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**LEBANON: THE UNCERTAIN ROAD TO  
RECONSTRUCTION**

by

Robert B. Chadwick II

June 1997

Thesis Advisor:

Glenn Robinson

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**LEBANON: THE UNCERTAIN ROAD TO RECONSTRUCTION**

Robert B. Chadwick II  
Lieutenant, United States Navy  
B.S., United States Naval Academy, 1991

Submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

**MASTER OF ARTS IN NATIONAL SECURITY AFFAIRS**

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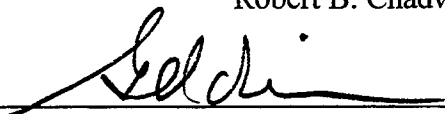
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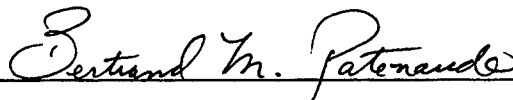


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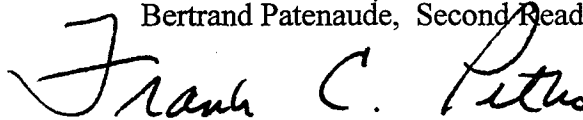
Approved by:



Glenn Robinson, Thesis Advisor



Bertrand Patenaude, Second Reader



Frank Petho, Chairman

Department of National Security Affairs



## ABSTRACT

Lebanon is in the midst of an ill-fated reconstruction effort. The \$30 billion plan involves not only physical reconstruction after 15 years of a devastating civil war but also an attempt at national reconciliation between Lebanon's historically contentious confessional groups. I argue that the effort is doomed to a path of diminishing returns due to the lack of a regional peace agreement between Israel and Syria.

Syria's domination of the Lebanese political scene and Israel's occupation of nearly 10% of Lebanese territory, both of which are near certainties in the absence of peace, ensure Lebanon will remain the last remaining battlefield of the Arab-Israeli conflict. The lack of stability in the region, real or perceived, negatively impacts investor confidence, virtually crippling a reconstruction plan that relies heavily on foreign investment. Further, the lack of a regional peace exacerbates internal problems within Lebanese society, which in and of themselves are quite capable of derailing reconstruction. Lebanon's reconstruction will have to wait for the precarious peace process to run its course.



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	INTRODUCTION .....	1
II.	PICKING UP THE PIECES .....	9
	A. THE WORLD'S LARGEST CONSTRUCTION SITE .....	12
	B. TOO EARLY TO CELEBRATE .....	14
III.	ASAD'S LEBANON .....	19
	A. THE ROOTS OF BROTHERHOOD AND COOPERATION .....	19
	B. INTERVENTION .....	21
	C. CONSOLIDATING CONTROL .....	24
	D. PLAYING THE LEBANON CARD .....	28
	E. THE PRICE OF ALLEGIANCE .....	32
IV.	ISRAEL'S QUAGMIRE .....	39
	A. A PAINFUL LEGACY .....	41
	B. THE ZONE .....	47
	C. IMPLICATIONS FOR RECONSTRUCTION .....	52
V.	TAMING THE FORCES WITHIN .....	55
	A. THE SHIA OF LEBANON .....	57
	B. THE RISE OF HIZBALLAH .....	62
	C. EXTERNAL INFLUENCES ON HIZBALLAH .....	66
	D. THE ISLAMIST THREAT TO RECONSTRUCTION .....	68
	E. THE PALESTINIAN ISSUE .....	73
VI.	"THE WILL TO PROGRESS OF THE WILL TO DESPAIR?" .....	77
	A. "THE MARTYR LEBANON" .....	78
	B. THE CONFSSIONAL DILEMMA .....	81
	C. HOSTAGE TO THE PEACE PROCESS .....	85
	BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	89
	INITIAL DISTRIBUTION LIST .....	97





## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since the Lebanese Civil War officially ended with the Taif Accords of 1989, Lebanon has launched a massive reconstruction effort to rebuild the nation. The ambitious plan involves not only the physical restoration of 15 years worth of 'war damage' and the rebuilding of a shattered infrastructure, but also the fostering of sense of national reconciliation, much needed after the sectarian violence which characterized the conflict. The ultimate goal is to restore Lebanon to its historic role as a Middle Eastern cultural and financial center, nothing short of a Herculean task.

This thesis will argue that Lebanon's reconstruction effort will fall far short of its intended goals in the absence of a regional peace agreement between Israel and Syria. Due to the complete devastation of Lebanon's political and economic infrastructures, it is not surprising that a well-coordinated plan would yield impressive relative gains very quickly, and such has been the case. The regional political and security situation, of which Lebanon plays the central role, however, has doomed the reconstruction effort to a path of diminishing returns.

When the initial reconstruction plan was launched, the prospects for Middle Eastern peace seemed more promising than at any time in recent memory. Regional stability, therefore, seemed a logical assumption to Lebanese government planners as they mapped out the road to Lebanon's reconstruction. Unfortunately, a resolution to the Arab-Israeli conflict has remained as illusive as ever, and has even recently shown signs of deterioration.

In spite of the faltering peace process, the Lebanese government continues to pursue a reconstruction policy which was

created at a time when peace seemed imminent, and has failed to adjust the policy for the current security environment. Additionally, various members of the international community, including the United States, have provided financial support for the reconstruction effort and apparently concur with the Lebanese government as to the viability of the policy. A more prudent, and cost-effective, approach would involve increased pressure for a settlement between Syria and Israel.

Syria has exercised nearly complete political hegemony in Lebanon since the end of the Civil War, bolstered by the continuous presence of 30,000 Syrian troops within Lebanon. Although there are strong historical links between the two nations, Hafez al-Asad of Syria views Lebanon not as a fraternal partner, but rather a tool to be used to reinforce Syria's position in the long-standing Arab-Israeli conflict. It has been through the manipulation of Lebanon, and specifically the war of resistance to Israeli occupation of Southern Lebanon, that Asad has been able to drastically improve his bargaining position in the ongoing peace negotiations. Asad has demonstrated that he is more than willing to sacrifice Lebanon's reconstruction efforts in order to achieve his ultimate goals, the most prominent of which is the return of the Golan Heights. Until those goals are achieved, Syria's influence will continue to threaten the reconstruction and reconciliation effort.

Israel also figures prominently in Lebanon's bleak reconstruction prospects. The Israeli's have maintained a 9-mile wide 'security zone' in Southern Lebanon since 1985, which encompasses approximately 10% of Lebanese territory. Although Israel's involvement in Lebanon, which reached a peak during the 1982 invasion of Lebanon, has resulted in numerous Israeli casualties as well as criticism from both inside and outside of Israel, it seems unlikely that there will be a unilateral pull-out of Israeli forces in the near term. Such a move would be

interpreted, at least by the present Israeli leadership, as bowing to Syrian demands. Like the Syrians, the Israelis view Lebanon's reconstruction effort as a means of coercing the Lebanese populace and sending a clear message to the Lebanese government that there is a price to pay for Beirut's allegiance to Damascus.

Lebanon's reconstruction is also threatened by forces within Lebanon, most notably Lebanon's disenchanted and impoverished Shi'i community and the large Palestinian refugee population. The anger and resentment of the Lebanon's Shia has manifested itself in the form of Hizballah, a radical Islamic militia currently waging a war of resistance against Israeli occupation of Southern Lebanon. Although the Lebanese government does not subscribe to Hizballah ideology, they have little choice but to praise their efforts in attempting to expel the IDF. In the meantime, Hizballah continues to cement their influence over Lebanon's Shia, by far the largest confessional group in the country. Additionally, Lebanon's Palestinian refugee population, which numbers over 300,000, poses a serious threat to Lebanon's internal security. The Lebanese are quick to point out that the Palestinian presence was a primary catalyst for their 15-year civil war, and many fear a similar scenario in the future.

The Lebanese leadership has recently attempted to separate the country's reconstruction effort from the floundering peace process. Unfortunately, saying it does not make it so. The plan relies heavily of foreign and private investment and it has become quite clear that the continued violence and lack of a peace agreement have detrimentally affected investor confidence. In physical terms, the reconstruction effort appears to be making progress and can be verified by the massive construction effort that is currently underway. Constructing buildings, however, is by far the easiest part of the task ahead, and it should not be forgotten that the Lebanese demonstrated during their civil war

that they are just as adept at bringing the buildings down. More effort should be devoted to institution building and harnessing Lebanon's immense human capital, saving the capital-intensive aspects of reconstruction for post-peace era. In the meantime, Lebanon's fate is inextricably linked to the precarious peace process.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Since the Lebanese Civil War officially ended with the Taif Accords of 1989, Lebanon has launched a massive reconstruction effort to rebuild the nation. The ambitious plan involves not only the physical restoration of 15 years worth of "war damage" and the rebuilding of a shattered infrastructure, but also the fostering of a sense of national reconciliation, much needed after the sectarian violence which characterized the conflict. The ultimate goal is to restore Lebanon to its historic role as a Middle Eastern cultural and financial center, nothing short of a Herculean task.

This thesis will argue that Lebanon's reconstruction effort will fall far short of its intended goals in the absence of a regional peace agreement between Israel and Syria. Due to the complete devastation of Lebanon's political and economic infrastructures, it is not surprising that a well-coordinated plan would yield impressive relative gains very quickly, and such has been the case. The regional political and security situation, of which Lebanon plays the central role, however, has doomed the reconstruction effort to a path of diminishing returns.

When the initial reconstruction plan was launched, the prospects for Middle Eastern peace seemed more promising than at

any time in recent memory.<sup>1</sup> Regional stability, therefore, seemed a logical assumption to Lebanese government planners as they mapped out the road to Lebanon's reconstruction. Unfortunately, a resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict has remained as elusive as ever, and has even recently shown signs of deterioration.

In spite of the faltering peace process, the Lebanese government continues to pursue a reconstruction policy which was created at a time when peace seemed imminent, and has failed to adjust the policy for the current security environment. Additionally, various members of the international community, including the United States, have provided financial support for the reconstruction effort and apparently concur with the Lebanese government as to the viability of the policy.

The purpose of this thesis is not to argue that reconstruction cannot proceed. Rather, it will show that the goals which have been articulated by the Lebanese government are unachievable, or at the very least severely limited by the lack of a regional peace agreement. A combination of internal and external factors, most of which are a direct result of the ongoing Arab-Israeli conflict, will be examined with specific emphasis on how they threaten reconstruction.

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<sup>1</sup>In 1990, the United States announced that it intended to open peace negotiations between Israel and its Arab neighbors.

Unfortunately, the Lebanon case is quite unique and does not lend itself to comparison to other post-conflict reconstruction efforts. The most notable of these historical examples, post-Civil War reconstruction in the United States and the Marshall Plan of post-World War II Europe for example, occurred after a cessation of hostilities. Lebanon in no way fits that mold.

Lebanon's government remains subservient to Syria and President Hafez al-Asad as a result of the conflict. More significantly, Israel has occupied nearly 10 percent of Lebanese territory in a self-proclaimed "security zone" since 1985. A portion of the population is well armed, supplied and financed by yet another outside power, Iran, and is actively attempting to evict the occupying force. This war of resistance is well beyond the control of the central Lebanese government and shows no signs of waning. Further, the occupation has also isolated a large portion of the population from the reconstruction and reconciliation efforts of the government in Beirut. The situation is truly unprecedented.

Even in the absence of the aforementioned factors, Lebanon's road to reconstruction is by no means assured. The country is racked by unemployment and poverty, the bottom 20 percent of the population receives only 4 percent of the private income, and the trickle down scenario envisioned by planners is unlikely to



provide immediate relief to the struggling masses.<sup>2</sup> Further, the Lebanese are attempting to come to grips with the new demographic realities of their society and their implications for the tenuous power-sharing arrangement which has historically led to strife.

In spite of these problems, however, many Lebanese are convinced that if they were the masters of their own destiny, Lebanon would arise from the ashes and assume its historical role in the region. Although such a scenario may seem unrealistic, Lebanese society may be up to the task. Fifteen long years of bloodletting may have finally convinced Lebanon's confessional mosaic that conflict has led nowhere and cooperation is the only path to salvation. In terms of human capital, Lebanon has a great deal to offer, including a population that is 90 percent literate and boasts a strong entrepreneurial heritage.<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, Lebanon is unable to bring many of its national attributes to bear in its reconstruction effort. Its role as host to the last remaining Arab-Israeli battlefield and the conflicting political agendas of Syria and Israel, have hindered nearly all aspects of reconstruction and reconciliation and will continue to do so until regional peace is achieved.

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<sup>2</sup>The government is giving priority to investment incentives vice income re-distribution, hoping that all will benefit from economic growth. See "Putting Back the Pieces: A Survey of Lebanon," *The Economist*, 24 February 1996, p. 15.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid. At one time Lebanon was referred to as "the Switzerland of the Middle East."

The chapters that follow will begin by addressing the aftermath of Lebanon's civil war and examining reconstruction efforts to date. In spite of initial signs of growth, the Lebanese economy has begun to show signs of strain. It will be argued that a major contributor to the economic slow-down is the reconstruction plan's heavy reliance on foreign investment. Regional security issues and the lack of a peace agreement have negatively impacted investor confidence, resulting in a growing national debt.

In Chapter III, Syria's involvement in Lebanon will be examined, concentrating on how Syrian interests help or hinder Lebanon's reconstruction effort. Syrian hegemony in Lebanon was formalized with the Treaty of Brotherhood and Cooperation of 1991. Since that time President Asad has used Lebanon as a means of bolstering Syria's negotiating position in the ongoing peace negotiations. In the absence of a codified peace agreement, Syria's influence will continue to threaten reconstruction.

Israel also plays a critical role in the success or failure of Lebanon's reconstruction. Chapter IV will examine how Israel's experiences in Lebanon over the past several decades have greatly influenced their current Lebanon policy. This policy will be analyzed in terms of how, in its present state, it threatens the stated goals of the Lebanese government.

The absence of peace also exacerbates internal problems which threaten to derail, or at the very least hinder, the reconstruction effort. This is the focus of Chapter V. There are numerous potential sparks for social unrest in Lebanon. However, this thesis will focus primarily on the threat from two groups that become more dangerous in the absence of regional peace, the Shi'i community and Lebanon's massive Palestinian refugee population.

Finally, the thesis will discuss prospects for Lebanon's future. Chapter VI will examine how the structure of Lebanese society, socially and politically, presents both reason for hope and cause for concern. The "Lebanese Formula" has yet to prove its ability to withstand the test of time and it remains to be seen whether the post-Taif arrangement will prove to be any more durable. Regardless, the lack of a peace agreement can only lower the odds of success.

Even in the most ideal of circumstances, the road to reconstruction for Lebanon would be an arduous one. Few in Lebanon would argue that their current situation is in any way ideal. However, there is optimism that Lebanon's future will include peace and prosperity. It remains to be seen whether such optimism is premature.

The plight of Lebanon poses serious implications for the stability of the surrounding region. Lebanon's importance in the

ongoing peace negotiations is critical, as it currently plays host to the only remaining venue for the venting of Arab-Israeli hostility. For the most part, the Lebanese are unwilling hosts whose dreams of meaningful national sovereignty remain elusive. The failure of the current reconstruction and reconciliation effort will carry with it a significant human cost. The fate of the nation hangs in the balance, and that fate is inextricably linked to regional peace and stability.



## II. PICKING UP THE PIECES

In terms of physical damage and human loss, the statistics are staggering. Lebanon's 15-year civil war resulted in nearly 150,000 dead and likely twice that number injured. Physical destruction estimates are believed to exceed \$25 billion, a figure which takes on more significance when one considers a national income of only close to \$2 billion at the outbreak of the war.<sup>4</sup>

Lebanon's political and economic infrastructures were decimated, leaving the Lebanese central government unable effectively govern and relegated to a role of passive observer to the increasing carnage around it. The country's economy declined rapidly and by 1987 was characterized by 487 percent inflation and a complete loss of faith in the national currency.<sup>5</sup> Hundreds of thousands emigrated from Lebanon throughout the course of the war, many of whom have yet to return.

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<sup>4</sup>The Lebanese Embassy in Washington, D.C. , states that the same relative losses to the United States would be on the magnitude of 15 million dead and \$85 trillion in physical damage. Although a questionable comparison, it does provide a sobering view of Lebanon's plight. See Embassy of Lebanon Homepage at (Internet) <http://www.erols.com/lebanon/general.htm>.

<sup>5</sup>In 1992, nearly 70 percent of bank deposits and 90 percent of loans were in foreign currency. See "Putting Back the Pieces..." p.12.

During the conflict both internal and external influences combined to eventually divide Lebanon along predominantly sectarian lines. Internally, Lebanon witnessed a breakdown of the political and social fabric which had been able to maintain peaceful relations among the highly diverse population. The ever-shifting alliances which typified the conflict eventually pitted nearly every armed group in Lebanon against the other and resulted in horrible acts of violence on all sides. At several points, partition of the country seemed a distinct possibility.<sup>6</sup>

The Taif Accords of 1989 officially ended the civil war and set Lebanon on a path towards reconstruction and reconciliation. The terms of the Accords were broad and addressed many aspects of Lebanese society, including the country's governmental structure. The National Pact of 1943 between Lebanon's Christian and Muslim communities established the structure of Lebanon's government. The 1932 census, the last one taken in Lebanon, indicated a 6:5 Christian majority resulting in the same ratio in the newly formed Parliament. Accordingly, the position of President of the Republic was reserved for a Maronite with the positions of Prime Minister and Speaker of the Parliament being filled by a Sunni and Shi'i, respectively. In its original form, the Pact granted

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<sup>6</sup>The Christian leadership was more apt to speak of partition; however it was obviously seen as an option for all communities. See Robert Fisk, *Pity the Nation* (New York: Atheneum Press, 1990), p. 121.

considerable authority and power to the Maronite President, at the expense of the Muslim Prime Minister and Speaker.

The Taif Accords recognized the altered demographic realities of Lebanese society, a society in which the Christians were a now distinct minority.<sup>7</sup> The new power-sharing formula has taken significant authority from the once powerful Maronite President and bolstered the position of the Sunni Prime Minister. The arrangement is viewed as more equitable by the majority of Lebanese, with the exception of the Christian community, and was widely seen as the first step towards national reconciliation.

The Accords also attempted to address the complex security environment in Lebanon in hopes of extending government sovereignty over all Lebanese territory. It called for the disarmament of all militias in Lebanon, as well as the strengthening of the country's national forces. While calling for the withdrawal of Syrian government forces, the Accords also legitimized Syrian influence in Lebanon by pointing out the "roots of close affinity, history and common interests."<sup>8</sup>

Although numerous clauses of the Taif Accords have yet to be fulfilled, including the withdrawal of Syrian forces and the disarmament of the last of Lebanon's militias, it signaled that

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<sup>7</sup>There is some question as to whether the Christians actually constituted a majority in 1932.

<sup>8</sup>Excerpt of The Taif Accords from website of The Levant Cultural Multimedia servers at (Internet) [http://almashriq.hiof.no/lebanon/300.political\\_science/327.international\\_relations/taif.txt](http://almashriq.hiof.no/lebanon/300.political_science/327.international_relations/taif.txt).



the country was putting the years of bloodshed behind and was ready to commence the task of rebuilding the nation. The reconstruction and reconciliation effort began to truly take shape after the election of 1992, which brought Rafiq Hariri to power as Lebanon's Prime Minister.

#### A. THE WORLD'S LARGEST CONSTRUCTION SITE

Rafiq Hariri brings considerable business experience to his post in the Lebanese government. Like many Lebanese, Hariri left Lebanon to seek his fortune. His construction empire in Saudi Arabia amassed for him a personal fortune, reportedly in excess of \$4 billion, and resulted in very close ties with the Saudi royal family.<sup>9</sup> Most Lebanese agree that Hariri is just what Lebanon needs during this critical time. In his own words, "A country like ours needs something different....It needs an exceptional way to solve exceptional problems. The more the country strengthens the less it needs someone like Mr. Hariri."<sup>10</sup> To help facilitate his reconstruction aims, he has surrounded himself with business-savvy ministers, some of whom were plucked from his own company.

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<sup>9</sup>It is reported that King Fahd had to grant Hariri permission to resume his Lebanese citizenship. See "Putting Back the Pieces...", p. 11.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

A walk through downtown Beirut reveals a massive effort underway which, for the most part, has removed most of the signs of Lebanon's 15-year struggle. Bringing back memories of a better time, the famed Casino du Liban, which once hosted the high society of both Europe and the Middle East, has re-opened with the financing of 10 Beirut banks. The construction is part of a broader plan which has been labeled Horizon 2000, and seeks to restore Lebanon to its earlier glory. The plan has already costs nearly three-quarters of a billion dollars a year since 1993 and the yearly cost is expected to hover around \$1 billion through 2001.<sup>11</sup>

The vehicle for much of the physical reconstruction is Soldiere, a privately-owned company, of which Hariri is a major stockholder. Although Hariri has been criticized for his 7 percent holding in the company<sup>12</sup>, few are able to discount the impressive work which has been accomplished. Much progress has been made in expanding the capacity of Beirut's airport; re-building roads and the sports complex, as well as numerous other public service projects. If the company's timetable is to be

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<sup>11</sup>Augustus Richard Norton, "Lebanon: With Friends Like These...", *Current History* (January 1997): p. 6.

<sup>12</sup>Hariri responds to his critics by pointing out his dilemma with regards to Soldiere. He argues that Soldiere was, in a large part, his brain child even before he became prime minister. He also contends that he risked damaging the confidence of those wishing to participate if he was not involved. See "World Statesman Interviews Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri," *World Statesman*, Fourth Quarter 1996 (Internet) <http://www.kenpubs.co.uk/worldstatesman/Archive/Hariri.html>.

believed, by 2018 Beirut will be a bustling financial metropolis without rival in the region. Estimates on total costs for the project vary from \$18-30 billion, massive expenditures in a country of 3 million people.

As would be expected, the Lebanese economy has shown signs of growth in the wake of the massive reconstruction effort. Between 1993 and 1995, Lebanon's economy showed a GDP average growth of 7.2 percent. Additionally, in the first two quarters of 1996 Lebanon registered a balance of payments surplus of \$285 million, good news when compared with a \$216 million deficit of a year before. Inflation has also fallen and has been accompanied by a significant rise in foreign exchange reserves.<sup>13</sup> As late as February 1997, Lebanon was receiving high "speculative grade" ratings from international credit agencies.<sup>14</sup>

#### B. TOO EARLY TO CELEBRATE

In spite of the signs of progress, the Lebanese economy has begun to show signs of strain, drawing attention to a serious vulnerability in Prime Minister Hariri's plan. Specifically, the plan relies heavily on foreign investment to fuel reconstruction

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<sup>13</sup>Giles Trendle, "Lebanon: Boom or Bust?" *The Middle East*, no. 264 (February 1997): 5.

<sup>14</sup>Agencies based these grades on a strong banking system and economic progress, however Standard & Poor's noted numerous signs of strain on Lebanon's economy. See "Lebanon Gets High Speculative Grade Ratings," *Reuters Financial Service*, 26 February 1997.

and the Lebanese government has expended a great deal of time and effort enticing foreign investors to get involved.

One of the more promising results of Lebanon's international fund drive was the "Friends of Lebanon" conference hosted by then Secretary of State Warren Christopher in Washington, D.C. in December 1996. At that meeting donor nations pledged \$3 billion to Lebanon, \$1 billion in immediate aid and \$2.2 billion in long term programs. Beirut newspapers noted that the meeting signified a "shift in America's attitude toward Lebanon." It seems telling, however, that the month following the meeting, the United States announced that it would not be lifting the 11-year old travel ban on Lebanon. Many Lebanese also warily recall previous donor conferences that pledged large sums of money that never materialized.<sup>15</sup>

In the meantime, Hariri is coming under increasing pressure from Members of Parliament (MPs) who are critical of Lebanon's blossoming deficit, which reached a staggering \$10.348 billion in December 1996.<sup>16</sup> They also speak to a growing divide between Lebanon's rich and poor, pointing out that nearly a third of Lebanon's population falls below the poverty line. The 1997 budget appears to be aimed at reducing spending. However, Hariri

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<sup>15</sup>Andrew Tarnowski, "Lebanese Detect Shift in U.S. Policy," *Reuters Financial Service*, 17 December 1996.

<sup>16</sup>Haitham Haddadin, "Lebanon's Hariri Lashes Back During Budget Debate," *Reuters Financial Service*, 3 February 3 1997.

has made it clear that government spending cuts should not be at the expense of the reconstruction effort. It seems obvious that if this trend continues, something is going to have to give, especially considering that the rising deficit is accompanied by declining growth rates and reduced investment.

Several schemes have been adopted to help ease the strain on the economy while helping to finance the reconstruction effort. One such program, the Buy-Operate Transfer (BOT) strategy, gives strong tax breaks and other incentives for contractors to build projects and operate them until they have recovered the investment plus an agreed upon profit and then turn the project over to the government. This system has been implemented on a limited basis and with varying degrees of success<sup>17</sup>, however it seems clear that innovative programs such as this will be necessary to keep reconstruction moving at an acceptable pace.

Signs of progress may be the only way of containing numerous social issues which are plaguing Lebanese society. As mentioned, nearly a third of the population lives in poverty. The government has also been battling trade unions who are demanding an increase in the minimum wage; a situation which has resulted

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<sup>17</sup>The most notable of these projects have included a contract for cellular telephone service, road construction from Beirut and the Syrian border and the proposed Beirut conference center. See "Putting Back the Pieces...", p. 13.

in several labor protests and strikes. Even Lebanon's middle class is beginning to feel the pinch of the economy's decline.<sup>18</sup>

The downturn in Lebanon's economy is directly attributable to regional security issues and their impact on investor confidence. The eleven-year-old U.S. travel ban serves as a constant reminder of how Lebanon's precarious security situation negatively affects investment opportunities. Many of the American justifications for the ban involve issues that are presently out of the purview of the Lebanese government, including the operations of Hizballah and other extremist organizations.<sup>19</sup>

The lack of a regional peace agreement, in and of itself, is a powerful deterrent to investor confidence. The proxy war between Israel and Syria being fought on Lebanese soil only serves to further intensify investor wariness, despite the desperate assurances of the Lebanese government. It is difficult to foresee a scenario short of a codified peace agreement which could reverse the downward trend of the reconstruction effort.

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<sup>18</sup>Many members of Lebanon's middle class have been forced to sell real estate and other fixed assets or, in many cases, leave Lebanon altogether. See Norton, "With Friends Like These...:" p. 6.

<sup>19</sup>For information concerning the travel ban see "Lebanon: Prospects for Peace, Security and Economic Development," Statement by Elizabeth D. McKune, Director of Office of Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and Palestinian Affairs, before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, subcommittee on Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs, 25 September 1996.

So how exactly does an absence of peace doom the ambitious plans of Prime Minister Hariri? The explanation must begin with the role of Syria and the motivations of President Hafez al-Asad. Lebanon's relationship with its Arab neighbor to the East has tied Lebanon's fate to the floundering Middle East Peace Process.

### III. ASAD'S LEBANON

#### A. THE ROOTS OF BROTHERHOOD AND COOPERATION

The historical bonds linking Syria and Lebanon predate the relatively modern borders of the two nations. Prior to the independence of both countries, the area encompassing present-day Lebanon was considered a part of a larger Syrian entity. Although various degrees of autonomy were exercised by local Lebanese rulers, or *hakims*, they were always nominally subservient to the leaders in Syria.<sup>20</sup> It was not until the late 19th century that Syrian control of "the Mountain," as Lebanon was often referred to, began to wane.

Civil strife in Lebanon served as the catalyst for European intervention. European powers competed for influence in the region and justified intervention by assuming the role of "protector" of various religious groups within Lebanon, which in many cases only served to inflame communal tension. France had a long history of supporting the Maronite Christian community in Lebanon,<sup>21</sup> but faced British and Russian ambitions, which were characterized by support of the Druze and Orthodox Christian

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<sup>20</sup> Naomi Joy Weinberger, *Syrian Intervention in Lebanon: the 1975-76 Civil War*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1986. p. 33.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 42. As early as 1649, King Louis XIV expressed his support for the Maronite Community in Lebanon which evolved into French "protection" for European Catholicism in the Ottoman empire.



communities, respectively. It would be the French, however, who would ultimately be granted the authority to create the state of Lebanon.

Following World War I, the victorious Allied Powers granted France a mandate for Syria and Lebanon. In 1920, France created the State of Greater Lebanon by annexing a large portion of Syria which effectively doubled the size of "the Mountain," or *mutasarrifiyyah*, of the pre-mandate era. The creation of Greater Lebanon was met with opposition by Syrian nationalists who were also enraged by the dissection of Palestine from Greater Syria. Additionally, the French-led effort to terminate the short-lived reign of King Faysal dashed the hopes of many Syrians of a constitutional monarchy in Syria.<sup>22</sup>

There was also significant opposition within Lebanon, mostly from the Muslim community, which viewed the mandate as a recipe for Maronite domination of Lebanon. Common opposition to the partition resulted in the establishment of trans-national links between Lebanese unionists and Syrian nationalists. This alliance, however, was unable to overcome French dominance and general elections in 1943 brought the Nationalist Bloc to power

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<sup>22</sup>Faysal, son of Sharif Husayn of Mecca, came to power on a platform of a united Syria which included Lebanon and Palestine. The French agreed only to Faysal's rule of inland Syria, under the condition that he recognize a separate Lebanon. The French government did not receive Faysal's acceptance of these terms by a predetermined deadline and the movement of French troops led to Faysal's departure from Syria. See Weinberger, *Syrian Intervention in Lebanon*, p. 52.

in Syria and a strongly nationalist government to power in sovereign Lebanon.

Although there was considerable cooperation between Syria and Lebanon during the stages leading up to independence, Syria's refusal to open diplomatic relations with Lebanon may have indicated a reluctance to accept the partition. Regardless, the Syrian government never publicly aired any aspirations of uniting "Greater Syria." The outbreak of the Lebanon's Civil War, however, would eventually call into question Syria's ultimate goals in Lebanon.

#### **B. INTERVENTION**

Viewed from Damascus, the deteriorating situation in Lebanon beginning in 1975 was cause for alarm. As the situation in Lebanon became more grave, the threat of the country slipping into complete anarchy was viewed as extremely dangerous to Syrian interests. Most importantly, if the rebel forces were somehow able to take control, it could not be ruled out that they would pursue policies detrimental to Syrian interests. Additionally, allowed to go unchecked, the PLO and other rebel forces could force Israeli intervention and lead to a direct engagement of Syrian and Israeli forces; a scenario which had very little appeal in Damascus.

Syria's initial military intervention in Lebanon was on the side of the Christian forces. At first glance Syrian protection of the Maronite community would seem odd, especially considering the fact that Syria had been giving tacit support to the PLO and its allies throughout 1975.<sup>23</sup> In fact Syria had cultivated a reputation as the prime defender of the Palestinian cause long before the outbreak of the Civil War. On closer inspection, however, it appears clear that the primary goal of the Syrian government was to maintain the status quo in Lebanon. Although their allegiance shifted during the course of the war, Syrian actions indicated a desire to prevent either side from gaining a decisive upper hand.<sup>24</sup>

As the civil war raged on, the Syrian position in Lebanon was extremely tenuous at times, especially during the Israeli invasions of 1978 and 1982. Although Israel's 1982 *Operation Peace for Galilee* did not result in full-scale war with Syria, Syrian forces suffered heavy casualties at the hands of the IDF.<sup>25</sup> One of the goals of *Peace for Galilee* was obviously to reduce Syrian influence in Lebanon, which the Israelis felt

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<sup>23</sup>Yair Evron, *War and Intervention in Lebanon* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987): p. 24.

<sup>24</sup>There is little evidence to support the theory that the ultimate aim of Syrian intervention was to annex Lebanon. However, there is little doubt that Syria desired that the eventual outcome would increase Syrian influence.

<sup>25</sup>A detailed account of the fighting between Syrian and Israeli forces can be found in Fisk, *Pity the Nation*, pp. 219-20.

had outlived its usefulness.<sup>26</sup> By 1984, however, the Israelis were forced to withdraw their forces to their southern "security zone," having accomplished none of their initial goals, including the extrication of Syrian forces and influence. The reasons for Israel's failure will be addressed more fully in Chapter III. However it is important to note that Syria emerged from the conflict in a position to actually increase its influence.

For all intents and purposes, the process leading up to Syrian domination of Lebanon culminated in 1990 when Syrian warplanes bombed the headquarters of renegade Lebanese Army commander Michel Aoun. Aoun had been fighting a self-proclaimed "war of liberation" against Syrian forces in Lebanon until the unprecedented air strike forced his capitulation.<sup>27</sup> Aoun's demise signaled the end of hostile opposition to the Syrian presence in Lebanon, in spite of the fact that the Taif Accords calls for the withdrawal of Syrian troops from their "sovereign" neighbor.

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<sup>26</sup>Israel had given tacit approval to the initial Syrian intervention in Lebanon, concluding that a stable Lebanon was an Israeli interest as well. See Evron, *War and Intervention in Lebanon*, p. 52.

<sup>27</sup>There had been a long standing agreement between Syria and Israel that Lebanese airspace was off-limits to Syrian warplanes. The lack of an Israeli response indicates that the United States and Israel gave their approval to the raid. See Giles Trendle, "Lebanon's Heavy Price of Allegiance," *The Middle East* (June 1996): p. 6.

### C. CONSOLIDATING CONTROL

The Lebanon-Syria relationship was codified in the 1991 Treaty of Brotherhood, Cooperation and Coordination. The Treaty calls for cooperation and coordination "in all political, economic, security, cultural, scientific and other fields in a manner that will realize the interests of the two fraternal countries within the framework of respect for their individual sovereignty and independence."<sup>28</sup> Although the sovereignty and independence issue is questionable in the Lebanese case, there is no doubt that the Treaty's call for coordination (or maybe co-optation) has been implemented fully.

From the Lebanese perspective, or at least the perspective of the Lebanese government, Syrian influence in Lebanon, and the nearly 30,000 Syrian troops associated with it, provided much-needed stability as they launched their reconstruction effort. As a result, one of the many costs of reconstruction has become unwavering allegiance to Damascus and President Asad. Syria virtually dictates Lebanon's foreign policy and also figures prominently in Lebanese domestic affairs as well. Few major decisions are made in Beirut before receiving approval from Damascus.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>Text from Lebanon-Syria Treaty of Cooperation, Article 1, May 20 1991, *Internet* ([www.intercenter.net/lebanon-.txt](http://www.intercenter.net/lebanon-.txt)) 12 March 1997.

<sup>29</sup> Norton, "With Friends Like These...", p. 7.

A recent example of the consolidated foreign policy stance involves the rejection of Israel's suggestions to separate the issues of Southern Lebanon and the Golan Heights. Soon after taking office, Prime Minister Netanyahu suggested a "Lebanon First" policy, which would involve negotiating an agreement on the status of Southern Lebanon before addressing the issue of withdrawal from the Golan Heights. The governments of Syria and Lebanon quickly rejected the prospect of a separate peace, arguing that it would reduce their bargaining positions.<sup>30</sup> Although a credible argument, it is interesting to note that Prime Minister Hariri had early in his tenure indicated that he was willing to negotiate with Israel on the issue of Southern Lebanon.

In February 1993, soon after taking office, Hariri stated he was willing to sign an agreement, short of a peace treaty, which would implement U.N. Resolution 425, which calls for the immediate withdrawal of Israeli forces from Lebanon. He also made it clear that such an agreement was not tied to negotiations between Israel and other nations.<sup>31</sup> By the end of the same year, Hariri had altered his position and announced a policy of

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<sup>30</sup>Barry Sweid, "Prime Minister Rules Out Separate Peace," *Associated Press*, 17 October 1996.

<sup>31</sup>Norton, "With Friends Like These...", p. 9.

complete cooperation with Syria. It served as Hariri's first lesson in the new rules of Lebanese politics.

Syria's influence can be found in nearly all aspects of domestic Lebanese politics. At no time is this more apparent than during elections. During elections in late 1996, candidates that voiced anti-Syrian inclinations fared poorly, and with few exceptions were defeated by pro-Syrian candidates. Election fraud, which is not a new concept to Lebanon, was reported to be widespread and included such tactics as fake electoral lists, false identity cards and threats to new newly-naturalized citizens of losing their citizenship if they voted incorrectly.<sup>32</sup> The reshuffling of voting districts is also a tactic utilized to ensure the election of Syria's allies.<sup>33</sup>

By Syrian design, the composition of the Lebanese government ensures that Prime Minister Hariri is unable to stray far from the Syrian line. His cabinet normally includes several of his most outspoken critics, indicating Damascus' aim of ensuring control of the Lebanese political scene. The tenuous relationship between Lebanon's major religious sects serves as the

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<sup>32</sup>Robert Fisk, "Lebanon's Oasis of Freedom Turns Into a Mirage; Electors are Backing Syria's Friends," *The Independent*, 30 August 1996, p. 9.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid. One such instance resulted from a law that divided the predominantly Christian Mount Lebanon in such a way that virtually secured the election of Druze Leader Walid Jumblatt.

vehicle for maintaining Syrian control. This tactic was used in early 1997, when the actions of Hariri alarmed Syria.

Hariri's problems began after he attended a meeting with President Bill Clinton in October 1996. The Syrian government made it clear that it was opposed to the meeting, fearful of fostering stronger direct ties between the Lebanese government and the U.S. The U.S. government indicated that the meeting was a precondition to the "Friends of Lebanon" meeting scheduled for later in the year in Washington. In a rare move, Hariri put his reconstruction ambitions above the wishes of Damascus and attended the meeting with President Clinton. As a result, the "Friends of Lebanon" conference met in December and provided a much needed boost to the reconstruction effort.<sup>34</sup> Additionally, the conference served to showcase Lebanon as an independent actor in its dealings with the international community; a precedent Syria viewed with concern.

The Syrian reaction came soon after the conference, when a Syrian bus was attacked north of Beirut and hundreds of Lebanese Christians were arrested by Lebanese Army Intelligence. By exploiting sectarian rivalries, the Syrians were able to send a clear message both to Hariri and the international community.

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<sup>34</sup>As discussed previously, the a majority of the financial aid from the conference is to be granted over a five year period. Many Lebanese are quick to point out previous pledges of international support that never materialized. See Andrew Tarnowski, "Lebanon Detects Swing in U.S. Policy," *Reuters Financial Service*, 17 December 1996.



For Hariri, the intended message was that his precious reconstruction effort, for which he is normally given a free hand, can be easily sidelined if it conflicts with Syrian interests. Other controversial arrests served to call into question the stability of Lebanon and provided justification for the 11-year old U.S. travel ban on Lebanon.<sup>35</sup> Additionally, such activities can only erode further investor confidence in the emerging Lebanese economy.

The actions of the Syrian government have made it clear that the success of Lebanon's reconstruction effort is secondary to Syrian interests--specifically, the maintenance of a strong bargaining position with Israel. Syrian consolidation of control in Lebanon serves that purpose and shows no signs of waning. Therefore, it is important to understand how Lebanon has supported the agenda of President Asad in the regional peace process.

#### D. PLAYING THE LEBANON CARD

In 1990, when the United States indicated that it would be sponsoring peace negotiations between Israel and its Arab neighbors, it appeared that Asad entered these negotiations with a very weak hand. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, Syria

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<sup>35</sup>A Jordanian employee of the Marriott hotel was abducted by Syrian Intelligence and later released. No reason for the abduction was given. See "Lebanon Politics: Syria Stands in the Way of Reconstruction," *Economist Intelligence Unit ViewsWire*, 18 February 1997.

had lost its main supporter in the international arena. Additionally, support from fellow Arab countries was questionable after Syria chose to back Iran in the seven year Iran-Iraq war beginning in 1982.

Militarily, Syria was not in a position to demand anything from Israel, especially considering Egypt's separate peace and the near completion of a peace agreement between Jordan and Israel. Asad's demand for the return of the Golan Heights, taken from Syria during the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, seemed nothing more than a pipe dream. A series of events and circumstances, however, combined to drastically improve Asad's bargaining position.

The first of these events was the Persian Gulf War of 1991. Asad very shrewdly joined the military coalition assembled to expel Iraq from Kuwait, and to this day continues to reap the benefits. Following the war, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia made it clear that they would be willing to contribute to Syria's developing economy.<sup>36</sup> Additionally, Asad reduced Syria's isolation in the international community, which could only help in any ensuing negotiations. The benefits derived from the Gulf War, however, were not the most significant factors which

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<sup>36</sup>Tahir L. Shad, Steven Boucher and Jennifer Gray Reddish, "Syrian Foreign Policy In The Post-Soviet Era," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 17, nos. 1 and 2 (Winter and Spring 1995): p. 87.

contributed to Asad assuming the role of a pivotal player in the peace negotiations. It is, in fact, Lebanon that has precipitated Asad's miraculous change of fortune.

When the peace negotiations began, it was not a secret that Syria all but ruled Lebanon. The Israelis, however, believing that they entered negotiations from an unassailable position, felt Syrian suzerainty in Lebanon was insignificant. Asad's manipulation of the anti-Israeli guerrilla forces in Southern Lebanon would eventually convince the Israelis otherwise.

Although Syria maintains nearly 30,000 regular troops in Lebanon, it has respected the long-standing Israeli "red-line" policy, which demands that Syrian troops stay out of Southern Lebanon.<sup>37</sup> This policy has served both Syrian and Israeli interests in preventing a conventional military confrontation between the two nations. The well-respected policy, however, has not prevented Asad from influencing events in the South.

Syria provided low-level support to Hizballah and other militant anti-Israeli guerrilla movements long before the formal peace process began, but it was not until 1993 that this support began to change the dynamics of the negotiations. The change can

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<sup>37</sup>Initially, Syria offered to secure all of Lebanon all the way to the Israeli border in 1976. This offer did not appeal to the Israelis and they established a "red line" policy which delineated a geographic line over which Syrian troops could not cross without provoking an Israeli response. Over the years "red line" has been used as a measuring stick for unwanted Syrian activities. In geographic terms, it has come to mean that the Israelis control the South and the Syrians the North. See Fisk, *Pity the Nation*, p. 103.

mostly be attributed to an increase in the effectiveness of the Lebanese "resistance fighters." One of the salient lessons that Asad took from the Israeli invasions of Lebanon was the extreme reluctance of Israel and the IDF to risk substantial casualties. This reluctance played into the hands of Syria as it stepped up their support of the guerrilla activities in the South. The suicide tactics of Hizballah were instrumental in forcing the withdrawal of Israeli forces from much of Lebanon following Operation Peace for Galilee in 1982 and Asad believed these tactics would also force the Israelis into a settlement that they might not otherwise agree to.

As IDF casualties began to rise, the Israeli government desperately searched for a solution to the deteriorating situation in Southern Lebanon. In the spring of 1993, Israel launched Operation Accountability, a predominantly air and artillery attack on southern Lebanon, designed to, among other things, punish Hizballah for its attacks on the IDF.<sup>38</sup> The name of the operation indicates that Israel meant to send a clear message to the third party actually calling the shots in Lebanon, Syria. The message, however, fell on deaf ears.

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<sup>38</sup>Stephen Pellitieri argues that the purpose of the attack was to create chaos in Lebanon, bringing the Lebanese government to the point of collapse, at which point Syria would be forced to reign in the activities of Hizballah. See Stephen Pelletiere, *Assad and the Peace Process: the Pivotal Role of Lebanon* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute. 1995): p. 23.

Only weeks after Operation Accountability, Hizballah had resumed its attacks on the IDF in the South and Israel came to the realization that if negotiations were to continue they would have to take place while attacks in the South continued. It seemed that the Israelis were no longer calling all of the shots. In fact, the Israelis approached the United States to deal with Asad, in hopes of breaking the deadlock over the situation in the South.<sup>39</sup> In 1990, it would have been hard to predict Asad's rise to prominence in the peace negotiations. By playing the "Lebanon Card," he has turned a bankrupt bargaining position in to one of strength. But what price must Lebanon pay?

#### E. THE PRICE OF ALLEGIANCE

Syrian hegemony is both a contributor to Lebanon's plight, as well as a stabilizing force which has allowed reconstruction to continue, albeit moderately. It is this dichotomy which makes Lebanon's allegiance to Damascus a "bitter pill to swallow," especially for the Christian community, which is the most outspoken in its criticism of Syrian control.<sup>40</sup> But even the

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<sup>39</sup>This effort on the part of the Israelis was likely the catalyst for two face-to-face meetings between Asad and President Clinton. See "Israelis Look to Clinton for Progress With Syria," *New York Times*, 25 October 1994.

<sup>40</sup>In December of 1995, a Vatican-sponsored statement by the leadership of Lebanon's Christian community criticized the presence of Syrian troops in Lebanon, as well as the exclusion of Beirut from the formal peace negotiations. The statement forced President Hrawi to publicly reaffirm his pro-Syrian leanings. See Peter Saiers, "Vatican-Sponsored

Christians realize that any future settlement of the imbroglio in the South depends on the Syrians.

Whether it is a precursor to a finalized agreement or a post-settlement requirement, a security arrangement in the South that meets the stringent requirements of the Israelis will be necessary. Unfortunately for Lebanon, in the near term it is unlikely that Israel will agree to the pacification of the South being entrusted to the Lebanese Army.<sup>41</sup> Syria appears to be the only outside power in a position to impose such an arrangement to the satisfaction of the Israelis.

There are several reasons why this role is not appealing to Asad and his government in Damascus. First, pacifying the South will involve stationing Syrian troops all the way to the Israeli frontier. Although Israel's "red line" policy might appear to be an affront to Syria, it has actually served Asad's interests quite well. Specifically, it has greatly reduced the chances of a direct confrontation between the Syrian armed forces and the IDF.

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Statement Is Sharply Critical of Syria," *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs* (May/June 1996): p. 58.

<sup>41</sup>Although the Lebanese Army is a 58,000-man force, outnumbering the nearly 30,000 Syrian troops, it has not proven itself to be a reliable force. Its commander, General Emile Lahoud, has focused his efforts on easing the sectarian divisions which have plagued the army in the past. However, Israel will likely look elsewhere for guarantees. See "Putting Back the Pieces," p. 18.

After Egypt's separate peace with Israel as part of the Camp David Accords, Asad could not hope to pose a conventional military challenge to Israel.<sup>42</sup> It is for this reason that the proxy war being waged in the South has been so appealing. By stationing troops along the Israeli border, Syria would be greatly increasing the chances of clashes with the IDF. Asad is likely to be reluctant to risk such an eventuality.

Further dissuading Asad from undertaking the pacification of the South would be the loss of plausible deniability that he now enjoys with respect to the violence in the South. Although his influence over the anti-Israeli forces now operating in the South is no secret, the violence is being carried out by non-Syrians and allows him to avoid the direct consequences. The Israelis would like nothing better than to be able to hold Asad personally accountable for the situation in the South, and it is for that reason the Syrian government is likely to cling to the status quo.

Furthermore, from the Syrian perspective, any such arrangement is likely to shift the focus from Syria's primary goal, which is the return of the Golan Heights. Syria has consistently demanded that Israeli withdrawal from the Golan must be

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<sup>42</sup>Although the separate peace negotiated by King Hussein of Jordan was not necessarily significant in military terms, it did serve to further isolate Syria as the lone Arab neighbor of Israel without a codified peace agreement.

unconditional. In the words of one political commentator in Syria, "Israel wants normalization before withdrawal but that is not possible from our point of view....That would reward the aggressor--which would amount to compromising sovereignty."<sup>43</sup>

Questions of sovereignty aside, Asad is also likely to be extremely wary about entering negotiations with the Israelis, based on the experiences of Yasir Arafat. Asad has undoubtedly taken note of the difficulty encountered by Arafat in his dealings with the Netanyahu government, particularly its disavowal of the land-for-peace policy espoused by the previous Labor government. The floating deadlines and incremental withdrawals that the Palestinian Authority has been forced to accept is likely to convince Asad that holding out for an "all-or-nothing" scenario, or a maintenance of the status quo, is in Syria's best interest.

For the reasons discussed, Syria is likely to continue its tacit support of the war in the South, hoping that mounting IDF losses will force Israeli concessions. The deteriorating state of Arab-Israeli relations, in the wake of numerous actions and statements of the Netanyahu government,<sup>44</sup> will ease the

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<sup>43</sup>Remarks by Muhammad Aziz Shukri-Dean of the Law School at the University of Damascus. See Mariam Shahin, "Syria Stands Apart," *The Middle East* (January 1996): p. 16.

<sup>44</sup>The commencement of construction of Jewish settlements in Arab East Jerusalem has brought harsh criticism from the entire Arab world.



perception of isolation that has plagued Syria, allowing Asad to continue the "waiting game" without pressure from his Arab neighbors.

Asad's "waiting game" does not bode well for the Lebanese reconstruction effort for several reasons. First and foremost, it will prevent a regional peace agreement, which would eventually lead to an Israeli withdrawal from Southern Lebanon. Israeli occupation means continued violence in the South, which in turn leads to reduced investor confidence in the struggling economy.

The lack of regional peace also ensures the continuation of Syrian domination of Lebanon.<sup>45</sup> As discussed, the Syrian government is more than willing to sacrifice Lebanon's reconstruction effort when it threatens Syrian interest. Prime Minister Hariri's economic overtures to the international community, so critical in securing vital foreign investment, will continue to be viewed with suspicion from Damascus.

Although Rafiq Hariri is the architect of Lebanon's reconstruction, it is Hafez al-Asad who is the program's most important sponsor and most dangerous critic. Only regional peace will reduce Asad's ability to threaten reconstruction. In fact, a peace agreement that meets Syrian aspirations, will likely

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<sup>45</sup>There are no guarantees that a regional peace would mean the end of Syrian involvement in Lebanon. Syria is likely to have significant ties to its neighbor to the West well into the foreseeable future. The nature of those ties, however, remains a question.

result in successful Lebanese reconstruction topping the list of Syrian national interests. In a post-peace agreement era, a stable Lebanon will be in everyone's interest, especially Syria.

In the meantime, Lebanon will remain in the "Syrian sphere," in keeping with the Treaty of Brotherhood, pledging allegiance to Damascus as Asad pursues his political agendas. The Lebanese government extols the virtues of the alliance, having made the decision that only with the help of Syria can Lebanon achieve its ultimate goals. The question as to when, or if, those goals will be attained is dependent not only on Lebanon's Syrian overlords, but also its security-conscious neighbor to the South.



#### IV. ISRAEL'S QUAGMIRE

On February 4, 1997, two Israeli CH-56 transport helicopters bound for Lebanon collided, killing all 73 IDF soldiers and airmen aboard.<sup>46</sup> The accident dealt Israel its largest single military loss of life in over a decade and revealed strong divisions within Israel concerning Israel's Lebanon policy. Prime Minister Netanyahu responded to the crash with calls for greater resolve in the struggle in Southern Lebanon. However, his strong words could not mask dissension even within his own government.<sup>47</sup>

Netanyahu is not the first Israeli Prime Minister who has had to defend Israel's policies in Lebanon to an often skeptical Israeli electorate. Lebanon is the problem that will not go away and offers no easy answers. In many respects, Lebanon has become Israel's Vietnam, a quagmire of mounting casualties and elusive, ill-defined political objectives. Like the American experience

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<sup>46</sup>Initial Israeli report indicated that the troops were routine replacements for their forces in the "security zone." However, several theories have emerged suggesting that the soldiers may have been part of an orchestrated strike in the Bekaa Valley or Hizballah stronghold on the outskirts of Beirut. Theories are based on the identities of the soldiers, Israeli artillery attacks on western fringe of the Bekaa and unconfirmed reports that the soldiers were not wearing IDF uniforms. See Al J. Venter, "Recent Developments in the Levant Preclude Peace," *The Middle East* (March 1997): pp. 12-14.

<sup>47</sup>Scott Peterson, "Israel Doubts Its Rule in South Lebanon After Collision of Military Helicopters," *Christian Science Monitor*, 6 February 1997, p. 8.

in Southeast Asia, Israel faces in Lebanon a crisis which has divided its populace and demoralized the nation's armed forces.

Lest we not forget, however, Israel's suffering as a result of its Lebanon policy pales in comparison to the price exacted from the Lebanese populace. In their eternal quest for security, Israel has displaced tens of thousands of Lebanese civilians and contributed to the deaths of thousands more who, in most cases, have been innocent victims in the Arab-Israeli battlefield that Lebanon has become. Israel's role in Lebanon continues to threaten both the safety of the citizens of Lebanon and the reconstruction effort that they long for.

To fully appreciate how Israel's Lebanon policy impacts the prospects for reconstruction, it is important to understand how Lebanon became Israel's quagmire. In principle, Lebanon seems the least likely Arab country to boast the longest running and last remaining Arab-Israeli battlefield. A Christian-led country for most of its recent history composed of numerous religious sects, many of whom fled to Lebanon to escape persecution,<sup>48</sup> Lebanon would seem the most likely Arab country to establish favorable relations with Israel. Lebanon's curse, however, has been its vulnerability to outside influence and intervention.

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<sup>48</sup>Three of the most prominent of Lebanon's communities fall into this category. The Maronite Christians arrived in the 7<sup>th</sup> Century fleeing the Islamization of the Arabs. They were followed by the Shia Muslims in the 9<sup>th</sup> century and the Druze in 11<sup>th</sup>, both seeking to avoid religious persecution.

Israel is one in a long line of outside powers that learned painful lessons in Lebanon.

#### A. A PAINFUL LEGACY

In 1948, following the creation of the State of Israel, Lebanon joined its Arab neighbors in their war against the new Jewish nation. It should be pointed out however, that Lebanon has never posed a conventional military threat to Israel, and although viewed too weak to take the bold step of being the first Arab state to reach a peace agreement with Israel, it was generally assumed that Lebanon would be the second.<sup>49</sup> It would soon become apparent, however, that Lebanon's weakness would in fact make peace with Israel an elusive goal.

A lack of central authority in Lebanon made the country an ideal launching point for Palestinian attacks on Israel. The situation worsened after the PLO was forcibly expelled from Jordan in 1970 and began operating exclusively from Lebanese soil. The establishment of a Palestinian "state within a state" was viewed as a direct threat to Israeli security, a threat that became more serious following the breakdown of order in 1975.

The Lebanese Civil war resulted in serious national security concerns from the Israeli perspective. First and foremost, the

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<sup>49</sup>Ze'ev Schiff, "Lebanon: Motivations and Interests in Israel's Policy," *The Middle East Journal*, vol. 38, no. 2 (Spring 1984): p. 220.

PLO continued its "terrorist" attacks against Israel and also figured prominently in the emerging power struggle in Lebanon. In the mid-1970s Israel's policy concerning the PLO involved primarily military defensive measures and limited offensive action to push the PLO out of southern Lebanon.<sup>50</sup> These actions were reinforced by the establishment of ties with Christian militia organizations, which would later constitute the Southern Lebanon Army (SLA), in southern Lebanon.

Israel initially supported Syrian intervention in Lebanon, but soon became wary of the growing presence and influence of the Syrian armed forces. These fears manifested themselves in 1981, when Israeli warplanes shot down two Syrian transport helicopters operating in support of Syrian forces battling Christian forces in the Lebanese town of Zahle. The Syrians responded by stationing surface-to-air missiles in Lebanon, a clear violation of the "red line" agreement. The Israeli action was significant for many reasons, not the least of which was the implicit message that Israel had signed on as the protector of the Christian community in Lebanon. It is a commitment that Israel would soon regret.

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<sup>50</sup>Ibid., p. 221. Israel constructed a series of fences along its northern frontier equipped with electronic detection capability, in an attempt to stop terrorist infiltrations. Additionally, the IDF launched limited attacks against Palestinian targets in southern Lebanon.

Although the Israelis launched *Operation Litani* in 1978, which involved IDF forces moving north to the Litani River, the turning point in Israel's involvement in Lebanon came in 1982 with *Operation Peace for Galilee*. The operation can be attributed, in part, to a change in Israeli leadership, and a more proactive policy against the PLO in Lebanon.<sup>51</sup> The goals of *Peace for Galilee* far exceeded the protection of northern Israel from PLO attacks, as the operation's name might imply, especially since there had been no attacks for approximately a year prior to the invasion. The ultimate aims of the operation were articulated by Defense Minister Ariel Sharon, who stated, "Israel's objective is to see to it that Lebanon becomes an independent state that will live with us in peace...as well as to solve the problem of the Syrian presence in that country."<sup>52</sup> Achieving these goals would require, in the eyes of Sharon, the liquidation of the PLO in Lebanon and the establishment of a pro-Israeli Christian government in Beirut.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup>Schiff, "Lebanon: Motivations and Interests in Israel's Policy,:" 223-4. With the resignation of Defense Minister Ezer Weizman, Prime Minister Begin relied more heavily on the military advice of his Chief of Staff, Rafael Eytan, who favored a stronger policy towards punishing the PLO in Lebanon. This trend continued with the appointment of Ariel Sharon to Defense Minister in 1981. See also Ze'ev Schiff and Ehud Ya'ari, *Israel's Lebanon War* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984): pp. 38-40.

<sup>52</sup>Schiff and Ya'ari, *Israel's Lebanon War*, p. 42.

<sup>53</sup>There is some debate as to whether Prime Minister Begin was fully aware of the intentions of Defense Minister Sharon at the outset of *Peace for Galilee*. Begin's family continues to contend that Sharon kept the prime minister in the dark. See Patrick Coburn, "Memories of 1982



In the final analysis, *Peace for Galilee* accomplished none of its intended goals and produced some very unexpected consequences for the Israelis. First, Israel drew strong criticism from the international community for its military assault on Muslim West Beirut, which resulted in numerous civilian casualties. But these criticisms would pale in comparison with the outcry over the massacre of Palestinian civilians in the refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila in September 1982 at the hands of Israeli-supported Christian militia members.<sup>54</sup>

Israeli civilian and military leaders initially attempted to distance themselves from the events at Sabra and Shatila, hoping the storm would quickly pass like many previous crises. It was the outcry from within Israel itself, however, which would lead to an independent Israeli commission whose findings would leave few in the upper levels of Israel's government and military unscathed.<sup>55</sup> The events surrounding Sabra and Shatila marked the

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Cloud Israel's Lebanon Dilemma," *The Independent*, 11 February 1997, p. 14.

<sup>54</sup>Robert Fisk was one of the first Western journalists to enter the camps following the massacre and provides a chilling account of his observations in Fisk, *Pity the Nation*, pp. 358-70.

<sup>55</sup>The findings of the Kahan Commission were released February 9, 1983, and would have far-reaching effects for the government and military of Israel. The commission confirmed what was already widely known, specifically that the IDF allowed the Phalange militia to enter the camps without assuring safeguards were in place to prevent the ensuing massacre. The report was particularly critical of Ariel Sharon, indicating that "the defense minister bears personal responsibility." See Schiff and Ya'ari, *Israel's Lebanon War*, p. 284.

beginning of the end of *Operation Peace for Galilee*, and served as a painful reminder of Israel's failure in Lebanon.

Although *Peace for Galilee* was able to eliminate the Palestinian "state-within-a-state" and drive Yasir Arafat and most of his fighters out of Lebanon, it did not succeed in dissolving the PLO altogether. Further, the operation did not have the desired effect of demoralizing the Palestinians in the West Bank, as evidenced by the uprising (*intifada*) which began in the Israeli-occupied territories in December 1987. Additionally, the void created by the departing Palestinian fighters was soon filled by extremist elements of Lebanon's Shia community, mobilized in response to *Peace for Galilee*.

The Israeli objective of reducing the influence of Syria in Lebanon also failed and may have actually had the opposite effect. Although the Syrian armed forces, particularly the Air Force, sustained heavy losses in the engagements with Israeli forces, Israel was unable to drive the Syrians out of Lebanon and was held at bay by the Syrian army during their march to Beirut. Israel's failure actually allowed Syria to strengthen the Beirut-Damascus ties which would eventually lead to Syrian hegemony in Lebanon.

Also significant was the demoralizing effect of *Peace for Galilee* on Israel's armed forces. Prior to the operation the IDF prided itself as one of the premier fighting forces in the world;

a claim that seemed to be validated by their lopsided victories over their Arab neighbors in the successive Arab-Israeli conflicts. The assault on Beirut and associated civilian casualties combined with the implications of the Sabra and Shatila affair, however, caused many in the IDF to question Israel's "morality of arms" policy that had been easily defended in Israel's defensive operations of the past.<sup>56</sup> Israel's conduct of the war shattered the moral veneer that had long been cultivated by the IDF. As one American military observer noted of the IDF in Lebanon, "The Israeli's think they are pretty good. But they are a fourth-rate army fighting a seventh-rate army."<sup>57</sup>

It would be the mounting casualties of the IDF that would eventually lead to Israel's withdrawal from most of Lebanon. The suicidal tactics employed by the Lebanese Shi'i militants caught the IDF completely by surprise and wholly unprepared. Approximately 500 Israeli soldiers were killed in the initial stages of *Peace for Galilee* and the Israeli public became more disenchanted as casualties continued during the next three years of occupation.

In 1985, Israel withdrew from most of Lebanon with the exception of a 9-mile wide "security zone," which it has occupied to this day. As discussed, *Peace for Galilee* accomplished none

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<sup>56</sup>Ibid., pp. 216-217.

<sup>57</sup>Fisk, *Pity the Nation*, p. 457.

of its stated goals, however it served as the catalyst for the current crisis in Southern Lebanon and the painful legacy of the ill-fated operation still haunts Israel.

## B. THE ZONE

The emergence of Hizballah following *Peace for Galilee* opened a new chapter in Israel's Lebanon debacle. Hizballah activities against Israeli forces and the SLA in the security zone have steadily increased over the past decade. In the past three years alone, not including the recent air disaster, Israeli casualties total 68 in Southern Lebanon, and have been accompanied by a growing number of Israelis demanding a shift in Israel's policy.<sup>58</sup>

The debate intensified in April 1996 when Israel launched *Operation Grapes of Wrath*. Ostensibly, the operation was in retaliation for Hizballah rocket attacks on Northern Israel, however, it was likely heavily influenced by the perceived electoral benefits for incumbent Prime Minister Shimon Peres in an election that would be won or lost on security issues. Obviously, the electoral benefits failed to materialize. More significantly, *Grapes of Wrath* served to draw heavy international condemnation on Israel.

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<sup>58</sup>Coburn, "Memories of 1982...", p. 14.

The criticism reached a crescendo following the Israeli shelling of a UN refugee camp in Qana. The attack resulted in the deaths of over 100 Lebanese civilians and damaged Israeli credibility when their initial claims of accidental shelling were proven wrong.<sup>59</sup> Hundreds more Lebanese civilians were killed or wounded during the operation which involved the use of bombing from aircraft, shore artillery and naval units. Noticeably absent were Israeli ground forces, consistent with the Israeli desire to minimize IDF casualties.

Although the operation was advertised as a retaliatory measure designed to reduce the capability of Hizballah to attack Northern Israel, Israeli target selection left many questions as to the real goals of the operation. An Israeli rocket attack on a Lebanese electrical power station in the hills overlooking Beirut cut the capital city's electrical supply by nearly two thirds and was obviously intended to send a clear message to the Lebanese government; specifically that they could not escape the consequences of the war in the South.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup>The UN concluded that the shelling of the refugee camp was unlikely to have been an error. Some evidence which was revealed during the investigative period was a videotape of an Israeli remote-piloted observation aircraft in the vicinity of the camp at the time of the shelling. See Robert Fisk, "Living a Nightmare with Qana's Dead," *The Independent*, 14 April 1997, p.12.

<sup>60</sup>Robert Fisk, "Israelis Knock Out Power Station; Agony of the People as Bombing Empties Lebanese Villages," *The Independent*, 16 April 1996, p. 1.

*Grapes of Wrath* ended with a U.S. brokered cease-fire between Israel and Hizballah. The agreement, however, only stipulated that both sides would refrain from targeting civilians in either Israel or Lebanon, leaving the door open for continued violence between Hizballah and the IDF/SLA in the security zone. Additionally, a Monitoring Group was established representing the United States, France, Syria, Lebanon and Israel and charged with ensuring conformity with the cease-fire agreement.<sup>61</sup>

In spite of the debate sparked by *Grapes of Wrath* and the recent helicopter collision, it seems unlikely that Israel will be abandoning its Lebanese Security Zone anytime soon. Despite calls for a unilateral Israeli withdrawal,<sup>62</sup> there are numerous factors which make such a scenario unlikely. First, the Netanyahu government can ill-afford to expend the political capital to withdraw from Lebanon without concessions on the Syrian side.<sup>63</sup> Prime Minister Netanyahu has continually ruled

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<sup>61</sup>Text of Cease-Fire Agreement, *Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs Internet* (<http://www.israel-mfa.gov.il/peace/cease-fire.html>). In April, Syria unilaterally withdrew from the Monitoring Committee in protest of recent actions of the Israeli government. See Robert Fisk, "Lebanon Israel Border Truce at Risk: Syria Out of Border Truce Group," *The Independent*, 3 April 1997, p. 15.

<sup>62</sup>Jack Katznel, "Debate Over Israel's Lebanon Policy," *The Associated Press*, 10 February 1997.

<sup>63</sup>The Netanyahu government came to office with the support of the conservative right-wing component of the Israeli electorate. The coalition government of the current Likud leadership would dissolve without the participation of the ultra-conservative elements of Israeli politics, who for the most part, are strongly opposed to land-for-peace agreements.

out a return of the Golan Heights to Syria, which is a precondition of Syrian cooperation. Netanyahu's call for a "Lebanon First" policy soon after taking office was likely intended to reap political gains, realizing that any such policy would be rejected by Syria and, by default, Lebanon as well.

Another difficult situation facing the Israelis in the event of withdrawal is the status of the SLA. Israel has indicated that it would require amnesty guarantees for SLA members from the Lebanese government: a necessity due to the animosity with which the SLA is viewed by the Lebanese population in Southern Lebanon. It also seems likely that amnesty may not apply to senior officers in the SLA and that they would need to be resettled in Israel.<sup>64</sup> Additionally, a disbanding of the SLA in conjunction with an Israeli withdrawal would leave the Israeli perception of an unsettling security void on Israel's northern border.

The Netanyahu government is likely to continue its efforts to separate the issues of Southern Lebanon and the Golan Heights. Although there is little chance that these offers will bear fruit, and the Israelis know it, it allows Netanyahu to blame Damascus for stalling peace negotiations despite the best efforts of Tel Aviv. His true feelings were made clear, however, in the wake of the February IDF disaster when he stated, "We are not

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<sup>64</sup>Thomas A. Nassif, "An Israeli Withdrawal in Return for Disarming Hizballuh," *Christian Science Monitor*, 28 June 1996, p. 19.

going to be deterred, and we are not going to relent."<sup>65</sup>

Netanyahu has also attempted to stave off criticism of Israel's Lebanon Policy by stating that any such debate negatively affects the morale of soldiers serving in Southern Lebanon, which has already become a legitimate concern.

The maintenance of the status quo, an option that appears to be the immediate goal of the Israeli government, will continue to cause suffering on both sides of the conflict. Although the most recent cease-fire agreement has, for the most part, prevented civilian casualties, it seems inevitable that if the war in the South continues, civilians will again end up in the cross fire. Even those that do not join the casualty roles will still be faced with a 'hostile' occupation force, which views its misery as a bargaining tool for future negotiations.

Southern Lebanon will continue to torment both the Israeli government and Israeli society as a whole. The effectiveness of attacks by resistance forces will continue to slowly pick away at IDF and SLA forces in the security zone, further fomenting discontent within Israel and negatively impacting the morale of IDF soldiers in the zone. As one Israeli journalist has noted, "As it happened to the Americans in Vietnam, we have also stopped noticing that we have entered a dead-end street. We have become

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<sup>65</sup>Scott Peterson, "Israel Doubts Its Rule of S. Lebanon After Collision of Military Helicopters," *Christian Science Monitor*, 6 February 1997, p. 8.



entangled in big operations which bring no results and the ongoing bloodletting has lost direction."<sup>66</sup>

### C. IMPLICATIONS FOR RECONSTRUCTION

Like Syria, Israel has shown, most recently in *Operation Grapes of Wrath*, a willingness to sacrifice Lebanon's reconstruction efforts to further its own political objectives. The pursuit of those objectives has resulted in continued violence and destruction, predominantly in the South, as the Lebanese resistance movement's attempts to evict the occupying Israelis intensifies. In the absence of a regional peace agreement, Israel's objectives and the tactics they employ are unlikely to change significantly.

The status quo, in terms of Israel's Lebanon policy, does not bode well for reconstruction. The Israeli occupied security zone and its associated "war" serve to damage Lebanon's efforts to portray itself as a stable environment for international investment. This is especially true on the occasions when the conflict in the South rears its head in other parts of the country, with the bombing of electric power facilities near Beirut providing a prime example.<sup>67</sup> It serves Israeli interests

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<sup>66</sup>Al J. Venter, "Recent Developments in the Levant Preclude Peace," *The Middle East* (March 1997): p. 13.

<sup>67</sup>The war in the South also results in severe refugee problems in the areas north of the security zone, especially after heavy fighting. *Operation Grapes of Wrath*, for instance, produced nearly 400,000

to convince the government and population of Lebanon that their reconstruction efforts are dependent upon an agreement with Israel, whether it is a bi-lateral arrangement or part of a broader regional peace agreement.

The Israeli occupation of Lebanon also contributes to increased tension and animosity among Lebanon's confessional groups. Nowhere is this more obvious than in Israel's manipulation of the SLA. Whereas Syria is able to stir up confessional rivalries in the North, Israel's control of the SLA only hurts Christian-Muslim relations in Southern Lebanon. Unlike the situation in the North, however, the Lebanese government is not able to direct confessional damage control measures towards the situation in the South. Due to Israel's occupation, there is a large portion of the Lebanese population that is completely out of reach of the national reconciliation aspects of Lebanon's reconstruction.

It is this untouchable portion of the Lebanese population, most of which is Shi'i Muslim, that quite possibly makes the Israeli occupation of Southern Lebanon most dangerous to Lebanon's reconstruction effort.

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Lebanese refugees fleeing to the north. See Theo Haddad, "Israel in Lebanon," *Trincoll Journal* (Internet: [http:// www.trincoll.edu./ articles/lebanon.html](http://www.trincoll.edu/articles/lebanon.html))



## V. TAMING THE FORCES WITHIN

Many Lebanese refer to the civil war which ended in 1990 as "the war of others on our soil."<sup>68</sup> Although such a view allows Lebanon's various sects to disavow many of the atrocious acts which characterized the conflict, it ignores many indisputable facts. The role of outside influence on the war in Lebanon is undeniable, however, it should not be forgotten that, for the most part, all foreign forces who participated in the conflict were invited, or at the very least welcomed, by one or more of Lebanon's rival sects.

External forces are often blamed for Lebanon's woes, both past and present; and one senses that many Lebanese truly believe that if all external forces in Lebanon were to depart, all of their problems would disappear. Liberation from foreign influence is a legitimate goal and would in fact solve many problems. It would not, however, solve the underlying internal problems which have made outside interference a mainstay of Lebanese society--specifically, the ever present tension and mistrust between Lebanon's major confessional groups. Even today, seven years

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<sup>68</sup>This phrase is used even at the highest levels of government. The phrase can be found, for instance, on the internet web site created by Lebanon's Embassy in Washington, DC available at [http:// www. embofleb. org](http://www.embofleb.org).

after the civil war officially ended, the Christian and Muslim communities in Lebanon are more divided than at the outbreak of the civil war.<sup>69</sup>

The Lebanese government recognizes the significance of these cleavages and has aggressively pursued the national reconciliation aspect of the reconstruction strategy. It is undoubtedly the hope of the government that sharing in Lebanon's future prosperity will serve to mend some fences between Lebanon's former warring factions, and to a certain extent this may be true. Further measures, such as removing religious affiliation from Lebanese identity cards, albeit symbolic in nature, will also aid in fostering a sense of nationalist identification, a concept that has not been prevalent among Lebanese in the past.<sup>70</sup>

All efforts towards national reconciliation, however, are unable to reach an important portion of Lebanon's population, namely the Shia of southern Lebanon. At present, Lebanon's Shi'i community has, relatively speaking, little control over the forward progress of reconstruction. It also happens to be the

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<sup>69</sup>Douglas Jehl, "Troubled Christian Minority Awaits the Pope in Lebanon," *New York Times*, 8 May 1997, pg. A1. Numerous regions that were at one time mixed communities have become exclusively Christian or Muslim.

<sup>70</sup>Traditionally, Lebanese have first identified themselves in terms of their family, then their clan or religious sect and finally as Lebanese. See "Putting Back the Pieces...", p. 3.

community which has the most potential to derail the reconstruction and reconciliation efforts.

Of the 17 recognized confessional groups in Lebanon, the Shi'i Muslim community continues to bear a disproportionate share of the social burdens in Lebanon. A recent UN survey indicated that Lebanon's poor numbered one million<sup>71</sup>, nearly one third of the nation's population. Of that one million, Shia are the predominant group represented. It is from this discontented Shi'i community that Lebanon faces its greatest internal challenge. To appreciate the significant role played by Lebanon's Shia, it is important to address the emergence of the community as social and political force in Lebanon.

#### **A. THE SHIA OF LEBANON**

The Shi'i community in Lebanon is by far the most underprivileged and underrepresented sect in Lebanon. The National Pact of 1943 recognized the Shia as the third largest confessional group in Lebanon, as determined by the 1932 census, and granted them the third highest political position, the Speaker of the Parliament. In spite of their representation in the Lebanese political establishment, the Shia were noticeably absent from political discourse in Lebanon. Numerous scholars commented on the backwardness and low standard of living of the

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<sup>71</sup>Giles Trendle, "Lebanon: Boom or Bust?" p. 6.

Shi'i community. In 1946 Albert Hourani wrote, "Their first need is for a reformed social organization and improved economic conditions."<sup>72</sup>

In many respects, Shi'i history and tradition fostered a sense of political and social quietude among the Shia. The martyrdom of Hussein at Kerbala, a central theme of the Shi'i faith, resulted in "a tradition of defeat and worldly dispossession."<sup>73</sup> This tradition is highlighted by the long-standing practice of *taqiyya*, defined as precautionary dissimulation or concealing one's faith. This practice is commonplace throughout Shi'i history and was authorized by Shi'i Imams and jurists<sup>74</sup> in response to widespread persecution against the followers of the Shi'i faith.

The Shia in Lebanon suffered the persecution and political domination which plagued their brethren elsewhere in the Islamic world. Until very recently, they were dominated by wealthy land-owning *zu'ama*, who controlled local politics throughout Lebanon. Survival often required firm allegiance to the local *zu'ama* and prevented any opportunity for a grassroots political movement to

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<sup>72</sup>Albert H. Hourani, *Syria and Lebanon: A Political Essay* (London: Oxford University Press, 1946), p. 135.

<sup>73</sup>Fouad Ajami, *The Vanished Imam: Musa al Sadr and the Shia of Lebanon* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1986), p. 138.

<sup>74</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 57.

emerge in the Shia community. Things began to change, however, in the 1960s.

The situation in Lebanon beginning in the 1960's was characterized by, among other things, changing agricultural patterns, increased access to media outlets and a deteriorating security environment. The once powerful *zu'ama* were unable to meet the increasing needs of the Shi'i community as a whole. Further social disruption occurred as the traditional village that dominated social life was faced with a significant urban migration. Finally, these factors were combined with significant external forces which resulted in the birth of a distinct Shi'i political consciousness.

Numerous organizations attempted to harness the newly politicized Shi'i community. These organizations ranged from predominantly political groups, such as the Lebanese Communist Party, to groups which were distinctly Shi'i. As one scholar noted, "The Shiite phenomenon was best reflected in the deep penetration of Shiite areas by radical, and particularly the Marxist, political organizations. It was also reflected in the increasing militancy of Musa al-Sadr, the populist head of the Shiite religious hierarchy, against the regime."<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>75</sup>Quote by Walid Khalidi from Augustus R. Norton, *AMAL and the Shia: Struggle for the Soul of Lebanon*, p. 78.



Musa al-Sadr was a charismatic, Iranian-born cleric who was pivotal in mobilizing the Shi'i community. Al Sadr was able to turn Shia history on its head. He successfully portrayed the problems of the Shia community as a religious struggle. He was able to portray the tale of Kerbala not as a sorrowful reminder of defeat, but rather a "celebration of defiance" on the part of a Shia community which refused to submit to injustice.<sup>76</sup>

Musa al Sadr became the political voice of the entire Shi'i community of Lebanon; from the poor peasants in the South to the wealthy, frustrated Shi'i businessmen of Beirut and more militant Shia elements in the Bekaa Valley. In the late 1960s, the pragmatic cleric established the Higher Shia Council. The Council was created to provide a platform for political and doctrinal independence for the Shi'i community. Although the Council collapsed in the mid-1970s, along with nearly every other political institution in Lebanon, it served notice of the emergence of the Shia of Lebanon as a force to be reckoned with.

As the civil war approached, Musa al-Sadr was forced to the realization that the future of Lebanon would be decided by armed struggle. This realization resulted in the formation of his mass popular movement and associated militia, Amal, which became the primary vehicle for Shi'i political discourse, activism and mobilization. Numerous factor contributed to the appeal of Amal

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<sup>76</sup>Ajami, *Musa al Sadr*, p. 142.

among the Shia in southern Lebanon. The first of these factors was the influx of Palestinian guerrillas into Lebanon, especially following the 1970 PLO defeat in Jordan.

Initially, the Shi'i community showed indifference towards, or in some cases tacit approval of, the Palestinians and their cause, occasionally making references to their shared legacies of misfortune.<sup>77</sup> These brotherly sentiments were short-lived, however, as it soon became apparent that that the Shia would sustain the brunt of Israeli punishment for the Palestinian presence in Lebanon. The rapidly deteriorating security environment, especially in Southern Lebanon, drove many Shia to pledge their allegiance to al-Sadr and Amal.<sup>78</sup> By 1980 the tenuous alliance between Amal and the PLO's Fatah, completely broke down and armed clashes became commonplace.

The mysterious disappearance of Musa al-Sadr during a 1978 visit to Libya served to further mobilize the Shi'i community. There are numerous theories as to the fate of the al-Sadr, and the truth may never be revealed<sup>79</sup>; however, his disappearance

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<sup>77</sup>Ibid, p. 162.

<sup>78</sup>It should be pointed out that Amal was in many respects an underdeveloped organization, and although many supported the populist message of Amal it is difficult to determine the actual membership. See Norton, *Amal and the Shia*, p. 61.

<sup>79</sup>Theories at the time of his disappearance include: he had returned to Iran to help in the final push to remove the Shah; he was kidnapped and being held in Amsterdam; he was a guest of President Asad in Syria. It is generally held assumption, however, that he never left Libya. See Ajami, *The Vanished Imam*, p. 184.

served as a rallying point for Lebanon's Shia and vaulted him to the status of a national martyr. Norton argues that "had Imam Musa passed quietly from the scene, it is likely that Shi'i politics in Lebanon would have been far more fractious than they have been...Many Shi'is find in the vanished imam a compelling and culturally authentic symbol for the expression of their discontent with the cruel malady that they have had to suffer."<sup>80</sup>

It is arguable that the most significant factor contributing to the emergence of the Shia in Lebanese society, however, was the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran. The Revolution, which brought to power a Shi'i Islamic theocracy in Iran, promised new support, both financial and spiritual, for the Shi'i struggle in Southern Lebanon. It is this Iranian support that catered to the emergence of the more radical elements of the Shi'i Islamist movement.

#### **B. THE RISE OF HIZBALLAH**

Beginning in 1982, more militant elements of Amal began to emerge. Dissension arose over the stated policies of Amal's leader Nabih Berri, who advocated negotiations over violence whenever possible. He also attempted to distance the organization from the Islamic Revolution in Iran, stating, "We

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<sup>80</sup>Ibid, p. 56.

support the Islamic revolution in Iran, but not on sectarian grounds. And we do not want an Islamic revolution in Lebanon. Our special relations with the Iranian revolution are based more on principle than on sectarian compatibility."<sup>81</sup> He was fearful that extremist and hard-line mullahs would take over the Shia movement. His fears were well placed.

The first major break came when Hussein Musawi, a former chemistry teacher turned militia commander, left Amal and established his own extremist "Islamic Amal" organization in the city of Baalbek, a Shi'i stronghold. Soon Islamic Amal would fall under the label Hizballah, or Party of God.

The immediate cause of the formation of Hizballah was Israel's *Operation Peace for Galilee* in 1982. Iran, with Syrian approval responded to the invasion by sending a contingent of approximately 1,000 Revolutionary Guards to Baalbek.<sup>82</sup> These Guardsmen began immediately propagating the Iranian revolution and set up social services including schools, hospitals and social welfare programs. Recruitment was facilitated by local Shi'i clerics who brought their followers into the organization.

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<sup>81</sup>Robin Wright, *Sacred Rage*, p. 61

<sup>82</sup>The purpose of the Revolutionary Guards was ostensibly to combat the Israelis. See Kenneth Katzman, "Hizballah: A Radical Militia in Lebanon," Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, October 7, 1993, p. 2.

It is clear that Hizballah refuses to recognize the legitimacy of Israel. Additionally, Hizballah ideology has, at times, indicated that Lebanon is a creation of the West and have advocated the establishment of an Islamic Republic to encompass all of Lebanon and Israel.<sup>83</sup> The organization has also adopted Iran's vehement anti-Westernism. These were made clear in the early days of Hizballah and were characterized by acts such as the suicide bombings of 1983 which killed 241 U.S. Marines and French paratroopers, and numerous abductions of Westerners in Lebanon.

Today, Hizballah's wrath appears to be directed solely at the Israeli occupation of Southern Lebanon and specifically the IDF and their proxy militia, the SLA. Hizballah forces regularly clash with IDF soldier's in the "security zone" in Southern Lebanon. Additionally, and much to the chagrin of the Israelis, Hizballah guerrillas have responded to IDF attacks on targets north of the Security Zone and civilian targets within the zone,

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<sup>83</sup>Calls for an Islamic Republic were more common in the early years of Hizballah. The Charter of Hizballah does not mention an Islamic Republic, and Hizballah leadership has indicated that Lebanon could only become an Islamic Republic as part of a larger Islamic State. Regardless, Lebanon is the least likely Middle Eastern country to establish an Islamic republic. See Katzman, p. 3. Fouad Ajami provides a cogent argument as to why the "Islamic Republic" concept never took hold, citing geographic, agricultural, economic and cultural impediments. See Ajami, *The Vanished Imam*, p. 216.

by carrying out attacks on Northern Israel, primarily with Katyusha rockets.<sup>84</sup>

Hizballah's military wing operates under the names of Islamic Jihad and Islamic Resistance. Some sources, predominantly Hizballah supporters, have reported that Hizballah has between 5,000 - 10,000 fighters, however, it is generally believed the number of dedicated militants is closer to several hundred.<sup>85</sup> It is predominantly a light force, equipped primarily with small arms, such as automatic rifles, mortars, rocket-propelled grenades and Katyusha rockets.<sup>86</sup>

In recent years Hizballah has undergone somewhat of a political transformation.<sup>87</sup> Although its violent opposition to Israeli occupation has not subsided, it appears that the Hizballah leadership is attempting to transform the organization into a mainstream political party as well. Until 1992, Hizballah

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<sup>84</sup>Hizballah has refrained from attacks on Northern Israel since the cease-fire agreement in April 1996. However, they still retain the capability to resume the attacks in a moments notice.

<sup>85</sup>Ladki, Nadim. Die Hard Hizballah Guerrillas Torment Israel. Reuters, August 19, 1993.

<sup>86</sup>In recent years Hizballah has reportedly acquired highly sophisticated military hardware, including German-made microlight aircraft and Soviet built anti-tank weapons. See "German-Built Microlights Supplied to Hizballah," Periscope/USNI Database, United Communications Group, (8 April 1996).

<sup>87</sup>It has been argued that the transformation is a result of a change in leadership in Tehran, arguing that with the passing of Khomeini, power has passed to younger more tolerant clerics. See Robert Fisk, "The Transformation of Hizballah," *World Press Review*, July 1996.

had strongly opposed any participation in the Lebanese political process. This stance changed, however, when Hizballah took part in 1992 Parliamentary election and won eight seats, which combined with the victories of Hizballah's non-Shiite allies, represented the largest single bloc in Parliament.<sup>88</sup>

Justifying political participation, Hizballah's secretary-general, Hasan Nasrallah indicated that the move was necessary to solidify anti-Israeli resistance in Lebanese politics as well as to vote down any agreement that calls for Lebanon to take part the U.S. brokered peace process. Further, he hoped to be able to end the political domination of Lebanese confessional politics by the Maronite Christians.<sup>89</sup> Despite this harsh rhetoric, Hizballah politicians have shown that they are willing and able to "play the games" of parliamentary politics, in the form of bargaining, compromise and coalition.<sup>90</sup>

### C. EXTERNAL INFLUENCES ON HIZBALLAH

External support remains critical to Hizballah, both in its military actions in the South as well as its social programs. As discussed in Chapter 2, Syria's Asad will likely continue his

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<sup>88</sup>Augustus R. Norton, "Lebanon: With Friends Like These...", *Current History*, January 1997, p. 7

<sup>89</sup>"Nasrallah Views Hizballah's Political Activities." Foreign Broadcast Information Service, FBIS NES 92 217, November 9, 1992. p. 34.

<sup>90</sup>Fisk, "The Transformation of Hizballah," p. 10.

support of Hizballah throughout the peace negotiation process. It also seems clear that Iran will persist in its financial and spiritual support.

Although monetary support has declined somewhat in recent years, there is no question that Iran still strongly supports Hizballah in both its social and military activities. In the past, there has been close cooperation between Iranian intelligence agencies and Hizballah, including assassinations and bombings.<sup>91</sup> For Iran, Lebanon is one of the few places in the Middle East that they wield any sort of influence.

It is believed that Iranian financial support is approximately \$60 million a year, down from \$100 million at its height. A possible reason for the decline is that Iranian President Rafsanjani has toned down support for Hizballah in hopes of improving ties with the West. It has also been reported that Iran has begun to "spread the wealth" among other extremist organizations, primarily Palestinian.<sup>92</sup>

Despite possible strains, it is unlikely that ties will be completely severed as long as Iran and Hizballah share several fundamental goals, including the disruption of the Arab-Israeli

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<sup>91</sup>See "Iran's Support for Terrorism: a Review of the Record," Federal Document Clearing House, Congressional Testimony. Testimony of Michael Eisenstadt, March 19, 1996.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid. The Report cites HAMAS and Islamic Jihad as possible recipients of Iranian support.



peace process. By remaining a factor in the Southern Lebanon equation, the Islamic Republic hopes to prevent a new regional order that is opposed to its interests.

#### D. THE ISLAMIST THREAT TO RECONSTRUCTION

Hizballah and other Islamist movements within Lebanon directly threaten the reconstruction efforts. Hizballah, in particular, will continue to be a "thorn in the side" of the Lebanese government. The Taif Accord called for the disarmament of all militias in Lebanon. However, Hizballah is the only militia that has not laid down its arms. The Lebanese government, even if it wanted to, is not capable of disarming Hizballah without the consent and assistance of their Syrian overlords. Furthermore, as much as Lebanese officials may curse Hizballah behind closed doors<sup>93</sup>, the group remains the vanguard of an effort to expel Israel from Southern Lebanon, a goal that nearly everyone in Lebanon can agree on.

Israeli military action in Southern Lebanon only serves to strengthen the position of Hizballah in the Shia community, and to a certain degree, throughout Lebanon. *Operation Grapes of Wrath* was no exception. Although hoping to alienate Hizballah from the Lebanese populace, *Grapes of Wrath* actually had the

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<sup>93</sup>It is reported that Hariri personally dislikes Hizballah. See Giles Trendle, "Lebanon's Heavy Price of Allegiance," *The Middle East*, June 1996.

opposite effect, albeit temporarily.<sup>94</sup> Shiek Hassan Nasrallah, when asked about *Grapes of Wrath*, stated, "They wanted to make a split between the people and the resistance. But the resistance is now more popular than ever. They wanted to create internal unrest in Lebanon, but we experienced national solidarity here that we haven't seen in 30 years."<sup>95</sup>

Nasrallah's assertions may be somewhat overstated. However, there is no question that Israeli attacks drive the Lebanese populace closer to Hizballah. In the South, this is due to the simple fact that Hizballah is the only organization able to provide relief and support after the Israeli attacks. This role was highlighted following Israel's *Operation Accountability* in 1993, which resulted in significant damage in Southern Lebanon. Following the operation the UN sent a team to assess the damage and determine how international organizations could help. They arrived to find Hizballah hard at work. By the time the UN report was submitted, Hizballah had rebuilt or repaired every building damaged in the Israeli attacks.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>94</sup>Despite signs of official and public solidarity following attacks by Israel, the underlying tension between the government and Hizballah is never far from the surface. See Trendle, "Lebanon's Heavy Price of Allegiance."

<sup>95</sup>See Lara Marlowe, "Cease Fire Does Not Mean Peace; Hizballah's Secretary General Vows Revenge," *Time*, May 13, 1996. p. 27.

<sup>96</sup>Venter, "The Hizbollah Equation," p. 9.

Other work performed by Hizballah has endeared them to the impoverished Shia community. They are active among the populace, building schools, tending to the elderly and paying pensions to families of those killed in the conflict. The Hizballah-run hospital in Southern Beirut is one of the better medical facilities in Lebanon.

Hizballah's motives, however, are likely not entirely altruistic. It seems clear they expect a certain amount of loyalty from those that they "protect." There is a sense within the Hizballah leadership that one is either for the movement or against it and there can be no in-between.<sup>97</sup> Hizballah is able to effectively propagate this concept of blind obedience to the younger generation of Shia through its control of the educational system in the Shi'i community.

Without question, Hizballah's efforts to "win the hearts and minds" of the Shia community is dangerous to the Lebanese government. Hizballah was able to assume the role of provider during the war due to the impotence of the Lebanese government in providing even the most basic needs to its citizens. The poor social condition of the Shi'i community ensures Hizballah continues to have a steady stream of willing recruits. Further, the lack of a peace agreement forces the government's tacit approval of Hizballah's activities.

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<sup>97</sup>Ibid.

Although the substantial social and humanitarian efforts of Hizballah may seem to complement the reconstruction efforts of the government, they pose a longer term threat. Specifically, Hizballah's courting of the Shi'i community will make it more difficult for the government to address the concerns of the community due to the entrenchment of Hizballah ideology; an ideology that is anathema to the government's plans for Lebanon. From the government's perspective, it is vital that the Shi'i, and all Lebanese for that matter, view themselves as Lebanese first and Shi'i second. To date, the Shia have been given little reason to feel any sense of allegiance to the Lebanese central government and its institutions. Their support has come primarily from the various Shi'i institutions, including Hizballah. Restoring the faith and trust of the Shia community is vital if the government hopes to reduce the influence of the Islamists.

Still, the most threatening aspects of Hizballah's activities, and those of the most immediate concern, are its guerrilla operations against Israel and the SLA. There is some question as to what it will take to end the violence in the South. Hizballah leaders have indicated that the violence will end as soon as there is a complete withdrawal of Israeli forces from Lebanese territory<sup>98</sup>, however it seems clear that the

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<sup>98</sup>See Lara Marlowe, "A Fiery Cleric's Defense of Jihad; Sheik Mohammed Hussein Fadlallah Speaks," *Time*, January 15, 1996.

withdrawal of Israeli forces would be part of a larger Syrian-Israeli agreement. Such an agreement would undoubtedly result in the immediate disarmament of Hizballah by Syrian forces, with or without the consent of Hizballah leadership.

Obviously Syria would also have to address the issue of radical Palestinian groups in Lebanon, as well. The Palestinian uprising on the West Bank and Gaza Strip in late 1987, provided Hizballah the opportunity to forge ties with groups such as Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Hamas. Hizballah has also formed ties with a secular Palestinian group, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command (PFLP-GC), which is headed by a former Syrian Army officer, Ahmed Jibril. Fighters from these groups fought alongside Hizballah members during Hizballah's 1993 clash with Israeli forces in southern Lebanon. All of these groups met in Tehran in October 1993 at an Iranian-sponsored conference to indicate their rejection of the Arab-Israeli peace process.

The disarming of Hizballah and other radical Islamic elements in Lebanon will address the immediate threat to Lebanon's reconstruction but will not solve the underlying condition which makes these organizations possible, specifically, the disenchanting Shia community. The demographic reality is that the Shia community represents the largest confessional group in Lebanon. It is also a reality that the Shia continue to be the

most underprivileged group, suffering the most in terms of economic and social hardships.

Reflecting on the violence which erupted during the 1970s and 1980s, Fouad Ajami states, "The Shia tradition had too much grief and pent-up resentment for it to be unleashed without a long season of anger and carnage."<sup>99</sup> The question that remains to be answered is whether the "long season" is over.

#### **E. THE PALESTINIAN ISSUE**

It is generally agreed among most observers that the presence of Palestinians in Lebanon, although by no means the sole cause of the civil war, was a major catalyst that plunged Lebanon into 15 years of violence. Few groups prospered as a result of the civil war; however the Palestinians have suffered more than most. Today there are nearly 346,000 Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, most of which are living in numerous refugee camps throughout the country.

Since the civil war, the Palestinians in Lebanon have experienced severe marginalization in Lebanese society and face discrimination in nearly all aspects of their lives. They are forbidden from taking professional and skilled jobs,<sup>100</sup> and they

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<sup>99</sup>Ajami, *The Vanished Imam*, p. 221.

<sup>100</sup>Professional and skilled jobs range from bank managers and barbers to doormen. See "Lebanon Survey: A War with Many Losers," *The Economist*, February 24, 1996.

are forced to compete with Syrian workers for the menial labor that they are eligible for. Most are vehemently anti-Arafat, feeling that they have been abandoned by the PLO. A former member of the PLO executive committee lamented the situation of the Palestinians in Lebanon, stating, "Most of them are refugees from 1948. They have offered Arafat more than anyone; 80 percent of his martyrs came from here. But they feel miserable and betrayed--and I don't expect any sympathy from the government here after what happened partly because of our presence."<sup>101</sup>

The situation for the Palestinians is unlikely to improve any time soon. The Lebanese government is unable to tend to the needs of the Lebanese and appear to view the Palestinian issue as a problem that will be settled in the final stages of the peace negotiation, and in the meantime just hope the problem goes away. Many refugees fear that their camps will be destroyed as a result of the growing reconstruction effort, and that they will be expelled to a neighboring Arab country, most likely Iraq or Syria.<sup>102</sup>

Even if the eviction scenario does not play out, the Palestinians face continued hardship in the country that they have occupied for over fifty years. As one Lebanese government

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<sup>101</sup>Ibid.

<sup>102</sup>See Julie Peteet, "From Refugees to Minority: Palestinians in Post-War Lebanon," *Middle East Report*, July-September 1996.

official put it, "...we will never give them permanent residence status. Why should we risk another civil war just to help out Israel?"<sup>103</sup> Aside from helping out Israel, granting citizenship to over 300,000 Sunni Palestinians, representing nearly 10 percent of Lebanon's population, would upset the delicate demographic balance between Muslims and Christians.

Many Palestinian refugees in Lebanon are strongly opposed to the Arab-Israeli peace process. After the Taba negotiations of 1995, in which the PLO-Israeli Interim Agreement was signed, there were angry demonstrations throughout Lebanon's refugee camps as well as protest strikes. One refugee stated, "We are not linked to any of the deals Arafat struck with the Zionist entity. We see no way out but to bring down the traitors and liberate Palestine."<sup>104</sup> Such rhetoric does not bode well for the Lebanese.

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<sup>103</sup>See Mike Thodoulou, "Death-Camp Survivors Playing Out Last Chapter," *The Montreal Gazette*, May 24, 1995, p. B1.

<sup>104</sup>See "Palestinians in Lebanon Protest Against Taba Deal," Reuters, September 28, 1995.





## VI. "THE WILL TO PROGRESS OR THE WILL TO DESPAIR"

A part of Lebanon's efforts at national reconciliation has included the establishment of a committee tasked with arriving at a common version of Lebanese history. Lebanon's confessional groups have often been at odds as to where the country draws its heritage. The Christians are more likely to stress the Lebanese aspects of their history, often making allusions to unfounded links to the ancient Phoenicians, whereas their Muslim counterparts are more apt to emphasize the Arab tradition.<sup>105</sup> The work of the committee is moving slowly and the final product is expected to gloss over many of the more unpleasant aspects of Lebanon's history, especially those surrounding the most recent civil war.<sup>106</sup>

Although focusing on Lebanon's good times may seem like the only option to the beleaguered Lebanese populace, it serves to perpetuate a common practice in Lebanon of ignoring the lessons of the past. Unfortunately, this selective ignorance often does not include forgetting or forgiving the confessional conflicts

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<sup>105</sup>The conflict between the Lebanon's Arab of Lebanese attributes was particularly acute at the time of Lebanon's achieving independence and has characterized relations between the communities ever since. For a fascinating account of the roots of the Lebanese historical dilemma, See Kamai Salibi, *A House of Many Mansions*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988.

<sup>106</sup>Roula Khalaf, "History Without the Detail," *Financial Times*, 22 February 1997.

which have cost so many lives. Coming to grips with their past is crucial as the Lebanese attempt unite and face an uncertain future, a future that is very much out of their hands.

**A. "THE MARTYR LEBANON"**

In a May 1997 visit to Lebanon, Pope John Paul II referred to his host nation as "the martyr Lebanon," stating, "I am certain that the sufferings of the past will not be in vain; they will strengthen your freedom and unity."<sup>107</sup> One of the primary purposes of the pontiff's visit was to show support for Lebanon's frustrated Christian community, but the visit was also strongly supported by the Muslim leadership, recognizing that it would focus international attention on Lebanon and its reconstruction efforts.

The papal visit was instructive, in that it brought out the best in the Lebanese and offered some signs warranting optimism. The entire country united in its warm welcome for the Pope on his first visit to Lebanon. His motorcade traveled Lebanese streets lined by cheering Christians and Muslims standing side by side; well in keeping with John Paul's call for moving beyond the costly confessional animosities. The Pope conducted a religious service on the site in Beirut that had served as the Muslim-

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<sup>107</sup>"Lebanon: the Morning After Pope John Paul's Historic Visit," *Mideast Mirror*, vol. 11, no. 90, 12 May 1997.

Christian battlefield for much of the civil war. Nearly half a million Lebanese, many of whom were Muslims, flocked to hear the pontiff speak his words of hope.

Further, even the most pessimistic of Lebanese could not help but take note of Hizballah's vocal support of the Pope's visit. Hizballah leadership, in a very uncharacteristic move, allowed large portraits of the pontiff to be displayed next to those of the late Ayatollah Khomeini, making it very clear that they appreciated the significance of the historic visit. This appreciation was verbalized by Hizballah's Sheik Nasrallah, who stated, "What's important for us is for the pope to come to Lebanon and return well and safe, and an impression to be given that it is a secure and stable country."<sup>108</sup> Such words from the leader of the organization, which by many estimates is a primary source of much *instability*, would seem a step in the right direction.

Unfortunately, the papal visit also highlighted many of the problems facing Lebanon, of which several threaten reconstruction. First, it was no secret that the Christian community hoped that the Pope would strongly denounce the Syrian and Israeli presence in Lebanon. Although the Pope stopped short of the direct demand for Syrian and Israeli withdrawal, Prime

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<sup>108</sup>David Rudge, "Hizballah Spiritual Leader Slams Pope for Blessing Israel," *The Jerusalem Post*, 24 April 1997: p. 12.

Minister Hariri felt it necessary to publicly proclaim that the Pope's visit would have no effect on Syria's role in Lebanon, a role which he characterized, not surprisingly, as positive and vital to stability.<sup>109</sup>

The visit highlighted the reliance of the Lebanese government on Syrian support, which manifested itself in the form of security assistance during the Pope's stay. Along with the 35,000 Syrian troops already stationed in Lebanon, Syria also assigned 3,000 security specialists to protect the Pope. It is also telling that although the Pope has been critical of Syrian hegemony in Lebanon, the Vatican received assurances from Damascus that Syria would provide "maximum effort" to aid Lebanese security forces during the 30-hour visit.<sup>110</sup>

A reported plot to assassinate the Pope during his visit to Lebanon provided yet another setback for the reconstruction effort. While the fact that the plot was uncovered and reported to the Lebanese via Interpol<sup>111</sup>, as well as the obvious success of the security effort both bode well for the much-sought-after perception of stability, the Lebanese government could not be

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<sup>109</sup>In addition to supporting Syria's role, Hariri indicated that the main problem was Israel's continued occupation of Southern Lebanon, in violation of UN Resolution 425. See G.G. LaBelle, "Lebanese Prime Minister Says Pope's Visit Will not affect Syrian Role," *The Associated Press*, 5 May 1997.

<sup>110</sup>"Syrian Security Helped Protect Pope," *United Press International*, 14 May 1997.

<sup>111</sup>"Newspaper Reports: Terrorists Planned to Assassinate Pope in Lebanon," *The Associated Press*, 13 May 1997.

pleased that intelligence sources indicated the plot was orchestrated by a previously unheard of Palestinian group.<sup>112</sup> The emergence of such groups is not likely to increase investor confidence and may further delay the lifting of the U.S. travel ban on Lebanon.

Finally, it seemed that the euphoria of the pontiff's visit was short-lived after his departure and was replaced by the skeptics' downplaying of the significance of the papal visit. Even Muslim analysts stated that any meaningful change would have to wait until a Middle East peace agreement made it possible for Syrian and Israeli forces to finally leave Lebanon.<sup>113</sup> Unfortunately, the dire predictions of these analysts are accurate and point to the predominant threat to Lebanon's reconstruction and reconciliation--specifically, the lack of a regional peace agreement.

#### **B. THE CONFESSIONAL DILEMMA**

During times of peace, Lebanon's confessional mosaic has often been held up as a shining example of how different religious groups can live together. During times other than peace, however, conflict lines are drawn predominantly along

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<sup>112</sup>Ibid. The name of the group is purported to be "Jaysh Allah," or God's Army.

<sup>113</sup>Andrew Tarnowski, "Pope Visit Raises Spirits of Lebanon Christians," *Reuters World Service*, 12 May 1997.

sectarian divisions. Such was the case between 1975 and 1990 in a conflict which saw atrocities from all sides, representing the most violent manifestation of the religious tension that seems never far from the surface.

The debate over Lebanon's history points to the primary confessional dilemma facing the country. It would seem that a nation's identity is derived primarily from its history. In the case of Lebanon, disagreements over the country's history have led to religion-based interpretations of what it means to "be Lebanese."<sup>114</sup> During times of stress, this quandary has led to much of Lebanon's population demonstrating allegiance not to the nation, but rather its various religious communities.

The structure of Lebanon's government contributes to the already factious tendencies of Lebanese society. The "Lebanese Formula" established in the National Pact of 1943 based political representation on religious affiliation, resulting in the highly charged arena of politics being intensified by the more divisive aspects of religious fervor.

Although the Taif Accords resulted in what seems like a more equitable version of the "the Formula," the inherent divisiveness of the political system remains. In the new arrangement, Lebanese

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<sup>114</sup>The debate over which religious sects interpretation of Lebanese history was the correct one figured prominently in Lebanon's civil war. At one point Druze leader Walid Jumblat stated that the rewriting of Lebanon's history books was a precondition to any lasting political settlement in Lebanon. See Kamal Salibi, *House of Many Mansions*, p. 201.

Christians have lost considerable power and influence and the frustration in that community is evident. For the Shia, their piece of the political pie in the post-Taif era is far smaller than their demographic superiority warrants. It should be stated, however, that a Sunni dominated governmental structure has a far greater chance of success than its Christian-dominated predecessor, based purely on demographic realities.

The religious diversity of Lebanon ensures that confessionalism will remain a central theme in Lebanese society. Diversity, in and of itself, does not necessarily threaten stability in Lebanon. The danger, however, derives from the institutionalized form of confessionalism which characterizes Lebanese government and society.

Rogers Brubaker argues that nations should be viewed not as substantial, enduring collectivities, but rather as institutionalized forms.<sup>115</sup> Using the former Soviet Union as an example, he contends that the policies of the Soviet regime, while vehemently anti-nationalist, were anything but *anti-national*. By formalizing ethno-national identities throughout the Soviet provinces, the regime ensured these institutionalized groups were "readily politicized" when the political situation changed so rapidly during the Gorbachev years. He argues that these institution-

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<sup>115</sup> Rogers Brubaker, "Rethinking Nationhood: Nations As Institutionalized Form, Practical Category, Contingent Event," *Contention*, vol. 4, no. 1 (Fall 1994): p. 6.



alized forms "transformed the collapse of a regime into the disintegration of a state."<sup>116</sup>

These same forces are at work in Lebanon. Whereas in the Soviet model, ethnicity was the means of "social accounting," the Lebanese have institutionalized the sectarian divisions of Lebanese society. This policy severely undermines any efforts at establishing a *national* identity by fostering sectarian interpretations of "sovereignty." With 17 recognized religious groups, the policy is a recipe for disaster. The civil war and its aftermath have provided a sobering example of how Lebanon's confessional mosaic, once touted as its greatest attribute, can also serve as its most dangerous liability.

In any case, one of the government's most formidable tasks is to foster a sense of national pride not linked to religious affiliation, which appears to be a major focus in the national reconciliation effort. Confessionalism must take a secondary role to the national identity which the current government is attempting to foster. As discussed, the structure of Lebanese society ensures that this will be no easy task. Additionally, reconciliation policies seem to have taken somewhat of a back seat to the physical reconstruction effort, which provides the government with much more tangible indications of progress.

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

The lack of a peace agreement helps to ensure that confessional loyalties overpower any emerging sense of national identification. Syrian domination and Israeli occupation, without question, negatively impact the Lebanese sense of national sovereignty, a critical aspect of national identification. As a result, the Lebanese will continue to draw their sense of identification from the established confessional institutions. The government's calls for reconciliation, therefore, will continue to be hampered by the precarious peace process.

#### C. HOSTAGE TO THE PEACE PROCESS

Prime Minister Hariri has stated that the Lebanese people must decide between the "will to progress or the will to despair," in describing the reconstruction and reconciliation effort. Unfortunately, the future of Lebanon's reconstruction at this point has very little to do with the "will" of the Lebanese people and despair is likely to remain a staple of existence for a large portion of the Lebanese population.

As the preceding chapters have shown, Lebanon's reconstruction has become yet another tool of the rival sides in the Arab-Israeli conflict, easily sacrificed for even the slightest gain in the long-standing struggle. The current deadlock in the Middle East peace process promises, at the very

least, a continuation of the status quo and possibly even a deterioration of the security situation leading to open hostility between Syria and Israel.<sup>117</sup> Further, the lack of a peace agreement also allows many of Lebanon's aforementioned internal problems to fester, which in and of themselves are capable of derailing the reconstruction effort.

Prime Minister Hariri has recently attempted to separate the issues of Lebanese reconstruction and the Middle East peace process, arguing that Lebanon "is not putting our national and political policy-making decisions in the hands of Israel to play with them as it wishes."<sup>118</sup> His remarks were indicative of how completely the Lebanese government has tied its fortunes to Damascus, as it is the Syrians, not the Israelis, who currently have a stranglehold on Lebanon's decision-making apparatus. Regardless, the consequences are very clear.

Lebanon's reconstruction effort will continue to flounder, precipitated by the increasing burden on the Lebanese economy and the persisting decline in investor confidence. The large-scale construction effort is likely to continue, with the new buildings offering tangible symbols of reconstruction. They will provide

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<sup>117</sup>Numerous analyst, primarily in the Middle East, have written about the breakdown of peace talks leading to armed conflict between Syria and Israel. See "Bracing for Confrontation and War," *Mideast Mirror*, vol. 11, no. 71, 14 April 1997.

<sup>118</sup>"Lebanon's Hariri Pledges to Rebuild," *United Press International*, 21 May 1997.

only temporary solace, however, as the lack of foreign investment results in the ballooning of the already substantial national debt, even further eroding investor confidence.

A codified regional peace agreement will not ensure the success of Lebanon's reconstruction. However, it has to be the first step in the process. Although it may seem obvious that peace must come before reconstruction, it is exactly for that reason that Lebanon's case is so unique. And for a people that has often prided itself on its uniqueness, it seems a cruel irony. The reality of Lebanon's predicament can be summed up very succinctly: as the peace process goes, so goes Lebanon.



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