Primacy is given to the family, village, and especially sects. The religious community is also often a geographic, social, cultural, political and even economic unit. National identity understanding is weak. The 1943 arrangement permitted Lebanon's confessional groups to coexist, but that system also kept them apart by legitimizing sectarian differences. While the various sects meant geographic separation, regional inequalities had sectarian dimensions. For example, the Shi'i community has been the poorest because it was concentrated in southern Lebanon, the most underdeveloped part of the country. According to the surveys, Christians constituted a majority of the population, and it was on this basis that they obtained the offices of the presidency and the commander of the armed forces, and the largest share of posts in government services. However, over time some of their leaders began to fear for their dominance, observing the growing power of Arab nationalism beyond their borders and then, after 1967, the even more menacing increase of Palestinian power within.⁷ After Christians observed that it was ineffective to try to contain PLO activities by the Lebanese army, they began to place greater reliance on their own sectarian counter-power in the shape of Christian-based militias. The main problem with this 1943 system was that it took inadequate account of change, internal or external. It could not escape from being the independence days' temporary agreement.

Besides, Kerr stresses that consociational tensions became exacerbated when external events altered the equilibrium; events such as the creation of the state of Israel, which had posed a challenge to Lebanon's foreign policy symmetry. The National Pact stipulated that the Christians of Lebanon would forego European protection and all military pacts with Western powers, while the Muslims agreed to set aside any pan-Arab desires and accept Lebanon's existing geographical boundaries.⁸ The problem arose in 1948 as to whether Lebanon should remain neutral in Arab-Israeli conflicts. While Christians viewed neutrality as being inclusive of Arab-Israeli conflicts, Muslims took the opposite view.⁹ In addition, Muslims were frustrated by the Republic's second president, Chaumon's -another French schooled Maronite politician- approach to the Baghdad Pact of 1955, his refusal to break off diplomatic relations with Britain and France in 1956, and most importantly his signing

⁷ Roger Owen, *State, Power and Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East*, Third Edition, London, Routledge, 2004, p. 175.

⁸ Simon Haddad, "The Relevance of Political Trust in Postwar Lebanon", *Citizenship Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 2, (2002), p. 203.

⁹ Kerr, *op.cit.*, p. 133.

up to the Eisenhower Doctrine in 1957.¹⁰ Those attempts were clearly inconsistent with the spirit of the unwritten National Pact and constitution giving priority to the neutrality of Lebanese state.

The acceleration of the Arab-Israeli conflict after 1967-particularly its Palestinian dimension-and the launch of the Arab-Israeli peace process in the 1970s increased the load on the Lebanese political system, which divided its masses and subsequently destroyed the elite consensus and Lebanon's proclaimed ideological neutrality.¹¹ Furthermore, the National Pact failed to foster and produce national leaders who are needed in a country as divided as Lebanon. It prevented the emergence of national leaders and stunted any nation-building programme, as it merged and papered over so many different national aspirations.¹² It also ignored demographic changes, and disproportionately favoured the Maronite and Sunni communities. "As time went by, due to different birth rates and other socio-economic factors, the governing coalitions grew increasingly unrepresentative of the changing Lebanese population".¹³

National Pact's failure to manage the newly emerging social and economic developments in the early 1970s clearly caused wide distress among the Lebanese people and consequently paved the way for the outbreak of the 1975 civil war. The civil war was greatly complicated and prolonged by extensive outside interference. Palestinian cross border attacks on Northern Israel prompted Israel to invade Lebanon twice: in 1978 when the Israeli army launched a partial military campaign in Southern Lebanon and held a piece of land which remained occupied until May 2000, and in 1982 when the Jewish state launched a massive military invasion to destroy PLO military and political power bases in Lebanon.¹⁴ With the collapse of the central government's authority and the rapid disintegration of the Lebanese army, Lebanon became a regional battleground. In 1975, the country had plunged into complete chaos and civil war and during the fifteen years that followed, Lebanon would become an anarchic country that existed by name only-dominated by Israeli and Syrian armies as well as local warlords and their militias.¹⁵ During the war, some 60.000 to 100.000 out of a population of approximately 3 million lost their lives, an additional 200.000 were wounded

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

¹¹ Haddad, "The Relevance...", p. 205.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 134.

¹³ Kerr, *op.cit.*, p. 136.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Ghassan Abdallah, *Lebanon's Political System: An Analysis of the Taif Accord*, Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Houston, December 2003, p. 13.

and some 250.000 fled the country. Large areas, including much of Beirut and the country's infrastructure, lay in ruins.

Syrian Penetration and the 1989 Taif Agreement

Since the French mandate period, Syrian Arab nationalists neither established diplomatic ties with Lebanon nor accepted it as a separate entity. Syria basically perceived Lebanon artificially separated from herself by the external forces. Beside this historic perception, Syria continuously regarded Lebanon as an indivisible part of its national security concerns. Syria also supported Palestinian militias which caused chaos and instability in the vulnerable political system of Lebanon. Ghassan Abdallah claims that one of the reasons for Syria's close support to the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) was linked to inter-Arab rivalries, with a particular intention to challenge Egypt's ascendancy in the Arab world. Whereas Lebanon preferred not to take an obvious supportive stance to the PLO, but actually stay silent to its activities, Syria obviously supported the PLO for its hegemonic concerns in Arab world. Despite the continued differences on the Palestine issue and continued absence of diplomatic ties between the two countries, relations between Lebanon and Syria began to improve in the 1970s.¹⁶

With the security concerns of herself, Syrian president Asad supplied the PLO with weapons and helped them establish a stronghold in the southern part of the country along the border with Israel. "Drawing considerable leverage from his relations with the PLO and the Shi'is (as well as from pro-Syrian forces in Lebanon, like the Ba'ath Party), and gaining high prestige from his role in the 1973 war, Hafiz al-Asad become the most influential external factor in Lebanese politics in 1974 and 1975".¹⁷ Moreover, after the civil war erupted in Lebanon in 1975, motivated by the common belief that Syria and Lebanon were indivisible in terms of security, Syria did not hesitate intervening politically and militarily to Lebanon. Asad urged Lebanon to implement new reforms aiming to establish a more equitable power sharing mechanism between Muslim and Christians. Nevertheless, Patrick Seale claims that Asad destroyed Lebanon's political equation worse than ever. "To rule Lebanon as he aspired to do, he had to smash the confessional system, but smashing the system meant smashing the Christians".¹⁸

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

¹⁸ Patrick Seale, *Asad of Syria: The Struggle for the Middle East*, London B. Taurus, 1988, p. 280.

From 30 September to 22 October 1989, most of the remaining members of the Lebanese parliament met in Taif, in Saudi Arabia to debate a political reform plan drafted by the Arab League and produced the National Reconciliation Charter, commonly known as the Taif Agreement.¹⁹ The Taif Agreement was also known as the “Document of National Understanding” and it implied a crucial turning point in Lebanon’s modern history. It ended the Lebanese civil war and established the internal conditions for peace.

The Taif Agreement reaffirms that Lebanon is an independent, sovereign country with an Arab identity and a parliamentary democracy where different communities coexist.²⁰ When it came to the institutions of government, it called for equal representation among Christians and Muslims in parliament and essentially “it wrought a change in the political structure to take account of the new power balances among the communities: the decline of the Maronites and the advance of the Sunnis and the Shiites”.²¹ The Taif Agreement attempted to reform the political system that had caused several years of civil strife.

Indeed, the Taif Agreement which concluded the devastating civil war in Lebanon and signed under the Syrian dominance was an effective political tool smashing Christian effects in the country. One of the accomplishments which the Taif Agreement realized was the institutionalization Syria’s occupation of Lebanon. Simon Haddad claims that the implementation of the Taif Agreement under close Syrian supervision turned out to be selective and controversial, increasing discord in a highly segmented Lebanese society. As a result of this supervision, he reiterates that parliamentary elections failed to provide both political normalization and the envisaged national reconciliation and integration.²² During Taif, “the Syrians did not seek to either annex Lebanon or radically transform its political, economic, and social systems, all that the Syrians did was to *define the political rules of the game for the Lebanese players* and more precisely, lay down the boundaries that could not be crossed”.²³ Yet the Taif Agreement is considered successful owing to its bringing of peace to Lebanon. However, this does not mean this agreement was fully successful. In his thesis, Abdallah stresses that there has been no progress towards dismantling the system of confessional representation

¹⁹ Reine El-Achkar, *Lebanon and Hezbollah: From Militia to Political Party*, Unpublished MA thesis University of Massachusetts Lowell, 2006, p. 35.

²⁰ <http://www.mideastinfo.com/documents/taif.htm>, (accessed on 03.01.2008).

²¹ Haddad, “The Relevance...”, p. 204.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 206.

²³ Abdallah, *op.cit.*, p. 91.

and claims that the problems that caused the 1975 civil war are yet to be resolved.

The Treaty of Brotherhood, Cooperation and Coordination which formalized Syria's role in post-Taif Lebanon was signed on 12 May 1991. It stipulated that the two states agreed to work for the highest possible level of coordination in all matters of political, economic, security and cultural policy and established a joint institutional framework to achieve that end.²⁴ According to Najem, this treaty was a critical departure from the historic neutrality of Lebanese foreign policy vis-à-vis the West and the Arab/Islamic world.²⁵ A Defence and Security Pact (August 1991) followed the Treaty of Brotherhood. Haddad explains that the "Taif Agreement acknowledged Syria's, who maintains an undisclosed number of troops, special relations with Lebanon and it has in reality transformed the post-war Lebanese entity into a Syrian satellite".²⁶ After the Taif Agreement internal relations also changed. In particular, the Shi'a, seen as the clear winners, gained a share of power that was more proportionate to their demographic strength for the first time and in general, the Muslim community as a whole benefited from Taif at the expense of the Christians; especially the Sunnis vis-a-vis the Maronites.²⁷ Actually, the Christians lost more with the Taif Agreement not only in terms of political terms, but also for the inextricable dependence of Lebanon on Syria since the Taif Agreement left Lebanon under *de facto* Syrian control. Although the agreement ended sectarian violence in Lebanon, it failed to ensure the country's independence and also disrupted the internal equilibrium among communities and the most striking aspect of the implementation of the agreement was that Christian grievances were continuously being ignored.²⁸

Over time, Syria's interest in Lebanon, quite independent of its desire for leverage in the Arab-Israeli dispute, have steadily increased. Najem explains that Lebanese and Syrian economies have become increasingly tied together over the course of the past decade. In addition to this, it should be noted that the individual members of the Syrian political elite have developed extensive personal business interests in Lebanon throughout the

²⁴ http://www.lebanonwire.com/prominent/historic_documents/1991_lebanon_syria_cooperation_treaty.asp, (accessed on 20.12.2007).

²⁵ Tom Pierre Najem, "Lebanon and Europe: The Foreign Policy of a Penetrated State", *The Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 3, No. 2, (2003), p. 218.

²⁶ Haddad, "The Relevance...", p. 205.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

²⁸ Simon Haddad, "A Survey of Maronite Christian Socio-Political Attitudes in Postwar Lebanon", *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, Vol. 12, No.4, (2001), p. 467.

period, which they will no doubt wish to use every means at their disposal to protect.²⁹ Besides, Syria's economic and political control of Lebanon was becoming a vital component of internal Syrian politics. In this context, a variety of Syrian-Lebanese agreements dealing with economic and social issues ensued enveloping Lebanon.³⁰ While the Syrian government and their allies in Lebanon have stressed constantly the role of the Syrian army in bringing back normalcy to Lebanon, Syrian success in rehabilitating Lebanon led to an overhaul in the approach of most Western countries to the role they had played.³¹ Owing to the fact that Syria maintained the order in Lebanon, the international community clearly accepted the Syrian hegemony in this country.

However, the Lebanese people viewed such a close alignment with Syria inconvenient, and not only Christians, but also vast majority of Lebanese Muslims have also been deeply concerned about the nature and extent of Syria's continuing role in Lebanon. The Taif Agreement disbanded Lebanon's various militias remaining from the civil war period, but it also unexpectedly helped increase Hezbollah's power. Hezbollah operatives were allowed to keep their weapons for the purpose of protecting Lebanon from Israeli incursion from the South. "Hezbollah, meant 'Party of God', is a Shi'ite Lebanese based militant organization formed after Israel's invasion of Lebanon in the 1980s".³² During Israel's invasion of Lebanon, Lebanese officials were far too occupied with their own struggle for power to be interested in the Shi'ites living in poverty in the south of the country. Hezbollah exploited the weakness and ignorance of the Lebanese state. With Iran's help, it embarked on an ambitious enterprise to build a social welfare infrastructure for the Shi'ite community.³³ Shi'ite society's severe life conditions provided appropriate ground for Iran to export its revolution. They funded millions of dollars in aid to Hezbollah. Hezbollah worked on agricultural activities, focused on health issues and provided educational support. Whereas Hezbollah was paying attention to making available social service resources to the poor, Westerners were becoming suspicious of Hezbollah's affairs and perceived it as recruitment tool. Hezbollah's endeavours returned to Iran as the allegiance of the Shi'ite population of Lebanon. Moreover, Iranian funds paved the way for rapid growth of Hezbollah's military wing, which devoted itself primarily

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 226.

³⁰ Abdallah, *op.cit.*, p. 92.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

³² El-Achkar, *op.cit.*, p. 49.

³³ *Ibid.*

to the expulsion of the American and European multi-national force (MNF) in Beirut and the defeat of occupying Israeli forces.³⁴ Also Syria had an interest in sponsoring paramilitary attacks against Israel so long as it refused to withdraw from the Golan Heights. Hezbollah's objectives were aligned with Iranian and Syrian interests. Syria allowed Hezbollah to maintain its hold on the region of the Baalbeck, while Iran continued to supply Hezbollah with money and training.³⁵

In the 1990s, Hezbollah continued its attacks on Israeli troops in the self-declared Israeli security zone inside Lebanon and in Israel itself. As a result, Israeli launched severe reprisal attacks, especially in 1993 and 1995, obviously aimed to pressure the Lebanese government to act against the Hezbollah themselves. They also intended to demonstrate to the Israeli people that they were willing and able to take action to protect the northern Israeli border.³⁶

Israeli troops began withdrawing from Southern Lebanon in May 2000, and this actually weakened the Syrians' need to be there, while many Lebanese-especially Maronites-began to regard Syrian presence unnecessary. Najem maintains that it was not in the interest of either Syria or Hezbollah to let the matter rest at that end. Nonetheless, Syria had new supporters in Lebanon, such as Hezbollah and many Sunnis. Reine el-Achkar benefits from an important interview made by a Lebanese journalist with Hassan Nasrallah (the Secretary General of Hezbollah). According to answers given by Nasrallah, Hezbollah clearly regards the Syrian presence as necessary for domestic stability of Lebanon and also sees it as a protective shield against Israel. Nasrallah states that due to the two countries' historical, geographical, and social ties, Syria has influence in Lebanon that no one can eliminate.³⁷

Hezbollah has also dedicated itself to the creation of an Iranian-style Islamic republic in Lebanon and the removal of all non-Islamic influences from the country. As Hezbollah utilized the funding and support of the Islamic Republic of Iran, it was in real harmony with Iran's conviction of Hezbollah soundness of path, right in jihad and resistance. Naim Qassem, Hezbollah's deputy secretary, offers three reasons for laying the strong relationship between Hezbollah and Iran.³⁸ First, he explains that both Iran

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

³⁶ Najem, *op.cit.*, p. 215.

³⁷ El-Achkar, *op.cit.*, p. 84.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

and Hezbollah believe in the jurisdiction of the Jurist-Theologian, and that Imam Khomeini was himself that leader. Second, Iran's choice of an Islamic republican system are in harmony with Hezbollah's principles. And lastly, Iran's absolute rejection of superpower hegemony and safeguarding of independence are concerted.

With respect to the contemporary situation, one crucial problem is that many scholars and policy-makers look at the dominant role which the Syrians now play in Lebanese politics and tend to assume that Lebanon really has no authentic foreign policy of its own.³⁹ However, assessing Lebanon foreign policy only in terms of Syrian hegemony can generate some misunderstandings. Najem points out that the internal forces which have historically shaped Lebanese foreign policy are still present and strongly relevant in Lebanese society. Secondly, he claims that there is strong desire at the vast majority of the Lebanese people to pursue a foreign policy based on Lebanese interests. Last of all, he underlines the importance of the contemporary political and economic circumstances which have generated Lebanese foreign policy imperatives that are separate from, and in some cases contrary to, Syria's interests. Najem also asserts that opponents of Syrian hegemony are ready for a more aggressive stance if given a green light by the US. He adds that there have been indications of a desire to pursue policies which accord more with Lebanon's independent interests than with Syria's interests.⁴⁰

In Lebanon, different communities historically tended to continue developing informal relations with their preferred international partners in the West and in the Arab world respectively. However, Lebanon has a high level of susceptibility to penetration by foreign actors. Syria, and to an extent Israel and Iran, exerts influence via ties especially with the Shi'ite community and Hezbollah, are the main foreign actors penetrating Lebanon's political system.

Lebanon After Israel's 2006 Intervention

After the assassination of Lebanon's Prime Minister Refik Harriri on 15 February 2005, hundreds of thousands of Lebanese took to the streets and called for an end to the Syrian influence in the country. Syria ceded to the

³⁹ Najem, *op.cit.*, p. 219.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 210.

pressure and withdrew its 14,000 military and intelligence personnel on 27 April 2005. At the time, many observers interpreted Syria's unexpectedly rapid withdrawal and the subsequent election of an anti-Syrian majority in the Lebanese parliament as a major setback for Syria's ambitions in the region, and some even predicted that the regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Asad had been seriously weakened. However, Syria maintained significant assets in Lebanon: a mixed government in Lebanon comprising both pro and anti-Syrian elements; a possible residual presence of Syrian intelligence assets in Lebanon; and Hezbollah, which has refused so far to relinquish its arms and apparently continued to support Syria's agenda by periodically attacking Israeli military positions near the Israeli-Syrian border.⁴¹

Besides, despite the success of the movement, according to Musbah al-Ahdab, Member of Parliament, Lebanon remains divided into two paths. The first path is what is now known as the March 14th alliance. The March 14th Alliance, is a coalition of anti-Syrian political parties and independents in Lebanon, led by Saad Hariri, younger son of Rafik Hariri, Samir Geagea president of the Lebanese Forces, and Walid Jumblatt.⁴² In addition to opposing Syrian influence, the alliance's agenda includes the construction of state institutions, rebuilding the economy, emphasizing Lebanese sovereignty and building immunity to the regional conflicts that have long permeated Lebanese society.

The second path is comprised of the Hezbollah movement and the pro-Syrians. MP al-Ahdab claims that second path's agenda is to merely maintain Lebanon as a proxy battlefield for the Arab-Israeli conflict and as a staging ground for Syrian and Iranian agendas.⁴³

Owing to the fact that not all Shi'a support Hezbollah, nor are all Sunnis and Christians opposed to Hezbollah, Lebanese society became unified in its response to the 12 July 2006 conflict. The conflict began when Hezbollah militants fired rockets at Israeli border towns as a diversion for an anti-tank missile attack on two armored Humvees patrolling the Israeli side of the border fence.⁴⁴ Of the seven Israeli soldiers, two were wounded,

⁴¹ El-Achkar, *op.cit.*, p. 76.

⁴² "The Lebanese Dilemma: A Primer", <http://www.antiwar.com/orig/issa.php?articleid+10453>, (accessed on 11.01.2008).

⁴³ Taylor Luck, "Post-War Status of Lebanon's March 14th Movement", Middle East Institute, Event Summary, 21 September 2006. For more detailed information about the March 14th Movement please see <http://www.mideasti.org/summary/post-war-status-lebanons-march-14th-movement>, (accessed on 12.01.2007).

⁴⁴ "Israel authorizes 'severe' response to abductions", July 12, 2006, <http://www.cnn.com/2006/WORLD/meast/07/12/mideast/index.html>, (accessed on 05.01.2007).

three were killed, and two were kidnaped and taken to Lebanon. Five more were killed in a failed Israeli rescue attempt. Israel responded with massive airstrikes and artillery fire on targets in Lebanon, which damaged Lebanese civilian infrastructure. Hezbollah then launched more rockets into northern Israel and engaged the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) in guerrilla warfare from hardened positions. Israel Prime Minister Ehud Olmert said the raid was “an act of war” and was set to meet with his cabinet to approve more military action in Lebanon.⁴⁵

Actually, after the onset of hostilities, the Lebanese government immediately began diplomatic efforts in order to end the crisis. As a part of these efforts, Lebanese Prime Minister Siniora put forward the Seven-Point Initiative at the Rome conference. Its components included the reimplementation of UNIFIL forces in the south and a return to the 1949 ceasefire.⁴⁶ In spite of these efforts, the conflict ensued until 14 August 2006, claiming the lives of over 1,000 Lebanese civilians, 163 Israelis, and an unknown number of Hezbollah militants.⁴⁷

On 11 August 2006, the United Nations Security Council unanimously approved UN Resolution 1701 in an effort to end the hostilities. The resolution, which was approved by both Lebanese and Israeli governments the following days, called for disarmament of Hezbollah, for withdrawal of Israel from Lebanon, and for the deployment of Lebanese soldiers and an enlarged United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) force in southern Lebanon.⁴⁸ The Lebanese army began deploying in Southern Lebanon on 17 August 2006. The blockade was lifted on 8 September 2006. On 1 October 2006, most Israeli troops withdrew from Lebanon, though the last of the troops continued to occupy the border-straddling village of Ghajar.⁴⁹

The UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), created in 1978 initially to monitor an earlier Israeli withdrawal, has fluctuated in size over the years, comprising approximately 2,000 military personnel as of mid-2006. Resolution 1701 envisions increasing UNIFIL to a maximum of 15,000,

⁴⁵ “Israeli troops move into Lebanon after Hezbollah attacks soldiers”, July 12, 2006, <http://www.cbc.ca/story/world/national/2006/07/12/israel-lebanon.html>, (accessed on 06.02.2007).

⁴⁶ <http://www.lebanonundersiege.gov.lb/english/f/Main/highlightsDisplay.asp?HLID=25>, (accessed on 11.01.2007)

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ UN Security Council Resolution 1701 (2006), “Permanent Ceasefire to Be Based on Creation Of Buffer Zone Free of Armed Personnel Other than UN, Lebanese Forces”.

⁴⁹ United Nations Economic and Social Council Topic Area B, 2007, Thessaloniki International Student Model UN, available at http://sites.mgkworld.net/thessis07/files/ecosoc_b.pdf, (accessed on 13.02.2008)

of which approximately 7,000 would come from Italy, France, Spain and other European countries.⁵⁰ As noted in the *Economist*, though the mission in Lebanon is run by the UN, not by the EU, the troops sent by the EU to join the UN Peacekeeping force in Lebanon were essential for a big and important European contribution. Thus, the decision to send troops by the EU was largely discussed collectively by the EU foreign ministers, who decided to meet Kofi Annan, the former UN Secretary-General, in Brussels.⁵¹ Taking into account the fact that the EU has mounted several peacekeeping operations of its own, one can realize that missions such as these are a visible expression of Europe's eagerness to play a bigger role in the world.⁵²

Though Hezbollah's military capabilities may have been substantially reduced, and re-supply from Syria and Iran could be hampered by the presence of international peacekeepers in Lebanon, Hezbollah's long-term potential as a guerrilla movement appears to remain intact after the July 2006 war. "The 2006 war split the nation and political system in two: most Shiites, who bore the brunt of Israel's military onslaught, saw it as justification for Hezbollah's weapons as deterrence against a real threat; most others, who lamented the scope of destruction, saw it as proof that the main danger came from Hezbollah's recklessness. Not since the end of the civil war in 1990 had the country experienced such a deep and defining divide"⁵³

Facing calls for Hezbollah's disarmament and denunciations of its (allegedly foreign-inspired) adventurism in triggering the July 2006 war, the movement concluded that the government of Prime Minister Fouad Siniora and its backers were hostile actors intent on cutting it down to size and further aligning Lebanon with the West.⁵⁴ As a result, Hezbollah carried the fight squarely onto the domestic scene, removing Shiite ministers, taking to the streets and pushing for the government's ouster. The sight of large numbers of Shiites taking to Beirut's streets alarmed many among the Sunni community who considered this a graphic display of a confessional power-play designed to weaken them.⁵⁵ Lebanon badly lost its balance and was at risk of new collapse, moving ever closer to explosive Sunni-Shiite polarisation with a divided, debilitated Christian community in between.⁵⁶

⁵⁰ Congressional Research Service Report for Congress, 15 September 2006, p. 4, available at <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL33566.pdf>, (accessed on 07.01.2008)

⁵¹ *The Economist*, 26th August 2006, "The European Union in the World: Abroad Be Dangers", p. 22.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ International Crisis Group, "Hezbollah and the Lebanese Crisis", Middle East Report No: 69, 10 October 2007, p. 10.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁵⁵ International Crisis Group, "Lebanon at a Tripwire", Middle East Report No:20, 21 December 2006, p.15.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

While Hezbollah clearly possesses by far the most formidable and the only private strategic arsenal, all other confessional groups in Lebanon have their own individual weapons adapted to urban combat. Acceleration of this kind of individual armament among the groups, makes another civil war possible when considering the fragility and sensitivity of Lebanese political structure.

For overcoming such dilemmas, first it needs be handled with gradual deconfessionalisation and reform of justice and security systems. Besides, strenghtening Lebanese institutions and state structures that cause both paralysis and foreign intervention would be a sustainable solution for mollifying the Lebanese crisis. It is a fact that in Lebanon there is an absence of institutions or organizations of political change, and there are primordial ties which encompass kinship, fealty and religion providing alternative methods of democratic representation and political stability. These primordial ties create political blocs and fronts preventing the growth of civility and national loyalty.⁵⁷ In a person-based political climate, what Lebanon needs to do is to improve and lean towards an institution-building approach. Lebanon's Western-backed government and the Hezbollah-led opposition reached a deal Wednesday to end an 18-month political crisis that pushed the country to the brink of a new civil war.⁵⁸ The deal reached in Qatar seemed to end the hostilities for now. However for an enduring peace in the country, the main reason dividing the country and standing as an obstacle for national unity should be eliminated carefully when taking into account the historical and social realities.

Conclusion

Lebanon, a country having a history of constant conflict and sectarian rivalries, came at the edge of another civil war with the Hezbollah and pro-Western government's activities after the 2006 Israel war. The roots of the conflicts are not new and involve old hostilities caused by the agreements, decisions and conciliations especially shaped by external forces. Another problem is that Lebanon contains once friendly, but now hostile groups affected by the external events, especially by growing Arab nationalism, increased PLO activities, Islamic fundamentalism and thus a concerned Christian population. For now, hostilities seem to have ceded. However, this

⁵⁷ Abdallah, *op.cit.*, p. 131.

⁵⁸ Cal Perry, "Lebanon Factions Reach Deal to End the Crisis", *CNN International*, 21 May 2008.

does not change the fact that any time conflicts may begin in the streets of Beirut among the unhappy sectarian groups. Moreover, owing to the hostile activities of Hezbollah towards Israel, Israel may attack Lebanon in order to provide its own security. This paper aimed to demonstrate the internal and external dynamics of Lebanon affecting its politic and social structures. Pursuing its own national security concerns, Lebanon should establish the unity of its people that have long been accustomed to live together disregarding their differences and institutionalize its own national foreign policy keeping at bay foreign forces' penetration. Moreover neighbours of the Lebanon have responsibilities for a wider peace in the region. However, given the fragility of Israel's government, the reluctance of Israelis to surrender territory in exchange for peace with Syria and Syria's refusal so far to meet Israeli demands that it drop its alliance with Iran and end support for groups such as Hizbullah, a regional deal looks hard to strike in the near future.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ From The Economist print edition, "The Prospect of a Wider Peace", *Economist*, 29 May 2008, available at http://www.economist.com/world/africa/displaystory.cfm?story_id=11465501, (accessed on 9 June 2008).