

Lebanon in search of sovereignty: Post 2005 security dilemmas

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Lebanon in search of sovereignty:

Post 2005 security dilemmas

This chapter explores a main hypothesis: Short of regaining its status of sovereign nation-state in the international arena, post-2005 Lebanon might be considered a state with limited sovereignty, where citizenship remained dubious and national interest controversial. In a state of this kind, armed forces are prone to fragmentation along primordial identities, and often privatised while authoritarianism looms as the ultimate recourse against state dissolution and societal strife. The chapter is organised in two sections:

The first section looks into the role, capabilities and interventions of national armed forces on the domestic and regional scenes. It stresses the limits of the military leadership's efforts to make Lebanon's national forces a powerful agent of national defence due to structural weaknesses and the transformation of war. It examines the political obstacles that prevented the state from acquiring a monopoly of legitimate force by contrasting the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) with the "National resistance" led by Hizballah. It shows how new international security threats shifted security policies from the national to the global arena. It concludes that the Lebanese security sector might be characterised as domestically "bifurcated" and internationally subordinate.

The second section examines the image of the new security institutions (army, police and intelligence) intended to project domestically by instilling a patriotic ethos among draftees and enhancing pluralism within military units. It argues that despite such intentions and tangible improvements, the armed forces were not immune from the segmentation of

society exacerbated by the 14 March/8 March division, which undermined cooperation between security institutions. In the meantime, in a context of privatisation and outsourcing of security missions, security institutions became prone to selective military-civilian cooperation within confessional networks.

Research on Lebanon's exceptionality rightly stresses the pluralism of its society following the adoption of "consensus democracy" in the 1926 constitution and the 1943 National Pact. A logical corollary is its 'weak state' status (illustrated in the slogan "Lebanon's strength lies in its weakness"), its limited sovereignty, its sectarian communal groups maintaining autonomous links with regional states and international powers, and armed forces which are limited in their scope and unequipped to cope with external challenge. Traditionally, Lebanon's external defence was neglected and, with the exception of the first Palestine War (1948-49), the state remained neutral in international and regional conflicts. The relationship between militarisation and state-building, presumed self-evident among nations arising from de-colonisation¹ was deliberately distended. On the one hand, military and senior officers ostensibly remained aloof from political conflicts. The political elite, on the other hand, kept them at a distance, even as they tried to manipulate them. With few exceptions, the Lebanese regime could be described as civil.

Lebanon's exceptionality was challenged by a traumatic experience: it was victim to one of the earliest "new wars" of the 20th century (1975-90), the country torn from within by sectarian militias, prompting intense diplomatic and military intervention by regional states and major powers, including the United Nations. In the wake of the civil war, it became

¹ Charles Tilly, 'War Making and State Making as Organised Crime' in P. Evans, D. Rueschemeyer and T. Skocpol (eds.), *Bringing the State Back In*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985, pp. 169-87; Steven Heydemann (ed.), *War, Institutions and Social Change in the Middle East*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000.

necessary to rebuild the country's devastated infrastructure and adapt it to the globalisation of trade and finance. As implied in the Ta'if accord,² priority should be given to military and police institutions, normatively erected as the "central pillar" of the new state. From 1990 to 2005, reconstruction of the security sector remained strongly impeded and dangerously lopsided, at odds with optimistic official discourse and confident public opinion. The reformed Lebanese armed forces remained unable to establish state authority over the national territory and provide a melting-pot for citizenship as had been expected after implementation of general drafting. Three contextual elements help explain this failure: (a) the enduring segmentation of the Lebanese society along primordial (family, clan and sect) fault-lines; (b) the steady percolation of Syrian Ba'thist political culture into the Lebanese polity during nearly thirty years (1976-2005) of military presence and arbitrary rule; (c) Lebanon's security remained threatened by regional and international tensions that related to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

The year 2005 was a landmark in the history of post-war Lebanon, its significance epitomised by ex-Prime Minister Rafic Hariri's assassination in February, not long after he had promoted the adoption of UNSC resolution 1559. The three contextual elements presented above were overturned, raising a new set of problems: (a) the reconfiguration of the national scene split the political arena into two coalitions aligned along pro-Western ('14 March') and pro-Syria and -Iran ('8 March') stances. This ideological division reinforced Lebanon's confessional segmentation, especially between Sunnis and Shi'a, while the Christians split into two adverse forces. How would this affect civilian and political confidence in, and support for Lebanon's national armed forces? (b) While Syrian military and intelligence left Lebanon within a few weeks of Hariri's assassination and Damascus

² Adopted by the Lebanese deputies in order to end the civil war in November 1989 under Syrian and Saudi patronage.

pretended not to be concerned with Lebanon anymore, change in bilateral relations was slow due to the strength of the strategic alliance between Hizballah and Syria and because the Syrian regime had woven dense and complex networks of trans-boundary collaborators, especially within the Lebanese military and intelligence. Would Lebanon be able to conceive and lead a national defence of its own, free from regional priorities? (c) The 14 March coalition which led the government from June 2005 until January 2011 committed itself to close security cooperation with the West. UNIFIL's role in the South was upgraded after the 2006 war³ and Lebanon received new armament for the struggle against trans-national terrorist networks. Could this strategic turn lead to a detachment from Syrian influence and Iran's agenda and reinforce domestic security without raising the prospect of domestic conflict?

Military reconstruction and national sovereignty

In the wake of the civil war, rebuilding Lebanon's armed forces in order to restore the sovereignty of the state required the adoption of a series of institutional and technical reforms. It also meant giving the military access to financial resources, new equipment and ammunition, and revising the government's national defence strategy. However, Syrian withdrawal and the growing involvement of Western powers in Eastern Mediterranean security issues did not result in a u-turn in Lebanese defence strategy and security policy. Rather, regionally and internationally, Lebanon's army and security forces remained caught in

³ UNSC resolution 1701 adopted on 11 August 2006, called for "end to hostilities between Hezbollah, Israel [and] Permanent ceasefire to be based on creation of buffer zone free of armed personnel other than UN, Lebanese forces."

a double bind: on the one hand they became a Western proxy in the fight against *Jihadist* networks. On the other hand, they proved unable to recapture the monopoly on national defence from Hizballah. Thus Lebanon remained hostage to regional conflict as well as to international tensions, most notably growing animosity between the US and Iran.

The rehabilitation of Lebanon's regular armed forces after the civil war, and their rebirth as the cornerstone of the new state, was intended to mark a radical departure in terms of state-military relations. Before the civil war, the Lebanese confessional elites considered the state inherently civilian and non-belligerent. Army recruitment was kept low, as was the budget, and the military was distanced from political affairs. In this respect, General Fouad Shihab's ascension to the presidency in the wake of the 1958 crisis constituted an exception. President Shihab devoted himself to social and political reform from 1958 to 1964, and his regime projected an image of efficiency and honesty. At the same time, he let the *Deuxième Bureau* (B2) - the military intelligence - meddle in the electoral process and administrative affairs.

Memory of *Shihabism* as a patriotic and development oriented doctrine explains why so many Lebanese put their trust in the military after the civil war, even more so when the Syrians withdrew in 2005. The population longed for order and was willing to see the military play a central role in Lebanon's political reconstruction. In return, the new military command, first under Émile Lahoud (1990-98), then Michel Sleiman (1998-2008), was made out of officers who were nurtured by *Shihabism*, having begun their careers in the 1970s. Its Orientation Directorate publicised a document describing the military as defenders of societal values – patriotism and solidarity.⁴

⁴ *Kirras Tawjihi*, chapters 1.2, <http://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/English/Kirras.asp>. This directorate under Armed Forces Command is in charge of political and ethical analyses published in its *Orientation Bulletin*.

Syria, for its part, targeted security requirements as a tool of control over the society and polity in accordance with the Ba’thist model. Part IV of the Ta’if agreement and the bilateral Treaty of Brotherhood imposed on Lebanon in May 1991 organised unequal cooperation in every domain, between a dominant power and a dominion state. A defence and security agreement made official the presence of some 15,000 to 25,000 Syrian military personnel and the subordination of the Lebanese army and police to their Syrian counterparts. The head of Syrian intelligence in Lebanon (General Ghazi Kan’an and, after 2002, General Rustom Ghazaleh) imposed Asad’s will on the Lebanese presidents. A “common destiny” (*talazum al-masarayn*) in face of Israel and other external dangers was the ideological rationale for this domination, which was condemned by the UN in September 2004⁵ and lasted until the forced withdrawal of the Syrian armed forces in April 2005.

Syria encouraged the building of a large army based on conscription and trained for traditional twentieth century warfare – a model already obsolete in Syria and the Middle East.⁶ Syrian hegemony was exercised at all levels, from the frequent convocation of Lebanese senior officers at Syrian military intelligence headquarters in Anjar to the presence in every military base of a Syrian liaison officer whose authority was paramount. Syrian control was so complete that the Minister of Defence, Mustafa Tlass, declared: “Thanks to the Lebanese army, Syria is at peace on its western flank”.⁷

⁵ UNSC resolution 1559 presented by France and the United States and adopted on 2 September 2004, called among other things upon withdrawal of all foreign forces from Lebanon.

⁶ The Lebanese army increased from 21,000 men in 1990 to 45,000 in 1995, and 72,000 in 2002, according to a CSIS working paper: Aram Nerguizian, ‘The Lebanese Armed Forces. Challenges and opportunities in post-Syria Lebanon’, www.csis.org/media/CSIS/pubs/090210_lafsecurity.pdf. It lowered to 56,000 in 2008 and 49,500 in 2010. With the *Quwwat al-Amn al-Dakhili* (Internal Security Forces), 13,000 men in 2001 and 14,600 in 2010, the total armed forces of Lebanon exceeded 70,000 to whom one might add 25,000 retired personnel.

⁷ *L’Orient-Le Jour*, 14 Apr. 1998.

Reform, conscription and armament

In a context of international lack of concern and domestic despondency, the military command under General Lahoud and their Syrian patrons rapidly gained control. A stream of reforms shook the Lebanese military in anticipation of state reform. The new army underwent several important changes, including the placement of dozens of officers on early retirement. This was used to get rid of insubordinate elements and provide intensive training for new recruits and old cadres at the Fayadiyeh military academy as well as at “friendly” military schools (IMET programs in the United States, the *École de Guerre* in Paris, and staff schools in Damascus and Aleppo). Army command imposed discipline and the (re)-training of men who had previously been confined to barracks, as well as selective recruitment and new assignments. All in all, rapid promotion resulted in an officer corps of some 3,000 men. Expertise, responsibility and corporatism appeared to be the watchwords for this post-civil war army.

LAF and security institutions were subject to organisational reform which was neither discussed in nor voted for by Parliament. A Central Council for Security (*Majlis al-amm al-markazi*) was formed in 1990⁸ and the Supreme Defence and Security Council (*Majlis al-a'la lil-difa' wal-amm*) re-established in 1991,⁹ thus formalising the centralisation of

⁸ Laws 12 & 17 (6 Sept. 1990) reorganized the Internal Security Forces (ISF) and created the *Majlis al-amm al-markazi*, composed of the Minister of Interior, the state prosecutor, the Beirut governor, the army commander, the head of the ISF, and the director of the Internal Security. See Amin Hutayt , *Al-amm wal-difa' fil-hala l-lubnaniyya* [Security and defense in the Lebanese context], working paper, Montreux, 10-20 Apr. 2007, pp. 17-9.

⁹ According to Law 102 (1983). See Ibrahim Khalil , 'Qanun al-difa'. Qiyada jam'iyya am shalal fil-qiyada? [The law of defense. Collective command or paralysis of command?], *Al-Difa' al-watani*, 1990, pp. 17-45.

competing information networks under Syrian tutelage. Army Intelligence and the General Security Directorate were reorganised in 1990 and 1998, and entrusted to the same pro-Syrian officer, Jamil al-Sayyed.¹⁰ On the whole, the military was reshuffled into twelve brigades and as many specialised units (Marine, airborne regiment, Republican guard, Special Forces, etc.) under five regional commands.

Syria worked to domesticate the Lebanese army, police and security services through the allocation of significant budgetary resources and economic privileges, and by upgrading the social status of the officers. Officers received supplemental pay for cooperation with Syria in the form of a training allowance while attending a Syrian military academy, or an invitation in officers' clubs. Some of them were provided with new vehicles and SUVs for personal use; and granted housing credits by *Iskan 'askari (Military housing)*, a foundation created in 1994 on the Syrian model.

Another novelty was the implementation of general conscription.¹¹ The military were expected to become a tool of social integration, but conscription raised recurrent protests among all sectors of society, as most conscripts remained idle after six months-training. Several surveys illustrated the project's flaws, revealing resistance and failures, and even its perverse effects, yet compulsory army service was abrogated by a non-controversial parliamentary vote, thanks to a convergence of interests between a majority of MPs and the Syrian command in January 2005. Three years later, armed forces were made up of career and contracting personnel only.

¹⁰ General Jamil al-Sayyed was a member in Army intelligence since the late 1970s and became head of the B2 in the Beqaa upon his return from IMET formation in the USA in 1982. After the civil war he played a major role in restructuring Army intelligence and became its deputy chief in 1992. President Émile Lahoud entrusted him with General Security in 1998, but he was jailed in Lebanon from Aug. 2005 to Apr. 2009 as part of the international inquiry into Hariri's assassination. He has, since being released, challenged his detention in court.

¹¹ Law 97 of 21 Sep. 1991 reinstated general draft.

Lebanon's budget deficit had resulted in the abrogation of conscription, and as early as 1997, PM Rafic Hariri was complaining of the excessive cost of military service.¹² Military expenses became a burden for the government as police and army numbers increased fourfold from 1991 to 2002, employing almost one tenth of the country's wage earners and supporting half a million people out of a population of 3,5 million. 80 percent of the army, police and General Security budgets were spent on wages, training and benefits for personnel, officers and enlisted corps. Between 1992 and 2008, defence spending remained Lebanon's largest budgetary item at over ten percent, after debt service and education. **Retired military and police personnel received a total of \$2.4 billion in end-of-service indemnities and pension payments between 1993 and 2002** - an exorbitant figure with regard to the state budget and its deficit.¹³

Paltry amounts were left for equipment and armament. The army was plagued by a "structural deficit in terms of material" which was never made up for during two decades.¹⁴ Most of its systems consisted of worn equipment transferred at no or low cost from other states.¹⁵ Still, levels of foreign support remained minimal from 1990 to 2006 and purchases and gifts were made up essentially of equipment of a defensive nature.¹⁶

¹² *L'Orient-Le Jour*, 2 Aug. 1997. Each draftee cost the state budget \$1000 a month according to *L'Orient-Le Jour*, 15 Jul. 2003.

¹³ 'A Closer Look: Lebanon's military expenditure', *Information International Monthly*, No. 2, Aug. 2002. Under PM Hariri, the government tried to limit the budget of the Ministry of Defence. In 1998, an unidentified military commando ransacked the office of the Minister of Finance, Fouad Siniora, who had attempted to scrutinize military expenses. 'Military Republic of Lebanon', *Information International Monthly*, No. 94, May 2010.

¹⁴ Minister of Defence Elias Murr to *Al-Nahar*, 5 Sep. 2007.

¹⁵ Nerguizian, *The Lebanese Armed Forces*, p. 36.

¹⁶ 'U.S. studies Lebanon's military', *The Chicago Tribune*, 2 Mar. 2006.

While never officially acknowledged, the reason for this deficit was that the Western powers which traditionally supported Lebanon were reluctant to help rebuild Lebanon's security sector while it remained tightly interconnected with and dependent upon the powerful Syrian forces stationed within the country's borders. Syria was no more willing to rearm the Lebanese military, fearing a resumption of the civil war and being concerned about the effect a Lebanese military empowerment might have on the Eastern Arab-Israeli front. As a testimony to LAF impotence, governments refrained from acting to reclaim state sovereignty over the occupied South and, following Israeli withdrawal in 2000, only a limited ISF-army force of one thousand men crossed the Litani. Fear of controversy within armed forces that might lead to resignations and even secession accounted for such paralysis.¹⁷

A few years later, when Lebanon was confronted with two major military aggressions – an insurgency in Nahr al-Bared in 2007 and the massive 2006 Israeli attack – its armed forces not only lacked adequate equipment and training, they remained plagued by inefficient organisation, management difficulties and lack of strategic direction. These dysfunctions and the government's lack of a security policy were crudely exposed.

A Lebanese proxy in the 'global fight against terrorism'

Lebanon has long been a case study for Western intervention in the Middle East. Its state institutions were largely shaped by the *Réglement organique*, a system imposed by European powers on the Sublime Porte in 1864, and through the French mandate from 1920 to 1943. After independence, Western intervention in Lebanon was frequent, from the US landings

¹⁷ In May 2003 President Lahoud told US secretary of state Colin Powell that he feared deployment of the Lebanese army to the south, along the Israeli border, would split the army along sectarian lines.

during the civil war in 1958 to the creation of UNIFIL in 1978 and the failed mission of the Multilateral Force in 1982-1983.

Ending the civil war did not secure state sovereignty. Israel's 22-year occupation of South Lebanon lasted until May 2000. Only then was a limited contingent of national military and police dispatched south of the Litani to cooperate with UNIFIL.¹⁸ Still, several contested areas (Sheba'a, Ghajar, Kfar Shuba...) remained under Israeli control, occasioning skirmishes over the "Blue Line" between Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) and Lebanese irregulars organised by Hizballah and backed by Syria. In the meantime, Islamist mobilisation in Palestine (*Intifada al-Aqsa* in 2000) then in Iraq echoed among Lebanese Sunnis and Palestinian refugees. Jihadist militants who had mobilised in the Ain el-Helweh (Sidon) refugee camp and fighting the Lebanese army in the highlands of Dennyeh in January 2000 were arming, training, and travelling back and forth to Iraq with the support of Syrian intelligence.¹⁹

Before 9/11 and the designation of al-Qa'ida as the global enemy, the United States and its NATO allies had led the Lebanese security services into the fight against international drug trafficking, illegal immigration, human trafficking and terrorist networks. Cooperation remained limited until the US led invasion of Iraq in 2003, which gave rise to a local and trans-regional Islamic insurgency that spilled over into neighbouring countries, and even Lebanon.²⁰ Following the "Cedar revolution" and the withdrawal of Syrian military and intelligence, Western military cooperation increased as the Lebanese army became gradually

¹⁸ The United Nations interim force in Lebanon created by UNSC resolution 425 in April 1978 to supervise an expected Israeli retreat.

¹⁹ This chapter was documented through nine interviews with foreign military attachés in Beirut and 5 interviews with retired or acting LAF officers between February 2002 and July 2008.

²⁰ Reinoud Leenders, 'Regional conflict formations: is the Middle East next?' *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 28, No.5, 2007, pp. 959-82.

involved in the fight against *Jihadist* local cells and guerrillas.²¹ The globalised “war against terror” bound Lebanon in “strategic partnership” with its Western allies.²²

Western powers were willing to reform and train the LAF, on their own terms and in relation to their strategic priorities. The US Congress, which had kept military cooperation at low level since US retreat from Beirut in 1983, approved an aid budget in February 2007 that included USD 280 million for security.²³ In May, when Islamic insurgency moved from Tripoli to the camp of Nahr al-Bared, Western governments labelled *Fatah al-Islam*²⁴ a “danger to international security”. On the whole, between 2005 and 2010, Lebanon was promised nearly 720 million USD worth of military material from Washington and the LAF were advised to “prioritize a domestic counterterrorism mission”²⁵. More specifically, top-brass US officers stressed the “necessity to counterbalance the influence of Syria and Hizballah.”²⁶

The LAF’s war against *Fatah al-Islam* in Nahr al-Bared illustrated the conflation of domestic Lebanese security issues with the regional and international agendas of third parties interfering in Lebanon. Moreover, it shed light on the dilemma plaguing Lebanon’s defence strategy: should the LAF have given priority to an international conflict and the

²¹ An assault against Islamist militants in Majdal Anjar in September 2004, attempts at taking control of Ta’mir, an outlaw area in the neighborhood of the Palestinian camp of Ain al-Helweh (Sidon) in 2005, 2006 and again in 2007, not to mention dozens of arrests, especially in Tripoli. Bernard Rougier, *Everyday Jihad*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007.

²² Admiral William Fallon, chief of US Central Command, Beirut, 29 Aug. 2007.

²³ *The Daily Star*, 22 Mar. 2007; *Al-Nahar*, 31 May 2007.

²⁴ *Fatah al-Islam*, a *Jihadist* off-shot of the pro-Syrian Palestinian group *Fatah al-Intifada* inspired from al-Qa’eda, first appeared in Lebanon in late 2006.

²⁵ David Schenker, ‘Defending Lebanon or Israel’, *Forbes.com*, 7 Jan. 2010. Available at <http://www.forbes.com/2010/01/07/lebanon-israel-military-aid-opinions-columnists-david-schenker.html>

²⁶ *Al-Safir*, 29 Jul. 2010.

defence of its national borders, or to the fight against local insurgents – a large number of whom were Lebanese citizens? The battle against a few hundred *Jihadist* insurgents entrenched in the Palestinian camp north of Tripoli lasted for over three months (May 24 to September 5, 2007), causing a high level of destructions and human loss.²⁷ It was finally won when LAF Special Forces flattened the insurgents' stronghold with emergency supplies of armed helicopters and missiles.²⁸

Fighting Sunni Muslims, a majority of whom were Arabs, and even Lebanese, with the logistical support of Western powers, was not met with universal domestic approval. Beyond the problem of the army's operational capability lay divisions within Lebanon's political leadership. Who should make national security decisions: the Maronite president, the Sunni Prime Minister or the sectarian majority in parliament? Furthermore, the lack of consensus regarding security priorities resulted in confusion amongst Lebanon's elites. In the 8 March camp, Hizballah warned that it would "not accept or provide cover or be partner in [the military assault]",²⁹ while in contrast, its Syrian patron kept a low profile and even offered technical assistance.³⁰ In the Free Patriotic Movement, Hizballah's main Christian ally, solidarity with LAF prevailed because General Aoun, who had been Commander-in-Chief between 1983 and 1988, retained support within the army. In the 14 March camp, cooperation with the West barely masked internal discord as Defence Minister Elias el-Murr

²⁷ 170 military, some 220 insurgents and more than 50 civilians. The destruction of the refugee camp (95 percent of the buildings and infrastructure were beyond repair) caused the displacement of some 27,000 people. See Are Knudsen, '(In-)security in a space of exception. The destruction of the Nahr el-Bared refugee camp in Lebanon'. in J.-A. MacNeish and J. H. S. Lie (eds.), *Security and Development*, Oxford: Berghahn, 2010, pp. 99-112.

²⁸ Nerguizian, *The Lebanese Armed Forces*, pp. 13-8.

²⁹ Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah quoted in *Al-Manar*, 25 May 2007.

³⁰ Defense Minister Elias Murr endorsed C-in-C General Sleiman's declaration that "There is no possible link between the terrorist faction [Fatah al-Islam] and the Syrian SR", *Lebanese press*, 5 Sep. 2007.

described the refugee camp of Ain el-Helweh as the utmost danger to Lebanon, while Sunni leaders maintained ambivalent relations with extremist groups within their electoral constituencies.³¹

In order to bypass the political stalemate, the LAF's decision making had to bypass the civilian leadership and Commander-in-Chief Michel Sleiman took the responsibility for seeking further Western support, engaging special units in the battle and launching the deadly air assault. The final victory in Nahr al-Bared contributed to enhance the image of the military nationally and paved the way for Sleiman's accession to the presidency in 2008. It prompted a reappraisal of LAF structures in order to upgrade Special Forces and give them a central mission,³² and it underlined the crucial issue of Western arms supplies - an issue which remained prescient.³³ The victory was nevertheless considered unjust among Islamist segments of the society and extremely costly in terms of military losses. Three months later, François el-Hajj, the brilliant general who led the battle of Nahr el-Bared, lost his life in his booby-trapped car and the year that followed the LAF were targeted several times in the Sunni areas of Tripoli.³⁴

³¹ According to several sources the Hariris had sought electoral arrangement with Islamist groups in Sidon, Tripoli and Akkar during the May-June 2005 Legislative elections; and again to confront the demonstrations organized by Hezbollah in downtown Beirut since December 2006. Seymour Hersh, 'The Redirection', *The New Yorker*, 3 Mar. 2007.

³² Nerguizian, *The Lebanese Armed Forces*, pp. 39-41; *L'Orient-Le Jour*, 29 May 2010.

³³ The freeze on US military aid was lifted by US Congress in November 2010 after getting assurance "that Lebanese troops would not use the equipment against Israel." Majority change in the Lebanese government in February 2011 led to further US tergiversation.

³⁴ The bombing of a bus in August 2008 made 18 victims, ten of whom were soldiers. *The Guardian*, 13 Aug. 2008.

A “bifurcated” national defence

Since 1985, when Hizballah began marginalising and eliminating rival groups, it had become *the* military actor confronting Israel in Lebanon. Born under the auspices of the Islamic Republic of Iran, it was legitimised by Syria as the main national resistance group and therefore exempted from the post-war demobilisation that occurred in 1991 on the pretext that the South remained occupied. Until the Israeli withdrawal of 2000, Hizballah substituted for the LAF in South Lebanon, organising and leading a successful guerrilla resistance against the IDF and their local proxies. After the Israeli withdrawal, the *Muqawama islamiyya* [*Islamic Resistance*] now renamed *Muqawama wataniyya* [*National Resistance*] took exclusive military control of the “liberated” areas down to the international border, heralding a globalised trend toward privatisation and trans-nationalisation of the security sector. Thanks to family and sectarian connections, and to the skilful blurring of boundaries between military structures, party organisation and the Shi’ite society, Hizballah enjoyed great support. Narrow localism and regional strategy, clerical domination and the cult of armed sacrifice, contributed to eroding the weak territorial nation-state of Lebanon, while Hizballah benefited from powerful transnational networks centred on Tehran, which provided financial resources, armaments, and political and religious support.³⁵

Hizballah could be considered a paragon of the new military structures fighting asymmetric wars in the wake of the “revolution in military affairs”. A unified, strictly hierarchical military institution of a few thousand combatants, with a command structure inspired by the PLO, it was organised in small, mobile, extremely well trained, decentralised autonomous cells which combined sophisticated intelligence technology, high-tech arms and

³⁵ Waddah Charara, *Dawlat Hizb Allah. Lubnan mujtama’an islamiyyan* [The State of Hezbollah. Lebanon Islamic society], Beirut: Dar al-Nahar, 1998, pp. 175-95.

audacious improvisation. These characteristics accounted for its success in its war of attrition against the Israeli occupying forces prior to 2000, as well as for its remarkable resistance against Israel's attack in the summer of 2006.

As suggested by Émile Hokayem, "In the best of all worlds, [Lebanon] would have a serious defence review that would conclude that [it] needs a military fashioned *à la* Hizballah – special forces, light infantry, officers and NCOs that have a sense of initiative, good communication, anti-tank weaponry, good intelligence and reconnaissance assets, some helicopters, coastal radars, even air defence at some point [...] Such a force would do a far better job at protecting Lebanon at a much cheaper cost, and the Israeli Qualitative Military Edge would not be an insurmountable problem."³⁶ In stark contrast, the LAF was a bystander in the 33-day war between Israel and Hizballah, merely coordinating relief efforts for the population and ensuring order following the hostilities. Neither equipped nor deployed to play a meaningful role, the LAF suffered losses with little response, scrambling to protect their men and firing anti-aircraft weapons to no avail.³⁷ On the civilian side, PM Siniora proved unable to obtain even defensive arms or civil protection equipment from his Western allies, who did not want him to engage the national army on the side of Hizballah. Only at the end of the war, and after the passage of UNSC resolution 1701 increased UNIFIL's mission in terms of manpower, scope and resources, did the government send 15,000 military south of the Litani in close cooperation with the international force.

Since 2005, questions over the future of Hizballah's militia have proved a stumbling-block in Lebanon's quest for state sovereignty and a monopoly on legitimate

³⁶ Émile Hokayem, 'U.S. military assistance and the LAF', *Qifa Nabki*, 12 Jan. 2010. Available at <http://qifanabki.com/2010/01/12/u-s-military-assistance-and-the-laf>.

³⁷ Nerguizian, *The Lebanese Armed Forces*, p. 12. A total of 49 LAF officers, NCOs and soldiers died. Military installations, including bases and positions near Jbeil, Batroun, Tripoli and a Brigade headquarters in the north were targeted by Israeli helicopters.

violence within its borders – the main point of contention between 14 March and 8 March within and outside the “consensus” government. It figured at the top of the agenda of the National Dialogue conference, and even more so after a provisional compromise was signed in Doha in May 2008 between the majority and the opposition which stressed the necessity to “promote Lebanon’s state authority all over the Lebanese territory”. Inside the LAF, Hizballah’s public stance remained a bone of contention among officers divided between the two camps. While intelligence units were prone to share information with Hizballah during the 2006 war, observers noticed sectarian resentment and distrust toward fellow Shi’i.³⁸ Disarming the “National resistance” by force would have been far beyond the LAF’s military capabilities and the authority of the government. Its integration into the Lebanese army seemed improbable in the short term.³⁹ Firstly because coordination would have to be negotiated between radically antagonistic political camps, and secondly because this would have required a radical change in the regional balance of power: Syria would not relinquish its political and logistic support to Hizballah and its other Lebanese and Palestinian allies in Lebanon as long as the regime did not strike a satisfying deal with Israel and the United States over the Golan Heights. For Iran’s part, its leadership highly valued their local Near Eastern allies either as proxies or as a safety valve for regional tension.

While Lebanon remained on the fault line between the “moderate axis” and the “resistance front”, Lebanon’s defence strategy remained caught in this double bind. On the one hand, a covert strategic relationship between the “national” resistance and the LAF was fostered under Syrian tutelage. This involved intelligence sharing, a tolerant approach to Hizballah training and the trafficking of arms between the Syrian border, the Beqaa and the

³⁸ Michael Young, ‘What’s Hizballah’s problem with the army?’, *The Daily Star*, 25 May 2007.

³⁹ Although advocated by Terje Roed Larsen, UN special envoy for the implementation of Security Council resolution 1559. See Report of the UNSG to the UNSC, 29 Apr. 2005.

South. Hizballah's leadership referred to this as "conceptual continuity"⁴⁰ as illustrated in the 1998 and 2004 jointly organised prisoner exchanges with Israel.⁴¹ Implicitly, this strategic relationship extended to Syria as overtly acknowledged by president Michel Sleiman during his visits to Damascus (August 2008, June 2010), and to Iran as suggested at the time of his visit to Tehran (November 2008).⁴²

On the other hand, coordination between UNIFIL II and the Lebanese brigades deployed in South Lebanon steadily improved: the UN force succeeded in involving Lebanese officers in tripartite security meetings with IDF representatives. In return, Lebanese officers mediated between UNIFIL and Hizballah in the new security zone.⁴³ Western military cooperation extended to include the surveillance of Lebanese territorial waters, the national airport and land border control between Syria and Lebanon in conformity with UNSC resolution 1701. Through Lebanese cooperation with several members of NATO, members of UNIFIL II and through the military and police operations against *Jihadist* militants, Lebanon was experiencing a kind of integration of its security sector into the "war on terror" – an integration paralleled by the financial and political support the international community granted to Lebanon's bankrupted economy and polity.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Talal Atrissi, quoted in Mats Wärn, *The Voice of resistance: the point of view of Hizballah*, May 1997, <http://almashriq.hiof.no/lebanon/300/320/324/324.2/hizballah/warn/index.html>.

⁴¹ Hassan Nasrallah, quoted by *Agence France Presse*, 25 Jun. 1998.

⁴² Iran offered to supply LAF with medium-range missiles as part of a five-year Iranian-Lebanese defence agreement. *The Daily Star*, 27 Nov. 2008.

⁴³ 'Hizballah: UN troops welcome in South', *The Daily Star*, 30 Mar. 2007; 'UNIFIL denies reports of weapons smuggling in South', *The Daily Star*, 4 May 2007.

⁴⁴ At the time of the Paris III conference in January 2007, the national debt amounted to US \$ 41 billion, i.e. 180 percent of the GDP.

Identity controversy and its effect on national security

Throughout Lebanon's history, sectarian constituencies attached varying degrees of confidence in the national army and security forces, while military recruitment followed the informal rules of political patronage along religious and family networks. The LAF and police forces reflected the sectarian segmentation of government rather than its demographic balance: Christians dominated the officer corps until 1975 and the Commander-in-Chief remained a Maronite by tradition. Shi'a from poor peripheral regions made up the bulk of the LAF's troops while Sunnis, especially from the cities, were under-represented.⁴⁵ During the civil war, the military institutions split along sectarian lines with officers and soldiers joining different militias on the basis of confession. When the war finally ended, the "Eastern" (Christian) branch of the LAF remained under command of General Michel Aoun while the other branch, under General Émile Lahoud and his Syrian patrons, garrisoned the rest of the country.⁴⁶

Although the idea of reunifying and rehabilitating Lebanon's security sector met with general consensus, the way the war ended precluded any "secularised" vision of national security. Peace was imposed from outside and the domestic balance of power ignored. Against such a background, the military remained enmeshed in the primordial ties and sectarian dynamics of Lebanon's different confessions and sensitive to inherited tensions and solidarity networks. What could be observed beyond the display of military ethos was that

⁴⁵ Ronald McLaurin, 'Lebanon and its army', in E. Azar (ed.), *The Emergence of a new Lebanon: Fantasy or reality?*, New York: Praeger, 1984, pp. 79-114.

⁴⁶ Ronald MacLaurin, 'From professional to political: The redecline of the Lebanese army,' *Armed Forces & Society*, Vol. 17, No. 4, 1991, pp. 545-68.

civilians and military of the same kin adopted similar sectarian patterns in their social behaviour and political commitment.⁴⁷

To begin with, the demobilisation of their militias left a whole sector of the Christian society outside of the reintegration process. The result of this ostracism was the disaffection of the Christian youth towards advancing a military career and a division within the Christian community on the issues of national defence and state sovereignty. Then, in a context of economic ultra-liberalisation, post-war civilian elites involved officers in financial and political deals under Syrian patronage. Last but not least, the national legitimacy of the army and the police as institutions was eroded amongst a population gripped by sectarian loyalties. With regard to these negative trends, the dramatic events of 2005, rather than being a turning point, had a revealing and accelerating effect.

DDR and the confessional rebalancing of the military

One of the key concepts behind the push to rehabilitate Lebanon's armed forces was blending the rank-and-file; thereby enhancing a shared national identity. As early as 1991, Émile Lahoud undertook a reshuffling of the army corps with a view to making it more pluralistic. For half a decade he imposed a rotating system among the 12 brigades deployed in the five main regions as a means of severing local sectarian connections. This measure was costly, however, and proved unpopular with the officers until it was scaled down in the 2000s.

In June 1991, Lebanon's parliament passed a law imposing the demobilisation, disarmament and reintegration (DDR) of some 40,000 former militiamen into civilian or

⁴⁷ The study by Oren Barak, *The Lebanese army: A national institution in a divided society*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009, appears to overestimate the strength, autonomy and patriotism of the military, possibly in accordance with Barak's preference for having LAF rather than Hezbollah facing IDF.

military service.⁴⁸ Conceived by Syria, the operation was hastily implemented and incomplete, with several militias hiding their heavy weaponry and selling other weapons to groups in the Balkans and the Caucasus. Moreover, hundreds of militiamen involved in war crimes were smuggled to Europe, the Americas, and Australia.

Only around 4,000 ex-militiamen (of whom 85 percent were Muslim) and a few dozen officers joined the regular armed forces. The main Christian militia group, the *Lebanese Forces* (LF), was excluded from state institutions in retaliation for its opposition to Syrian rule, thus causing a deficit in Christian representation within the military. Furthermore, nearly 69 percent of the 253 (out of some 2,000) army officers forcibly retired were Christians. The percentage of Christians in the officer corps declined to 47.1.⁴⁹ Among the rank-and-file it was even lower, as the army encountered great difficulty in attracting Christian youths, because they became increasingly reluctant to serve under Syrian rule and prone to emigration. This was true even for remote provinces like Akkar, a traditional reservoir of poor Maronite recruits. It kept declining, down to 41 percent in 2000 – an accurate reflection of Lebanon’s overall sectarian composition.⁵⁰ It was similarly reported that the percentage of Christians among the draftees dropped down to 25 percent.⁵¹ Although difficult to corroborate, reports on new recruitment policy sponsored by the Ministry of Defence after 2005 underlined the confessional balance conundrum, as it was said that

⁴⁸ Law 88 (13 Jun. 1991). Elizabeth Picard, *The Demobilization of the Lebanese Militias*, Oxford: Centre for Lebanese Studies, 1999.

⁴⁹ Oren Barak, ‘Toward a representative military? The transformation of the Lebanese officer corps since 1945’, *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 60, No. 1, 2006, p. 85.

⁵⁰ According to official figures voters included 1,558,000 Muslims (56.55 percent) and 1,197,000 Christians (43.45 percent) in 2000. The Muslim/Christian ratio for the total (resident *and* non resident) population was estimated around 60:40.

⁵¹ Carole Dagher, *Le défi du Liban d’après guerre*, Paris: l’Harmattan, 2002.

Minister Murr wanted to increase the number of Christians in the army by recruiting them for Special Forces units. As a result, Christian under-representation in LAF and Intelligence appeared a major concern for the Ministry of Defence.⁵²

The year 2005 saw a major rift within the Christian community over the army. While supporters of the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) highly valued the figure of the military leader and men in uniform, many top-brass officers in return remained sympathetic to Michel Aoun, their ex-C-in-C. The memorandum of cooperation signed between FPM and Hizballah in February 2006 has to be interpreted against this background,⁵³ as well as the alignment of Aoun and his FPM on strong anti-Israeli lines together with Hizballah, Syria, and even Iran and Hamas, especially during the 2006 war. For their part, Samir Geagea and his LF adopted the opposite position, as the 14 March-8 March divide reactivated the intra-Maronite splits of the late 1980s. While FL milieus tended to distrust the military institution and favour self-defence, their leader blamed Hizballah's provocative strategy and persistent security cooperation with Syria, criticising the army command for being soft on the Shi'a party.⁵⁴

It was sometimes argued that after the Christians lost their dominant position within Lebanon, they became a middle force able to balance between two agonistic Muslim communities. But the Ta'if Accords marked a considerable defeat for the Christian community and a reduction in national defence involvement, despite the traditional designation of a Maronite as Commander-in-Chief of the army. After 2005, the polarisation

⁵² According to unchecked sources, Elias el-Murr told the US embassy in 2008 that his recruitment efforts over the last two years had netted 20,000 new troops for LAF and brought the Christians to 25% and the Sunni/Druze component to 50% of the enlisted ranks.

⁵³ The MoU stated conditions for Hezbollah's disarmament: the return of Lebanese prisoners from Israeli jails and the elaboration of a defense strategy to protect Lebanon from the Israeli threat.

⁵⁴ Samir Geagea quoted by *L'Orient-Le Jour*, 29 May 2010; Nerguizian, *The Lebanese Army*, pp. 39-41.

between the 14 and 8 March camps was not simply a reflection of demographic change in Lebanon, but also a testimony to the Christian community's reluctance to adapt to new domestic realities and new regional trends. A large majority of Christians, even among FPM supporters, felt at odds with the party's official stance on national defence, its solidarity with the "national resistance", and wished for peace with Israel more than reconciliation with Syria.⁵⁵ While this explained their reluctance to enlist in the armed forces, it exposed the divided loyalties of the army's Christian officers when they were confronted with warfare or domestic strife.

Corruption and repression: dealing with the Syrian legacy

In a context of structural incapacity of the judiciary, discrepancies between the image that the army and police intended to project and their actual behaviour on the ground raised doubts with respect to their nature and mission. They contributed to undermining public confidence until 2005, when a crucial question arose: Would the withdrawal of Syrian forces help Lebanon return to the rule of law and escape the Middle East authoritarian pattern?

The Ba'thist regime had aptly distilled its authoritarian mode of accumulation into Lebanon: Clientelist redistribution combined with predatory practices. Taking advantage of Lebanon's ultra-liberal post-war economy, the Syrian leaders had secured the lion's share in the huge benefits from financial and real-estate investments of the privatized reconstruction

⁵⁵ A Wikileaks cable, published by *Al-Akhbar*, 2 Dec. 2010, reported that Minister of Defense Elias el-Murr asked US Chargée d'Affaires Michele Sison on 11 March 2008 that an expected Israeli attack spare Christian areas and informed the United States that he instructed C-in-C Sleiman that LAF should not involve when Israel comes for Hizballah. Full text on <http://www.yalibnan.com/2010/12/03/wikileaks-secret-cable-memo-fuel-tensions-in-lebanon>.

and established fruitful networks of trans-boundary trade. Far from diminishing after 2005, this Syrian-Lebanese collusion remained an enormous source of profit for corrupt entrepreneurs in both countries. The difference was that now it required bigger bribes and opened the door to more direct military involvement as the Lebanese army and security forces had recovered part of their autonomy.

During fifteen years (1990-2005) the Lebanese army and police had been subordinate, sometimes forced partners in the trans-boundary trafficking of primary goods such as oil products and cement, in the exploitation of Syrian manpower in Lebanon and, in some occasions, in channelling arms to Hizballah. Officers were considered desirable partners by civilian entrepreneurs because of their supposed proximity to lawmakers and the Syrian leadership, who chose its agents in dealing and trafficking among state personnel through a mix of reward and threat.⁵⁶ Some entered the unruly economy under the pretext of implementing security missions such as closing illegal quarries, enforcing construction legislation and repressing infiltrated Syrian workers. The police, because of their daily interaction with the society on the ground, were even more affected, although petty corruption did not match the great stakes involving high hierarchy. Along with political leaders and senior civil servants, senior officers have been cited in corruption scandals alleged to cost the Lebanese state more than USD 1.5 billion per year.⁵⁷ Rumours persisted of senior Lebanese officers being partners to Syrian leaders in extortion from companies and banks: Between the end of the 1990s and early 2003 (date of its collapse), Bank al-Madina seemed to have been involved in a kickback scheme that supplied Syrian and Lebanese, civilian and military

⁵⁶ Charles Adwan, 'Corruption in reconstruction: the cost of 'national consensus' in post-war Lebanon', *Lebanese Transparency Association*, 2005, pp. 7-8. Available at www.gdnet.org/fulltext/adwan.pdf; Kamal Dib, 'A strategy to investigate Lebanese corruption and debt', *The Daily Star*, 14 Jun. 2005.

⁵⁷ United Nations Center for International Crime Prevention, *Corruption assessment report on Lebanon*, Jan. 2001. *Al-Nahar*, 30 May 2000.

officials with cash, real estate, cars and jewellery, in exchange for protecting and facilitating a multi-billion dollar money laundering operation. “While lower people like generals and officers would get cash, the big shots would get checks”.⁵⁸

There was no indication that the Syrian withdrawal in 2005 and the forced retirement of higher officers surrounding president Lahoud – Mustafa Hamdan, commander of the Presidential Guard; Jamil al-Sayyed, director of Sûreté Générale; Domestic Security head Ali Hajj, and the Commander of Army Intelligence, Raymond Azar; four overtly pro-Syrian higher officers, were imprisoned in Beirut in August 2005 on suspicion of complicity to murder and terrorist acts – was enough to put an end to the stream of loyalties, goods and funds circulating over the Syrian-Lebanese border with the complicity of security personnel.

Such collusion belied the apparent opposition between those who wished to “privatise” the state for the sake of globalised capitalism (epitomised by Rafic Hariri) and those who depicted the state as the protector of citizens’ security, promoter of full employment and fight against corruption – the “strong state” promised by Émile Lahoud upon his accession to the presidency.⁵⁹ Rather, the balance between business and military interests implied a sharing of power and profits between merchants and men in arms in a common “network of privileges”⁶⁰ exerting arbitrary domination over the society.

Although far from the *mukhabarat* state, the post-Ta’if state had become more coercive than the consensus state of the 1960s and 1970s. Importation of the Ba’thist model and translation of Syrian stakes into the Lebanese political arena brought long-lasting changes in the culture of the military institutions and in civilian-military relations. This authoritarian

⁵⁸ *Fortune*, 15 May 2006; *Mehlis Report I* (S/2005/662, paragraph 217)

⁵⁹ Guilain Denoeux and Robert Springborg, ‘Hariri’s Lebanon: Singapore of the Middle East or Sanaa of the Levant?’, *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 6, No. 2, 1998, pp. 158-73.

⁶⁰ Reinoud Leenders, ‘Public means to private ends: State building and power in post war Lebanon’, in E. Kienle (ed.), *Politics From Above, Politics From Below*, London: Saqi Books, 2003, pp. 304-34.

turn was praised by president Lahoud on Army day (1 June 2001) when he declared that “officers should employ an iron fist in commanding respect for a state of law and for national security. Security officers are a key element of the state.” Confronted with extra-parliamentary opposition and street demonstrations, the political leadership routinely resorted to police and even army intervention, extra-judicial procedures and illegal imprisonment. Arbitrary use of force by state institutions targeted advocacy associations and demonstrations against Syrian occupation. A military ethos characterised by the use of all necessary force presided over the repression of supposed Jihadist groups rather than the police ethos of use of minimum force. Together, the new military and police participated in the diffusion of authoritarian patterns and the trivialisation of the domination of the men in arms.

Political strife and fragmentation of the security order

During the *Intifadat al-istiqlal*, “Independence uprising”, of Spring 2005, several signals raised great but fragile expectations of a return to a legal and fair national security under civilian rule, in a clear breach with Syrian practices. The army Commander-in-Chief Michel Sleiman provided some insight into this change while commenting on LAF’s dealing with the huge civilian demonstration which took place on 14 March 2005: “We execute the political will which emanates from a generalised national consensus... I approached this question from the point of view of the will of the nation, which is to say, the wish to live in peace. As a result I applied the popular political wish and not the official decision.”⁶¹

Still, withdrawing Syrian forces had left Lebanese security institutions unprepared and hardly adequately equipped in view of their new autonomy and responsibilities.

⁶¹ *Al-Safir*, 4 Feb. 2006.

Moreover, they had set up a number of separate and competing services, each accustomed to refer to their Syrian patrons while transversal cooperation had been kept at minimum. Post-Syria security services remained attached to specific political leaderships and tended to act as autonomous forces. The Republican Guard, an elite corps assigned to the presidency had been reinforced, equipped with modern weapons, and was commanded by officers trained in Homs and Damascus. Major General Ashraf Rifi was promoted to the head of ISF by 14 March Minister of Interior general Hassan Saba in April 2005. At the *Sûreté générale*, Major General Wafic Jezzini, an officer known for his Amal sympathies, replaced Jamil al-Sayyed in September 2006. Since Rafic Hariri's assassination in February 2005 and the subsequent withdrawal of the Syrian military at least five rival intelligence units, each attached to a different confessional leader, overlapped and obstructed information exchange while the ministry of interior proved unable of staffing a joint-operations room as agreed in August 2005.⁶² A dozen bobby-trapped cars took the lives of anti-Syrian political and intellectual figures in the following months, and the work of the UN International Independent Investigation Commission on Hariri's assassination remained continuously obstructed by conflict between intelligence services and paralysis in the judiciary.⁶³

Fragmentation of the legal security forces prompted the re-militarisation of the society. Once the Syrian lid lifted, every sectarian and political group scrambled to rearm and train their militants. Private security companies, and even foreign operators, offered their services to every local *za'im*.⁶⁴ Among the Christians, 14 March LF and 8 March FPM launched mutual accusations of secret training and breaches of the demobilisation Law. Pro-

⁶² *The Daily Star*, 11 Aug. 2005, 25 Aug. 2005, 5 Oct. 2005; *Al-Mustaqbal*, 6 Nov. 2005; *Al-Safir*, 17 Jan. 2006; *L'Orient-Le Jour*, 3 Oct. 2006; www.libnanews.com, 23 Sep. 2006.

⁶³ IIC was established by UNSC resolution 1595, 7 Apr. 2005.

⁶⁴ For example French *gendarmes* were unofficially in charge of the Prime Minister's security after Hariri's assassination. 'Beirutis turn to private security firms after wave of bombings', *The Daily Star*, 8 Jun. 2007.

Syrian militias such as Ba’thists in the Bekaa, the Syrian Social National Party in Beirut, Alawite gangs in Tripoli, and even Amal, prepared intensively for urban fighting. Hizballah took a decisive step in paralleling state security services by organising a sophisticated communication network whose discovery set fire to the relations between majority and opposition in May 2008.⁶⁵ Even Hariri’s Future Current⁶⁶ began hastily recruiting *shabab* from deprived northern mountain areas and organise them in private companies, such as *Future Security Plus*, in order to prepare the defence of Beirut’s Sunnis.

Instead of smoothening national reconciliation, the 2005 revolutionary turn paved the way for domestic strife: Intense polarisation between 14 March and 8 March embodying the famous “Riviera vs Citadel” model;⁶⁷ and a chasm between Sunnis attached to the legacy of the Hariris and Shi’a federated by Hizballah, reverberating the Middle Eastern division exacerbated by the Iraqi crisis and the growing fear of Iran’s regional status.⁶⁸ Extreme political tension prevailed from December 2006 to May 2008, and again after PM Saad Hariri’s forced resignation in January 2011. The government was paralysed and the struggle shifted from the realm of elite politics to that of street politics. 8 March parties organised rallies and sit-ins in downtown Beirut close to the *Grand Sérail*, the government headquarters. Clashes erupted during the general strike of January 2007 and acts of “civil disobedience” and

⁶⁵ A Wikileaks cable reported the detailed description of the network, given by 14 March leader Marwan Hamadeh to the US Chargée d’Affaires on 16 April 2008. Full text on <http://www.yalibnan.com/2010/12/07/wikileaks-cable-iran-telecom-is-taking-over-the-country>.

⁶⁶ See the minutes of the ministerial meeting called to discuss the rearmament of the paramilitary militias in *Al-Akhabar*, 4 May 2007; B. Daragahi and R. Rafei, ‘Private force no match for Hizbollah’, *Los Angeles Times*, 12 May 2008.

⁶⁷ Nadim Shehadi, ‘Riviera vs Citadel: the battle for Lebanon’, <http://www.opendemocracy.net>, 22 Aug. 2006.

⁶⁸ International Crisis Group, Middle East Briefing No. 23, *Lebanon: Hizbollah’s Weapons Turn Inward*, 15 May 2008.

“popular rage” became more and more frequent, until Hizballah’s take-over of Beirut in May 2008, which left 80 dead and 200 wounded in one week.

The challenge posed by mounting sectarian strife had a direct effect on security forces, especially on ISF. It underlined the distinction between ISF and LAF when dealing with social and sectarian unrest, although both institutions acted as police forces. After the 2005 legislative election granted 14 March government majority, PM Fouad Siniora endeavoured to strengthen the ISF, now released from Syrian control and directly under the responsibility of a loyal Minister of Interior. Within a few months, the Forces grew from 14,000 to 20,000 with a view to recruit 6,000 more in 2011.⁶⁹ Their training and equipment received special attention from the United States and France, whose governments considered their role “crucial for the independence, sovereignty and security of Lebanon”.⁷⁰ An elite guard of some 1,000 men meant to ensure the Sunni PM’s personal security was recruited among Sunnis, and an independent intelligence service, the *Far’ al-ma’lumat [Intelligence branch]* was created in 2006.

Although ISF included a high proportion of Christians, and even Shi’a, they were considered by 8 March opposition as the armed wing of 14 March, more specifically of the Sunni leadership. They were accused of pursuing a sectarian agenda in their handling of demonstrations and local strife and became increasingly exposed to confrontation with better armed and trained 8 March militia groups and special units, namely Hizballah and SSNP militants during the crisis of May 2008. Not only did they lose these battles, but they also suffered a setback in their perceived national legitimacy.

⁶⁹ *Magazine*, 21 Apr. 2006; *Al-Nahar*, 6 Sep. 2010.

⁷⁰ Commission of the European Union, *Annex to European neighbourhood policy: country report Lebanon*, Sec (2005) 289/3, Brussels, 2 Mar. 2005; United States embassy in Lebanon, *Press Release*, 3 Jun. 2010, 15 Dec. 2010.

The Army, rather than ISF, was sent in January 2007 and 2008, and again in May 2008 and September 2010, to contain Sunni-Shi'i and Druze-Shi'i fighting. With rare exceptions,⁷¹ LAF coordinated with Hizballah forces when the former took over security in city areas. This coordination echoed their successful cooperation in Southern areas between the Litani and the Blue Line after 2006. At the same time it contrasted with episodes of dysfunctional communication with ISF, namely when ISF stormed Islamist militants' quarters in Tripoli on 20 May 2007 without noticing the army and provoked a deadly retaliation from *Fatah al-Islam* against 27 soldiers. This raised questions about the political neutrality of LAF in a period when the C-in-C became the new president.⁷² Some suspected them of pro-14 March sympathies as a result of Minister of Defense Murr's alignment. Others suspected them of proximity with the Syrian regime when Sleiman, then his successor as head of LAF Jean Kahwaji, visited Damascus. In the end, the military failed to consolidate a third force loyal to the president within the "consensus" government. This failure underlined the limits to the "patriotic mission" they were allegedly trusted with.

Conclusion

At the time the civil war ended, the Lebanese shared a common belief: Their national army and security forces would be rebuilt as united and efficient institutions and become the main pillars of state reconstruction. This conviction was relayed and reinforced by public commitments of political leaders and Western allies. Among all constituencies, the military enjoyed a most positive image and became the symbol and model for national reconciliation.

⁷¹ Army intervention to calm sectarian strife between Ain Remmane and Shiyah in January 2008 resulted in six Shi'ite victims. An officer was sentenced.

⁷² Negotiators in Doha agreed to overcome the constitutional rule imposing a six month delay between General Sleiman's position as C-in-C and his election.

Still, the reality of such a positive image could not be tested as long as Israeli occupation lasted, and while Syria dominated the country militarily and politically. The passage of UNSC resolution 1559 in 2004 and the new division of the political arena following Hariri's and others' assassinations in 2005 raised new challenges and brought new liabilities for state security institutions.

A first question was whether the LAF had the capability to guarantee state sovereignty and contribute efficiently to national defence. Yet, shortage of military equipment and inadequate training prevented them from substituting for Hizballah's "Islamic resistance" as blatantly demonstrated during the 2006 Israeli war over Lebanon. Moreover, the impossibility for the Lebanese state to recover monopoly on the use of force as prescribed by UNSC resolution 1701 was acknowledged successively by Prime Ministers Fouad Siniora and Saad Hariri, who both had to pay tribute to, and legitimate, the rival defence force. Although the LAF did improve their military performance thanks to friendly cooperation with UNIFIL II south of the Litani, they paid a heavy human price in order to suppress the Islamist stronghold of Nahr el-Bared in 2007 and were only able to overcome once their Western allies delivered lethal armament. In view of the persistence of Arab Israeli hostility, access to offensive military material remained scarce, in spite of US and French pledges of support.

The second issue concerned the capacity of security forces (LAF, police and intelligence) to resist social dynamics of fragmentation and competing political agendas – an issue which became crucial since leaks from the UNIIIC revealed bitter competition between security institutions as well as their susceptibility to foreign influence. After universal conscription had been abolished, both the military and the police, but also various intelligence units, were characterised by unbalanced sectarian recruitment, and became more sensitive to political and economic interests. Because the ISF were accused of partiality in their dealing with social unrest and confessional strife, the LAF had to take responsibility on several

occasions. Although successful at temporary appeasement, their intervention in the domestic arena was but the mirror side of their paralysis in the international arena. In a country where the latest two presidents came from the military, obedience or autonomy of security forces with regard to national and foreign powers remained an irresolute issue.

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