

LEBANESE DEMOCRACY

BATTERED, FLAWED, AND UNMATCHED IN THE ARAB WORLD

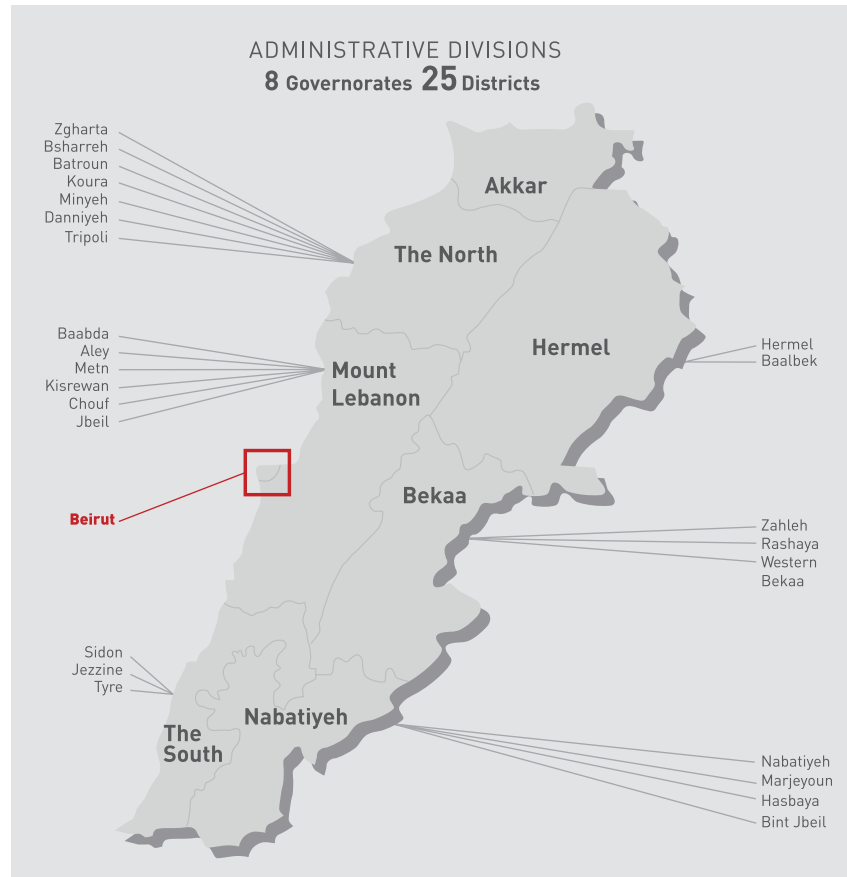
WILLIAM HARRIS



AN UNMATCHED PLURALIST PEDIGREE

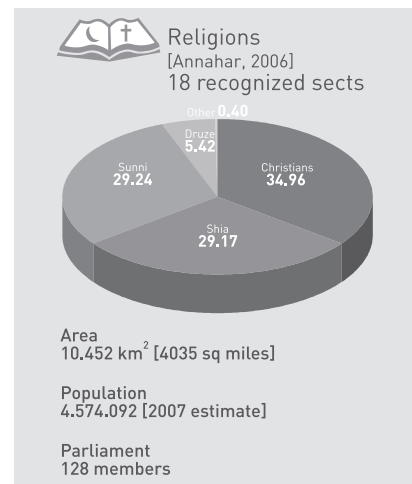
Lebanon's pluralist politics and representative institutions, however battered and flawed, have a historical pedigree unmatched anywhere in the Middle East. They date back to the administrative council of the autonomous Ottoman province of Mount Lebanon, established in 1864 as an elected multi-sectarian advisory body for the provincial governor. In other words, Lebanon acquired a proto-parliament decades before the emergence of either Israel or the Turkish republic, and far in advance of the creation of modern Arab states. When France and Britain cobbled together such entities as Syria and Iraq in the 1920s, Mount Lebanon already had half a century of experience of council elections and pluralist discourse.

Apart from Lebanon, the modern Arab world divides between two almost equally dismal historical trajectories. In Syria, Iraq, Jordan, and Egypt, bourgeois political competition flickered briefly in the mid-20th century before the curtain of autocracy descended. Elsewhere, in the Arabian Peninsula and North Africa, new Arab states proceeded without a break from Ottoman or European hegemony to monarchical or republican authoritarianism. From the 1980s, some Arab regimes implemented limited political liberalization, with elections and political party activity, but the objective was to secure



power structures by installing safety valves, not to move toward genuine representative government. The post-2003 Iraqi experiment is different, but it took foreign invasion to uproot a vicious dictatorship and the outcome has been bloody fragmentation.

Only Lebanon, with a 144-year representative tradition, has a serious history of a parliamentary role in government, political pluralism, and public freedoms. Only Lebanon, with its intellectual and commercial ferment and its long trial and error



with multi-communal cohabitation, can show the Arab East a brighter political future. If Lebanon's post-2004 democratic revival founders because of continuing assault by the Syrian autocracy, there will be little hope for democratization in the Arab Levant.

LEBANESE PLURALISM AND SOCIAL REALITY

From the outset, Lebanon's pluralist politics evolved to accommodate the pre-existing social reality of popular identification with various Muslim and Christian sectarian communities, each with its own leaders and preoccupations. The communities crystallized in medieval times, between the Islamic conquest of the Levant in the 640s and the Ottoman overthrow of the Egyptian Mamelukes in 1517. It distorts history to represent Lebanese sectarianism simply as a product of 19th-century European interventions.

Out of the late 19th-century Ottoman autonomous province and French mandatory tutelage in the 1920s and 1930s the modern Lebanese state developed its eccentric confessional democracy, to balance the interests of the sectarian communities ("confessions"), mediated through their bourgeois elites. The balance has been a product of power relations and elite manipulation, has never been fully fair, and its operations ossified sectarian compartmentalization.

Some of the imperfections were not absent from 20th-century Western democracies. It is more important to remember that the confessional democracy of mid-20th century independent Lebanon became the bedrock of flourishing civil liberties, vociferous political debate, successive parliamentary elections involving genuine competition, and repeated constitutional transfers of presidential and government authority. After the mid-1950s, the contrast with the rest of the Arab world was like that between day and night. Lebanon's tolerance and openness, however, made Lebanese democracy vulnerable to disruption, especially



«We thought of ways of salvaging the Lebanese situation. We had exerted political efforts; we had also earlier sent weapons and ammunition, which were not in short supply to begin with. We were left with the only option of directly interfering in the conflict so we ordered our troops to move in under the banner of the Palestinian Liberation Army, a fact which was unknown to all».
Hafez Al-Assad's speech at the University of Damascus July 20th 1976

from Lebanon's unsympathetic neighborhood. The country's geographical centrality in the Middle East and its position on the Arab-Israeli front line attracted

the predatory attentions of Arab regimes, and freewheeling Lebanese politics eased their penetration. After the June 1967 Israeli defeat and humiliation of the Arabs, political activation of the large Palestinian refugee population in Lebanon interacted balefully with Lebanese Muslim grievances about the Maronite advantage in Lebanon's domestic affairs. The new Syrian Baathist regime, as it consolidated its power in Damascus in the early 1970s under Hafiz al-Assad, looked to command its Lebanese flank against both Israel and other Arabs. The modern Syrian state was not reconciled to Lebanon's existence, as indicated by Syrian refusal of diplomatic relations between Damascus and Beirut. In the 1970s, a combination of Palestinian armed assertion, Israeli military intrusion, Syrian interference, conflicting Lebanese communal responses, and Lebanese regime incompetence brought large-scale violence and degradation of the Lebanese state.

The eclipse of Lebanon's confessional democracy, with no truly free parliamentary elections between the last poll before the war years in 1972 and the first poll after the lifting of Syrian Baathist hegemony in 2005, lasted three decades. Fifteen years of mayhem were succeeded in 1990 by fifteen years of subjection to Baathist Syria, one of the authors of Lebanon's wartime miseries. It is a tribute to the resilience of Lebanon's deep pluralist traditions that a free press, a dynamic civil society, and a functioning parliament survived the dark decades,

to re-emerge in good order in the early 21st century.

After renewed independence in 2005, Lebanon remains what it was when it initially gained its independence in 1943: a multi-communal country with no majority community in which sectarian diversity colors national identity. Confessional democracy, if adjusted periodically in line with demography, therefore continues to reflect the country's social reality. Whatever the faults of this framework, it allows popular participation in politics and government in a particularly complex corner of the Middle East. Confessional democracy can also be a way station, within which the Lebanese become sufficiently integrated to proceed to a non-communal framework. However, the persistent absence of large cross-sectarian political parties indicates that practical democracy is not yet separable from communal sensitivities. Overall, Lebanon's reconciliation of representative government with its communal compartments is a precious counterpoint to the notion that autocracy is the best form of political practice in the fractured Middle East.

It is worth reviewing the long, difficult development of Lebanon's confessional democracy, because the historical record indicates the depth and magnitude of the investment in political pluralism, and the high level of the stakes in the early 21st century. Lebanon's democracy remains a work in progress, riddled with imbalances, corruption, patron-client networks,

and poor accountability, but it is by light years the most inclusive and participatory political system in the Arab world. Its resurgence since 2005 does not deserve to be emasculated by the steady, cunningly modulated attrition coordinated from Damascus against it.

FOUNDATION OF CONFESSIONAL DEMOCRACY, 1860-1943

Mount Lebanon's formal autonomy within the Ottoman Empire, extracted by the European powers in the early 1860s, was a bid to stabilize the rural hinterland of Beirut after almost two centuries of Maronite Catholic expansion, increasingly impinging on the dominant Druze clans. Druze clan chiefs led a distinctive mountain community that emerged out of Ismaili Shiite Islam in the early eleventh century. European intervention, with a French landing near Beirut, followed the 1860 Druze victory over the poorly organized Christians, involving widespread massacres of Christian villagers. The events culminated escalating interplay of Maronite peasant rebellions against Maronite and Druze lords encouraged by the Maronite church, Druze and Muslim resentment of increasing Christian wealth, and defensive coalescence of Druze chiefs and peasants. Successful stabilization involved an innovative representative institution – a council elected from single and multi-member districts with sectarian

allocations roughly aligned with population. This had antecedents stretching back to 1845 multi-communal advisory councils for the qa'im-maqams (administrators) of Mount Lebanon. The style of representation after 1864 set the pattern for subsequent confessional democracy. In functions, including a veto power over tax increases, and electoral arrangements, the council of the autonomous province was qualitatively different from other Ottoman provincial councils.

The council advised the governor, a Christian appointed from elsewhere in the empire, on the domestic affairs of Mount Lebanon, the geographical core of modern Lebanon. A Christian majority of seven out of 12 members reflected in subdued fashion the Christian 80 percent of the population. In the arrangement the dominant Maronite community came out a little badly – despite amounting to nearly 60 percent of Mount Lebanon's inhabitants, Maronites received four council seats, the largest communal bloc but only one-third of the total. Druze, Shiites, and Sunnis received seating somewhat above their demographic shares. In each constituency male residents voted for a group of headmen, who in turn all voted for all district representatives. Again, apart from the later shift to direct voting, the method of filling the multi-sectarian allocations persisted. Administrative councils succeeded one another for five decades, until the Ottomans abolished the autonomous province in 1915, in the midst of World War I.

Full elaboration of modern Lebanon's confessional democracy took place between 1920 and 1943, under French Mandatory rule. France, which had long-standing special relations with the Maronite Catholics of Mount Lebanon, took advantage of the Ottoman collapse in 1918 to extract a mandate from the new League of Nations to control the area of modern Lebanon and Syria, theoretically to guide the local

obligation to fulfill the terms of the mandate, a duality that gave rise to all sorts of tensions.

France contributed fundamental elements to modern Lebanon. First, in September 1920, in coordination with leading Maronites, France enlarged the Ottoman province of Mount Lebanon into a "Greater Lebanon" that pulled in the coastal cities of Beirut, Tripoli, and Sidon,

Greater Lebanon was intended to be a viable territorial platform for a Maronite dominated state, but in fact it established a political entity with no majority community. Mount Lebanon with Beirut could have become a Maronite dominated state; Greater Lebanon could only function on the basis of multi-communal pluralism, with a tentative Maronite primacy. The French adjusted to this reality more quickly than the Maronites, and sought to build the large Sunni and Shiite Muslim populations of the newly incorporated districts into enlarged representative institutions.

Second, France organized population counts, including a full-scale census in 1932. Multi-communal pluralism could only operate in the context of solid data regarding the demographic balance of the communities. The 1932 census showed a razor-thin Christian majority of 51 percent in Greater Lebanon, with the Maronites as the largest of the three major communities (29 percent), followed by the Sunnis (23 percent) and the Shiites (20 percent). The trend since a 1921 survey indicated that the Christians would soon lose their edge, but the numbers gave interim legitimacy to the Maronite political advantage. By the 1930s, the presidency was a virtual Maronite preserve.



From 1861 to 1914, Lebanon was at peace, as it had been for most of its history, the one notable exception being the period between 1840 and 1860 and, in particular, the civil war of 1860. By 1861 peace reigned, Lebanon had been reorganized, and its factions learned to live together in relative harmony, a harmony that lasted until the end of the Ottoman Empire.

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populations to independence and representative government. To some degree, the mandate was colonialism under new vocabulary, but France was nonetheless under an explicit

the Beqaa Valley to the east, and rural districts in the northern and southern extremities of the coastal mountain range. This created today's Lebanese territorial boundaries.



Fighters in the 1860 civil war

Third, the French commissioned the initial post-1920 Lebanese representative council to suggest a long-term constitution, and in 1926 confirmed a political order in line with the recommendations. After a brief experiment with a senate as well as a lower house, a 1927 constitutional amendment established a single-chamber parliament, with electoral laws defining more elaborate versions of the multi-communal allocation of seats pioneered in the 1860s. In any constituency, all voters (universal male suffrage) would vote for all seats, whatever the sectarian distribution. Up to 1934, according to electoral regulations, the voters chose

deputies via an electoral college, and up to 1939, parliaments contained a fluctuating minority of appointed members.

The 1926 constitution featured an executive president on the French model, elected by a two-thirds majority of the chamber of deputies. It stipulated that “the sects be equitably represented in public employment and in the composition of the Ministry.” Much of the original document, with a major adjustment in 1989, persists into the 21st century, and it is the oldest constitution in the Arab world. France injected dynamism into Greater Lebanon’s multi-communal

politics through its determination to stay indefinitely in Beirut, and its oscillation between flexibility and high-handedness in dealing with Lebanon’s political bosses. By the mid-1930s, many Sunni politicians of the coastal cities, who strenuously opposed their incorporation into Lebanon through the first fifteen years of the Mandate, became habituated to Greater Lebanon. Their Arab nationalism became tempered by enjoyment of political influence that they could not expect in a Greater Syria ruled from Damascus. France guaranteed the Sunni elite a substantial political role, clipping Maronite wings for the sake of

stability, and was attentive to Shiite and Druze sensitivities. As early as the Druze and Arab nationalist revolt in interior Syria in 1925-1926, the reticence of many of Lebanon’s Muslim and Druze leaders showed divergence of interests.

The critical extra element was the fraying of Franco-Maronite relations in the 1930s. Some Maronites always regarded the tutelage of the Mandate as an insult in view of Mount Lebanon’s preceding half-century of representative experience, but accepted it for the sake of a more viable territory. The French attempt to enforce a tobacco monopoly in 1934, however, alienated the Maronite patriarch and small producers. Added to the 1932-1934 French suspension of the Lebanese constitution, such challenges pushed some Maronite politicians together with Sunnis in conceiving an independent Lebanon, balancing between the West and the Arab world. In the early 1940s, after France’s June 1940 defeat by Nazi Germany and the British military occupation of Lebanon and Syria in June 1941, the most influential Maronite and Sunni leaders, Bishara al-Khoury and Riyadh al-Solh, crystallized an understanding on power sharing. The final French contribution to Lebanese communal coalescence was the brief arrest of the senior politicians of all the significant communities in November 1943.

With firm British backing and reluctant French acquiescence, Lebanon became an independent country at the end of 1943.

Confessional democracy in independent Lebanon proceeded on the basis of the 1926 Constitution operated according to the unwritten 1943 “National Pact” among Khoury, al-Solh and other politicians. Under the pact the president would be a Maronite, the prime minister a Sunni, and – an afterthought precipitated by Shiite protests – the parliamentary speaker a Shiite. British General Edward Spears introduced the idea of splitting parliamentary seats between Christians and Muslims (including Druze) according to a 6:5 ratio. The Maronite president would retain preponderant executive authority and appoint the Sunni prime minister, but in reality could not exercise effective authority except in partnership with a prime minister enjoying the confidence of the Sunni Muslim community. The marginal Christian advantage in parliament did not mean much because governments depended on support from multi-sectarian blocs of deputies mobilized by shifting alignments of communal bosses (zu’ama – singular za’im).

CONFESSIONAL DEMOCRACY IN INDEPENDENT LEBANON, 1944-1975

Vigorous political pluralism within and among the communities characterized mid-20th century Lebanon. This was not simply a matter of electoral competition and generally peaceful transfers of power. It also involved an ethos of dynamic, free public debate and organizational activity beyond the state, which both the political class and most of the population conceived as having only limited command of society. The ethos grew naturally out of the strengthening cosmopolitanism of Beirut and the Maronite assertion in Mount Lebanon through the 19th century. In the mid-20th century it supported the flourishing diversity of the Lebanese media and an elaborate range of autonomous civil society groups, from professional guilds to family associations. Beirut towered over the rest of the Arab world in development of such social underpinnings for democracy, the more so in the 1960s and early 1970s as the media and civil society in Syria and Iraq passed under Baathist dictatorship.

Confessional democracy could be a rough game. President Bishara al-Khoury manipulated state patronage, client networks, and alliances of zu’ama to gain a parliamentary majority in the 1947 elections sufficient to override the constitution in favor of a second presidential term. Busting the constitutional six-year



French High Commissioner Henri Gouraud, flanked by the Maronite Patriarch and the Grand Mufti, declares the formation of the State of Greater Lebanon on 1 September 1920.



Riyadh al-Soth (L) and Bishara al-Khoury (R), the architects of the National Pact. An unwritten agreement which came into being in the summer of 1943, the terms of which reinforced the sectarian system of government begun under the French Mandate by formalizing the confessional distribution of high-level posts in the government based on the 1932 census six-to-five ratio favoring Christians over Muslims. The terms of the National Pact were believed to have been enunciated by the first cabinet in a statement to the legislature in October 1943.

<http://www.country-studies.com/lebanon/the-national-pact.html>

limit was an unfortunate precedent to be set by the republic's first head of state. Nonetheless, Khoury was genuinely popular for several years, even if this received exaggerated

reflection in the 1947 vote, and his attempt to rewrite political rules led to his demise. Leading politicians, including Maronite presidential aspirants, turned against him, the press became hostile, and he barely retained a parliamentary advantage in the 1951 elections. In 1952 his prime minister deserted him because of Khoury's corrupt practices and attempts to muzzle the media. When the army commander refused to intervene against street protests, Khoury had to resign. Democracy prevailed.

From 1952 to 1958, under President Camille Chamoun, the basic compromises of the National Pact came under strain. Chamoun faced mainly Muslim demands that Lebanon join the pan-Arab trend led by Gamal Abdul Nasser of Egypt, thereby abandoning the understanding that Lebanon would balance between the Arab world and the West. The president raised the temperature by tilting toward the West. Sunni Muslim politicians also questioned the Christian-Muslim demographic balance and privileged Christian access to administrative appointments in violation of the constitution. Chamoun gave the vote to women in 1952 and buttressed the independence of the judiciary, but otherwise had little room for maneuver in a deadlocked country. Angry reaction to his pro-Western foreign policy intensified his frustration. He lost his initial parliamentary support in part because he did not have the cross-sectarian social connections that Khoury had enjoyed. The lack of

large cross-sectarian political parties that could anchor a presidency was a serious weakness.

Chamoun tried to find an exit from frustration with his own manipulation of 1953 and 1957 parliamentary elections – gerrymandering constituency sizes and boundaries to undercut opponents, and pressure



A commemorative plate at the Nahr al-Kalb river, east of Beirut, marking the exodus of the last remaining occupying armies from Lebanon on 31 December 1946 during the term of Bishara al-Khoury

and patronage through security agencies. He pushed leaders from all communities out of parliament but, like Khoury, produced insuperable opposition in the press and the streets. It was a tribute to the

flexibility of the political class that the division was contained within a framework of civilian politics and fierce but peaceful debate for years – until external pressures became overwhelming.

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Having glimpsed the abyss, Lebanon's communal bosses took the opportunity offered by



American mediation to step back. The establishment of a resolution satisfactory to public opinion in both main camps and the swift recovery of the political system demonstrated the underlying strength of multi-communal pluralism. Chamoun served out his term until late 1958 and then departed, avoiding any disruption of the constitution. Maronite army commander Fouad Chehab became president as a civilian to widespread acclaim, having studiously kept the military out of the domestic conflict. Chehab promised reform to answer

Muslim discontent, and sported a decent relationship with Nasser while firmly guarding Lebanese independence. Chamoun's presidency thus ended with a second peaceful transition of executive authority and reaffirmation of the National Pact.

Between 1958 and 1970, under Chehab and his successor and ally, Charles Helou, Lebanon moved to mitigate communal imbalances. Chehab was conscious of the relative deprivation of the Shiite Muslim community, which became more obvious through the 1960s because of Shiite migration from the peripheries to Beirut and a Shiite demographic growth rate higher than that of the Maronites and Sunni Muslims. By the 1970s the Shiites had nosed past Maronites and Sunnis to become the largest single community, up from 20 percent in 1932 to probably 25-30 percent. Muslims were undoubtedly now above 50 percent of the country, even without the Druze, and all indicators showed that Christians were down from 51 percent to not much above 40 percent. Maronites and Sunnis were perhaps each a quarter of Lebanon's population in the 1970s.

Chehab's mild reformism recognized the trend. He mandated implementation of the constitutional provision for Muslim-Christian equality in administrative appointments. He also massively increased state spending in social infrastructure and development projects in the Shiite rural areas. The measures were obvious precursors to a political debate on modest

recalibration of shares in confessional democracy, meaning Muslim-Christian equality in parliament, attention to the Shiite deficit, and adjustment in the relative powers of president, prime minister, and parliamentary speaker. In the event, limited recalibration was delayed twenty years, until the 1989 Taif Accord. Externally provoked inflammation of Lebanese politics again intervened from the late 1960s, this time so dire as to bring 15 years of warfare on Lebanese territory after 1975, with comprehensive paralysis of the Lebanese state.

Whether or not communal bosses would have had the maturity to recalibrate the confessional system in the 1970s if Lebanon had been less squeezed from outside is an open question. Without such maturity there would have been a domestic crisis and breakdown sooner or later. There was the complication of other demands – Druze leader Kamal Jumblatt wanted sectarianism taken out of Lebanese democracy so that a Druze like himself was not blocked from acceding to top state offices. It was a fair demand, certainly to Western ears, but Lebanese realities were and are unlike realities in most Western societies – the communities were and are real foci of interests, and real political compartments.

On the one hand, in view of the hostility Chehab's methods and policies aroused in much of the Christian and Sunni elite by the early 1960s, it is easy to be skeptical about the flexibility of confessional

democracy. On the other hand, the precedents in 1943 and 1958 showed that the elite could adjust when the viability of the state was at stake. Further, the leading personality in the Shiite community in the 1960s, Iranian born cleric Musa al-Sadr, was anxious for a *modus vivendi* with the other communities, and had excellent personal relations with Maronite



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spiritual and political leaders. Sadr was a respected religious figure and could deliver his community, regardless of social ferment and the influence of the radical left among the Shiites. Most Shiites simply wanted a fair deal, and their relative deprivation was a blot against confessional democracy. The essential point is that after the 1967 Arab-Israeli war Lebanon never had the chance to adapt its democratic affairs, and we shall never know what might have been achieved.

Chehab's impetus to increase the social role of the state and to address sectarian and geographical imbalances aroused a fierce debate that itself demonstrated robust

pluralism. Chehab carried over scorn for civilian politicians from his military past. He resorted to officer friends, technocrat advisors, and military intelligence (the so-called *Deuxième Bureau*) to bypass the prime minister and government and to get sympathizers into parliament in the 1964 elections. Lebanese civilian politics, however, were not

so easily corralled. Through the 1960s, Maronite politicians with significant followings – Chamoun, Pierre Gemayel, and Raymond Edde – opposed Chehab's bigger state and military intrusion in civilian affairs. Chehab also alienated leading Sunnis, especially his first prime minister, Saeb Salam. The pattern of Khoury and Chamoun thus repeated itself in more subdued fashion. Under Helou, a weaker president, the Chehabists lost ground in the 1968 parliamentary poll. This was a fair reflection of wider public disillusion with a stalled and seamy Chehabist machine. The coup de grace was the 1970 presidential vote. Conservative and leftist forces, supporters and opponents of Lebanon's *laissez-*

faire outlook on society, joined in parliament to defeat the Chehabist candidate and elect Suleiman Franjeh from the conservative opposition, by a margin of one vote. Franjeh cut back military intelligence, Lebanon's eyes and ears, and terminated the activist state. He proved incompetent in coping with Palestinian weaponry, the machinations of his friend Hafez al-Assad, Syria's tough new master, and the sectarian splintering of the Lebanese elite as Lebanon became an Israeli-Palestinian front. Nonetheless, the crucial turning point toward chaos preceded Franjeh. It was the surrender of state sovereignty by President Helou and army chief Emile Boustany in Palestinian refugee camps and areas along the Lebanon-Israel border through the November 1969 Cairo Agreement.

Whatever the implications, Franjeh's election was a peaceful transfer of power between contending political blocs. The 1972 parliamentary poll expressed confessional democracy warts and all, but without notable presidential interference. Urban and rural bosses mobilized clients, and manipulated clan loyalties. About 54 percent of eligible voters participated in this jamboree, comparable to turnout in present-day America. The multi-sectarian lists in multi-member constituencies – 99 seats from 26 districts – indicated a degree of multi-sectarian cohesion. Results for an array of factions and small parties reflected the will of a populace used to influence peddling and communal segmentation. In the early 1970s,

Lebanon shone as a bright light of freedom in a region submerged in autocracy.

ECLIPSE 1975 - 2005

Lebanon's constitutional apparatus persisted through the dark years of violence, militia cantons, and foreign military interventions between 1975 and 1990. Three presidencies came and went on schedule, the 1972 parliament renewed itself repeatedly, and multi-communal governments succeeded one another. Democratic politics, even the peculiar Lebanese variety, were of course impossible in the absence of law and order. The democratic ethos in society, however, lived on. Beirut continued to host the most diverse publishing and media activities in the Arab world. In the late 1980s, unions and other associations, including women's groups, protested in the streets against militia tyranny, demanding restored central democratic authority. Popular sentiment and mobilization, expressed through Lebanon's still dynamic civil society, gave critical momentum to General Michel Aoun's drive to terminate militia rule and Syrian occupation in 1988-1990. Aoun, who was Lebanon's Maronite army commander from 1984 to 1990, drove a chain of events that brought the post-1975 war period to an end. However, the events led not to renewed democracy and independence but to recovery of state authority under Syrian hegemony. Aoun lacked the capability to prevail when he took his brigades to war against Syrian forces

in 1989 and against Lebanon's largest militia, the Christian Lebanese forces, in 1990. Instead, the paroxysm of violence brought American and Arab intervention in favor of giving Syria a mandate to control and "stabilize" the Lebanese.

To function at all, even under Syrian hegemony. Lebanon needed an updated constitutional understanding among its communities. The Arab League and the United States sponsored a meeting of surviving 1972 parliamentary deputies in the Saudi town of Taif in October 1989. On the positive side, the deputies agreed constitutional amendments that would allow confessional democracy to develop once Lebanon recovered its independence. First, the Taif accord shifted main executive power from the Maronite president to the multi-communal council of ministers, chaired rather than commanded by the Sunni prime minister. Second, it replaced the Christian advantage in parliament with Christian-Muslim equality, also enhancing the authority of the Shiite parliamentary speaker. In any case, because a significant number of Christian deputies are elected in Muslim majority constituencies, and therefore reflect Muslim politics, too much should not be read into continuing nominal Christian overrepresentation. Third, the Taif accord explicitly provided for dialogue on ending confessional allocations at some indefinite future date.

On the negative side, the deputies agreed to an open-ended Syrian



military presence in Lebanon and to “distinctive” Syrian-Lebanese relations. Special treaties would follow to implement “coordination and cooperation.” There was no word on the minimal mutual respect of establishment of diplomatic relations as part of “distinctive relations” – Lebanon was to be a protectorate of Syria. The United States, as a patron of the Taif accord, must bear primary responsibility for what followed – 15 years of Lebanon’s subjugation to a foreign dictatorship. The outcome was particularly insulting to the country in that it coincided with the liberation of Eastern Europe.

Lebanon only acquired a government with the capability to reconstruct infrastructure and improve the economy in late 1992, after Syria found its clients dangerously incompetent and impoverished multitudes launched a street rebellion. In the meantime, the Syrian regime made sure of its security interests. It had militias disbanded except for Hezbollah, which faced Israeli occupation in southern Lebanon; it supervised reorganization of the Lebanese army under a dependable new commander, Emile Lahoud; and it imposed the Brotherhood Treaty for effective integration of the two countries. In October 1992, Syria accepted the billionaire Rafiq al-Hariri as Lebanon’s prime minister despite hostility to his Saudi and Western connections. Continuing Syrian hegemony required Lebanon’s financial recovery and a front man in Beirut with international credibility.

Hariri’s ambition was to rebuild central Beirut and revive Lebanon’s standing as the freewheeling commercial and service hub of the

eastern Mediterranean. In the end, the project implied escape from Syria and renewed confessional democracy, because Lebanon could not ultimately

The collage features several elements: at the top, a newspaper front page with the title 'النهار' (An-Nahar) and a large headline in Arabic: 'السيدات لا السنهان: لا استبعد انسحابا اسرائيليا صامتا ولكن لا اقبل بالمفاوضة قبل جنيف حيث تبحث الجبل الشامل لن يتمح بتكديرات حادة اللاحرب والاسلم'. Below this is another headline: 'حادث عين الرمانة: 30 قتيلا وعد من الجرحى عرفات يستجد بالملوك والرؤساء العرب والجميل يتهم اسرائيل بافتعال الحادث'. The central image shows a bus with a sign 'Le printemps ailleurs...' and a person sitting on the ground. Other smaller images and text fragments are visible, including 'الافضل الكبار' and 'مسيرات وليس بول'.

A Bus filled with Palestinian fighters was crossing the Christian suburb of Ain al-Rimaneh when an exchange of fire took place leading to the death of 30 people. This was the spark which unleashed 15 years of civil war. Above, the front page of An-Nahar newspaper following the incident which reads “Arafat appeals to the Arab Kings and Presidents --- Gemayel Accuses Israel of instigating the incident”.



play the role Hariri intended without such outcomes. For the medium-term, however, Hariri accepted that he had to adapt to Syrian supremacy in security affairs and to the venality of Syrian officials and their Lebanese sidekicks. He had no choice. The United States steadfastly backed Syrian control of Lebanon, and Israeli bombardment, most notably in 1993 and 1996, relentlessly inflated Syria’s ally Hezbollah, and strengthened its grip on the Shiite third of the population. Syrian military intelligence and its Lebanese security associates cracked down on public dissent, mainly from Christian followers of the now-exiled General Aoun, with detentions, abductions and torture, documented in detail by Human Rights Watch.

In both 1992 and 1996, Syrian military intelligence oversaw predetermined results in the parliamentary polls, with a respected al-Nahar journalist observing that Syria deserved an Oscar for systematic manipulation. The West exhibited little concern: U.S. ambassador Richard Jones expressed the “pleasure” of his country with “a very interesting” opening round in the 1996 parliamentary elections, despite the blatant rigging of the Mount Lebanon vote. Whenever Hariri tried to exercise a little political autonomy, in security arrangements for southern Lebanon or relations with the West, Syrian President Hafiz al-Assad summoned and rebuked him. Nothing illustrated the Syrian regime’s contempt for Lebanon’s institutions more than its abuse of the remodeled Lebanese presidency.

Between 1989 and 1998, it suited Syria to downgrade the Maronite president to give more space to Sunni and Shiite leaders. In 1995, Assad personally overrode the Lebanese constitution to extend the term of the pliable Elias Hrawi, observing: “I don’t see altering one or two clauses as being of such great importance to justify debate.” In 1998, it suited Syria to transplant the

project achieved enough by 1998 for Lebanese economic viability under Syrian hegemony. The Syrian priority shifted to conclusive containment of Lebanese civilian politics, including Hariri, with real authority in the hands of a battery of security agencies under President Lahoud and Syria’s military intelligence chief in Lebanon. From 1998 to 2000, Hariri was out of office,



The Lebanese civil war lasted for 15 years and left around 150,000 people dead and a country in ruins

army commander into the presidency, again breaking the constitution, and to have the new president, Emile Lahoud, as the focus of a Syrian style security machine. Regardless of the constitution, Lahoud exercised upgraded power derived from Syrian backing and his influence over the military, because Syria now wanted to reduce Maronite discontent and restrict the Sunni prime minister.

and Lahoud’s security apparatus oversaw a vindictive campaign against the former prime minister and his aides, even accusing Hariri of colluding with Israel by scheming to have the army curb Hezbollah. Lahoud and his partners, however, proved by 2000 that they had nothing productive to offer the Lebanese people, and efforts by Syrian military intelligence and Lahoud to manipulate the 2000 parliamentary elections against Hariri backfired badly.

For Syria, Hariri’s reconstruction



Syrian troops entered Lebanon under the banner of the Arab Deterrent Force, an Arab League sponsored military intervention force whose majority was entirely composed of Syrian forces with token contributions from other Arab states.

The elections in August-September 2000 came when Damascus was preoccupied with its own presidential transition from Hafiz al-Assad to his son Bashar after the death of the former on 10 June. In addition, the then-head of Syrian military intelligence in Lebanon, removed by Bashar al-Assad in 2002, did not have good personal relations with the Lebanese president. The vote showed that in such conditions the Lebanese popular mood might still be able to express itself in reasonable pluralist representation. Hariri swept a Sunni community infuriated about subordination of the Sunni prime minister since 1998. He also profited from Christian disenchantment with Lahoud. In late 2000, the Syrians had no option but to accept Hariri again as head of government. Lebanon's recalcitrant confessional democracy

could still kick. The security apparatus, however, could not allow such a precedent to stand.

Unlike his father, who floated above Lebanese factions as long as they behaved, the new Syrian president, Bashar al-Assad, picked sides in Lebanese politics. He aligned himself with Lahoud and Hezbollah secretary-general Hassan Nasrallah, and treated Hariri coldly. Lahoud devoted himself to sabotaging Hariri's economic policies, and the security machine devoted itself to cracking down on an increasingly diverse opposition.

Israel's May 2000 withdrawal from southern Lebanon under Hezbollah pressure raised questions about the justification for Syria's overbearing military and intelligence presence

around Beirut and in much of Lebanon. Druze leader Walid Jumblatt joined Maronite patriarch Nasrallah Sfeir in defiance. In April 2001 the Syrians moved troops into Jumblatt's fiefdom in the Shouf district, and in August Lahoud's security apparatus arrested hundreds of Christian activists, Aounists and others, while President Assad sent extra forces across the border. Prime Minister Hariri complained that he knew nothing about these moves. In October 2003, Hariri had a nasty experience in Damascus when Assad presided over a kangaroo court at which Syrian officials accused the prime minister of working against Syria.

With the U.S.-led invasion and occupation of Iraq in March-April 2003, and an unprecedented American assertion of "democratization" in the Middle East, the ruling Assad family and its entourage in Damascus were determined to lock down Lebanon once and for all. Bashar al-Assad played the dangerous game of confronting the U.S. presence in Iraq, in order to force the Bush Administration into a regional bargain with his regime. By mid-2004 the Sunni Arab jihadist insurgency in Iraq, plainly encouraged by Damascus, and American difficulties with Iraqi Shiites, particularly Muqtada al-Sadr, gave Assad confidence of expanding room for maneuver.

Locking-down Lebanon against any challenge on Syria's western flank involved yet another infraction of the Lebanese constitution, to extend President Lahoud's term beyond its



November 2004 termination, hence maintaining presidential cover of the security apparatus. Coercing Hariri and the Lebanese parliament into approving such an outrageous move would humiliate both. A triumphant Syrian-Lebanese security machine would then be in a powerful position to manipulate results in parliamentary

elections postponed until May 2005, because of the presidential issue. Assad duly summoned a resistant Lebanese prime minister to Damascus on 27 August 2004, and flatly ordered him to have the Lebanese government and parliament override the constitution in favor of Lahoud.

The Syrian ruling clique overreached. In an angry response to Assad's brushing aside their appeals that Syria not dictate Lebanon's presidential affairs, the United States and France sponsored UN Security Council resolution 1559 of 2 September 2004. The resolution required removal of all foreign –



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read Syrian – forces from Lebanon, a Lebanese presidential election free of foreign interference, and disbandment of all remaining private armies on Lebanese territory – read Hezbollah's armed wing and Syria's Palestinian clients. Baathist Syria's inflated strategic self-importance led it to gamble recklessly, inaugurating a crisis that has still not reached a resolution in late 2008, but which produced a reassertion of Lebanese democracy amid a Syrian campaign to abort this reassertion.

CEDAR REVOLUTION, 2005

Neither Prime Minister Hariri nor a majority of the Lebanese public took their humiliation by Bashar al-Assad easily, and the intervention of the international community encouraged surging waves of protest in Beirut. President Lahoud got his three-year extension, assisted by death threats against parliamentarians. Vociferous condemnations of Lahoud across a wide part of the communal spectrum evidently unnerved the security machine. The 1 October 2004 attempted assassination of the Druze politician Marwan Hamade, who resigned his ministerial post to protest the Lahoud extension, began what became a long series of political murders and murder attempts. Hariri resigned and quietly dedicated himself to an opposition victory in the May 2005 parliamentary elections, which could have seriously challenged the Syrian presence in Lebanon.

On 14 February 2005, Hariri was assassinated in a massive truck bombing that killed more than 20 people. In the aftermath, Bashar al-Assad's friends and opponents in Lebanon respectively mobilized their crowds on 8 and 14 March, in demonstrations that also reflected a divide between Shiites on the one hand and a coalescence of Sunnis, Christians and Druze on the other. The 14 March crowd, demanding immediate release from Syrian hegemony and the security machine, numbered about one million,



Rafik al-Hariri is considered the modern architects of post-war Lebanon, spearheading the reconstruction process and establishing relations with leaders of the international community. The Hariri Foundation established in 1979, provided scholarships and loans to a huge number of Lebanese students to study in Lebanon and abroad. The Syrian regime, always tried to curb Hariri's outreach to the Lebanese restricting him to part of the Sunni community. Hariri's objection to the Syrian extension of Emile Lahoud's term in 2004 put him on a collision course with Bashar al-Assad.

On 14 February 2005, after leaving the House of Parliament in downtown Beirut, which he was responsible for rebuilding, a car bomb targeted his convoy killing him and 22 others. His assassination was the spark of the Independence Uprising, where a month later on 14 March more than a million Lebanese took to the streets to demand for the truth about the assassination and an end to the Syrian military occupation.

substantially larger than the half million assembled by Hezbollah, largely Shiites wishing to emphasize their existence.

The impetus of the majority toward freedom from hegemony, spurred by the dramatic provocations between August 2004 and February 2005, received the shorthand label "cedar revolution." From the outset the "revolution" was fragile and

vulnerable, because Lebanon's sectarian jealousies limited it and provided opportunities for its enemies. Nonetheless, it expressed the resurgence of the democratic ethos – freedom for all to express themselves, to parade their popular capability, and to participate in decision taking roughly according to their popular weight. There was nothing else like it in the Arab world of the early 21st century.



Samir Kassir, a Lebanese journalist and scholar and one of the leading figures of the Cedar Revolution. He was an outspoken opponent of the Syrian regime's hegemony of the Lebanese political system. Kassir was also very active in the democracy movement in the region. Kassir was assassinated on 2 June 2005 when a bomb under his car seat exploded. Kassir's role in the Cedar Revolution and his links to Syrian intellectuals and politicians- the Damascus Spring- who opposed the Assad regime were reasons for his assassinations.

The "Cedar Revolution" also involved a special association of Lebanon with the international community, because it went hand in hand with global disgust regarding the Hariri murder, expressed in establishment of the UN's first ever murder inquiry, under Security Council Resolution 1595 of 7 April 2005. Lebanese and international pressures together forced a resentful Syrian regime to pull its troops and visible intelligence operatives out of Lebanon by the end of April 2005.

Lebanon thus emerged from three decades of suspended democracy. The May-June 2005 parliamentary poll, the first free of foreign steerage since 1972, was an improvement on those

of mid-20th century confessional democracy in important respects. Most notably, three clearly defined blocs with recognizably distinct orientations sought parliamentary seats, in contrast to the amorphous jostling of personalities, patronage networks, and loose factions that dominated before 1975. Hariri's son Saad and Walid Jumblatt led a "14 March" grouping with cross-sectarian Sunni, Christian, and Druze backing that emphasized independence, civilian political preeminence, and economic liberalism. General Michel Aoun, returned from exile and feeling sidelined by "14 March", headed a separate bloc based on his Free Patriotic Movement, which campaigned against "corruption" and put forward the most systematic reform policy document hitherto seen in Lebanon. The Shiite bloc of Hezbollah and Amal reiterated the importance of "resistance" against Israel. Their grip on a Shiite community that still felt left behind, including in parliamentary seating, was overwhelming. The election results broadly reflected the popular weight of the three blocs, as indicated by the March demonstrations. The "14 March" grouping took a modest majority of 72 out of 128 seats. Aoun and allies took 21 seats in the Christian heartland, reflecting pent-up Maronite frustration. Hezbollah and Amal gathered 35 seats, including Christian allies in Shiite majority constituencies. At more than one-quarter of parliament this was as fair a representation as the Hezbollah-led group would have gotten in Western elections.

Otherwise, the election process received intensive, unprecedented attention from international and local monitors. There were problems with unfair constituency boundaries that were legacies of the 2000 election, but there was little prospect of a properly agreed new electoral law without dangerously lengthy postponement

"What we dream of is a state that is owned by all its citizens and its citizens only, fortified by an independent judiciary and an unshakable popular support, a state that is not held by sectarianism or patronage."

Samir Kassir
The Dream Statement :
An-Nahar January 28, 2004

of the poll. The top priority in the charged environment was to produce a properly representative parliament as quickly as possible. The monitors all judged the elections generally free, fair, and appropriately conducted. The Aounists complained of "14 March" abuses, but they got results they never could have dreamed of under

Syrian hegemony. Hezbollah undercut Aoun in the Baabda constituency as part of a momentarily expedient understanding with Walid Jumblatt, and ordered its followers to vote against Aoun's candidates. Aoun, however, had no problem making his own deal with Hezbollah some months later.

Rafiq al-Hariri's former close advisor Fouad Siniora formed a new government based on the parliamentary outcome in July 2005. Syria's allies, meaning Hezbollah, Amal, and representatives of President Lahoud, received a minority of cabinet posts – one short of the one-third giving them a veto on government decisions. Hence the parliamentary majority could govern, and the part of the minority that agreed to join the cabinet received its fair share. Michel Aoun, dissatisfied with the cabinet portfolios on offer, declined to enter the government and led the parliamentary opposition. As for the sectarian dimension, there was a carefully agreed allocation of cabinet posts among communities, within the constitutionally mandated balance of half Christian, half non-Christian.

In retrospect, renewed Lebanese independence, state sovereignty, and exercise of democratic freedoms achieved their peak between mid 2005 and mid 2006. All were flawed, and their "14 March" standard-bearers failed to reach out to the Aounists and Shiites by promoting serious reform of a deficient state and electoral apparatus, but the country seemed on an upward path. Despite further

murders of critics of the Syrian regime, the UN investigation of the Hariri assassination progressed vigorously. After the detention of four Lebanese security chiefs in August 2005, UN inquiry reports of October and December 2005 formally fingered the Syrian-Lebanese security machine as the prime suspect. By early 2006, indictments and a special



Gebran Tueni, Editor-in-Chief of the Leading An-Nahar newspaper and member of the Lebanese Parliament. Tueni was a staunch opponent of Syrian meddling in Lebanese politics. His newspaper was a platform for all the pro-democracy activists to express themselves under the Syrian occupation. Shortly after his return from a trip from France, Tueni was assassinated when a roadside bomb targeted his armored car on his way to work. During the March 14 rally Tueni addressed the crowds with his famous pledge.

international tribunal appeared to be a close and real prospect, promising to free Lebanese politics from a crippling impunity for political murder that had prevailed since the late 1970s. A national dialogue among senior politicians in early 2006 also put Hezbollah on the defensive regarding its private army and defiance of the right of the state to monopoly of force.

Regression toward politics constrained by fear and intimidation, and reasserted Syrian influence, began with the warfare between Hezbollah and Israel in July/August 2006, triggered by Hezbollah's 12 July raid into Israel to capture Israeli soldiers. Hezbollah turned the tables on the Lebanese government, demonstrating that it – not the

institutions of a democratic state – decided on war or peace for Lebanon. The Party of God also reemphasized its hegemony over the Shiite community, and put its weaponry, communications system, and territorial sway in large tracts of the country beyond any right of criticism, which it menacingly dismissed as "serving the Zionist enemy." Behind Hezbollah loomed its patrons and arms suppliers, Syria and Iran.



A nasty rebellion of Sunni Islamic jihadists in the Nahr al-Bared refugee camp north of Tripoli came hard on the heels of these Syrian threats. Triangulation of multiple sources of evidence indicated Syrian military intelligence sponsorship of the rebellion. The outbreak lasted from May to September 2007, and severely stretched the Lebanese army.

In November 2006, Syria's Lebanese allies, headed by a Hezbollah buoyed by the "divine victory" of holding out against Israel and careless of the accompanying wreckage, closed in on the prospective UN murder tribunal. When the government moved to approve the protocol of a mixed international/Lebanese court, all pro-Syrian ministers instantly resigned. The government still had a two-thirds quorum and endorsed the tribunal. Hezbollah, parliamentary speaker and Amal leader Nabih Berri, and President Lahoud all declared that the government was illegitimate because Shiite ministers no longer participated, and hence there was not a communal balance. Prime Minister

Siniora held that the question did not arise because he did not accept the resignations. The UN Security Council supported Siniora, unanimously stressing the international legitimacy of the democratically established Lebanese government against the Syrian backed campaign to destroy it. Speaker Berri meantime refused to convene parliament, preventing the parliamentary majority from confirming the government decision on the tribunal. Parliament thus became eviscerated through 2007, while the government and its Sunni prime minister persevered in a state of siege. These conditions, added to Hezbollah's highhandedness, exacerbated the Sunni/Shiite

sectarian rift. Hezbollah, Amal, and Michel Aoun, who headed Christians suspicious of the Sunni and Druze leaders of "14 March," sponsored a protest encampment in central Beirut. They demanded a blocking and therefore commanding third in a "national unity government." In June 2007, the UN Security Council confirmed the special murder tribunal, overriding both Lebanese parliamentary paralysis and threats of violence from Syria's president, expressed to UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in Damascus on 24 April 2007.

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When President Lahoud's extended term expired in November 2007,

deadlock over a successor led to a seven-month presidential vacuum. Lacking options, “14 March” proposed army commander Michel Suleiman, well connected with Hezbollah and



Above March 8 fighters on the streets of Beirut

On 8-9 May, Hezbollah and allied militias seized mainly Sunni West Beirut. The Party of God used heavy weapons in the mainly Druze hills in its “operation smash the balance” (*amiliyat kasr al-tawazun*). It demonstrated conclusively that it would deploy deadly force against dissenting Lebanese, and the government promptly rescinded its offending decisions.

Syria, in the chancy hope that he might develop autonomy in office. The opposition accepted Suleiman’s candidacy but refused his election until they got their “national unity government” and veto power. The Siniora cabinet assumed presidential functions during the vacancy, in line with the constitution, but the opposition warned it to do no more than manage routine affairs. Lebanon

thus had no president, no effective government, and no sitting parliament.

In both the international and domestic arenas, Lebanon’s “Cedar Revolution” lost ground. The new French president, Nicolas Sarkozy, shifted French policy from supporting Lebanese pluralism to pampering Syrian autocracy. The Hariri murder inquiry and tribunal seemed to lose all traction after the supposedly decisive UN Security Council move in June 2007, causing increasing despondency in the “14 March” coalition. Given that there was weighty evidence against identified suspects by early 2006, the chain-dragging into 2008 could only fuel suspicion that international players were more interested in exploiting the case as a bargaining chip than in truth and justice. Within Lebanon, Hezbollah piled up armaments in special military zones closed to the Lebanese state and extended an unauthorized secret phone system even into the mountains north of Beirut.

In early May 2008, Lebanon’s government responded with a forlorn, despairing bid to stop the rot. It transferred the Hezbollah aligned officer in charge of Beirut airport security and decided to probe Hezbollah’s private communications. On 8-9 May, Hezbollah and allied militias seized mainly Sunni West Beirut. The Party of God used heavy weapons in the mainly Druze hills in its “operation smash the balance” (*amiliyat kasr al-tawazun*). It demonstrated conclusively that it would deploy deadly force against

dissenting Lebanese, and the government promptly rescinded its offending decisions.

Hezbollah’s May 2008 coup broke the political deadlock in favor of Syria and the opposition, but the “14 March” camp remained in the game and Hezbollah permanently alienated the great bulk of Lebanon’s Sunni/Druze “third.” Qatar and the Arab League sponsored a Lebanese conference in Doha, which agreed Michel Suleiman’s election as president, opposition veto capability in a “national unity government,” and a new parliamentary election law for 2009 that returned to the small district constituencies of the 1960 law. On the one hand, President Suleiman proved predictably solicitous of Syrian interests in his first months, no-one dared further challenge the ‘state beyond the state’ of Hezbollah’s “national resistance,” and the Sunni stronghold of Tripoli became wracked by violence plainly manipulated from outside Lebanon. On the other hand, Fouad Siniora remained prime minister, the “14 March” parliamentary majority retained a majority of cabinet seats, which had (incredibly) been in question, and the electoral arrangement was roughly neutral. Small constituencies (using the administrative qada) answered the Christian grievance about swamping of Christian rural majorities in large districts, for example in the hinterland of Sunni Tripoli, but failure to implement a partially proportional system has made it difficult for Shiites discontented with Hezbollah to achieve representation.

There are many concerns about the parliamentary elections scheduled for early 2009. The foremost is how there can be a free, fair choice and a robust free debate if one party is armed to the teeth and controls a large portion of the country, and if political murder continues to overshadow the whole arena. The US and France, having promoted international justice and encouraged the “14 March” camp to stick its neck out in early 2005, have a moral obligation in early 2009 to heed the consequences of backtracking on justice and engaging the Syrian ruling clique. Fear, despondency, and a triumphant neighboring autocracy may well bring the curtain down on Lebanon’s brief renewed independence. Grudging Syrian diplomatic recognition of Lebanon is irrelevant – if in full health and undeterred, Bashar al-Assad’s regime will make an embassy a high commissariat and secret police center.

In the end, if the majority of Lebanese want to put themselves in the hands of local demagogues and a Syria that ranks near the rock bottom of every global index of freedom and human rights that is their democratic privilege. They will throw out their pluralism together with its defects. History has precedents. Lebanese might ponder the twilight of Weimar Germany in the early 1930s. Only the decisive decay or disintegration of the present Syrian regime, or at least the prospect thereof, can secure Lebanese pluralism and induce the allies of Syria and Iran to respect it.

WEIGHING LEBANESE PLURALISM IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Even with much of its territory beyond state authority, a flawed electoral system, and a heavily corrupted state machine, Lebanon ranks far above all other Arab states in the 2008 Economist Intelligence Unit Index of Democracy. Lebanon features as a hybrid of democratic and authoritarian elements, just short of “flawed democracy,” with virtually the same score as Turkey across five components of democracy (electoral process and pluralism, functioning of government, political participation, political culture, and civil liberties). Lebanon ranks 89th out of 167 countries. The next Arab states, Iraq and Jordan, come 116th and 117th. Syria is a dismal 156th, beaten by Zimbabwe and Equatorial Guinea. In the cruel, barren Arab political context, Lebanon exhibits democratic traditions that are worth buttressing.

Several aspects of Lebanon’s contemporary circumstances deserve concluding observations. First, two cross-sectarian alignments, with distinct ideological and foreign policy orientations, have emerged since 2005, especially since the Maronite General Aoun joined the Hezbollah-led “8 March” in February 2006. “14 March” and “8 March” present the voter with clear choices, an advance on the confused factional politics of pre-1975.





March 14 demonstration 2005

Second, Lebanon remains a collection of communities, with communal politics represented by sectarian organizations like Hezbollah, Amal, the Lebanese Forces, the Phalange and so on. Lebanese politics will continue to differ from those of more homogeneous societies. As noted in the description of the 2005 election results and government formation, numerical democracy is quite well served anyway in today's Lebanon – on the basis of Sunni/Druze, Christian, and Shiite “thirds” that reasonable estimates and competitive demonstrations indicate are demographic reality. Also, the winner-take-all electoral system means that the inadequate Shiite share of parliamentary seats has not in fact cheated the Hezbollah/Amal alliance. For 2009, given that Sunnis

will largely head in one direction and Shiites in the other, the distribution of the Christian vote will probably be decisive.

Third, at some point in the not too distant future, the credibility of parliamentary sectarian allocations will require a credible census, under close UN supervision, along with decisions on participation of Diaspora Lebanese. All sorts of means are conceivable to update confessional democracy: a presidential council with a rotating chair; ending the communal monopolies on the three top offices of state, with an understanding that no community will have more than one at any one time; partial proportional voting for parliament to represent significant minorities within communities; a senate to represent

communities with the lower house of parliament freed from sectarian allocations; and stronger district authorities.

However, neither a proper census nor political innovations are possible until Rafiq al-Hariri's murderers are apprehended. In the meantime, there is no better Lebanese democracy in prospect than the present democracy, which demands full state sovereignty and state monopoly of force. This democracy, this sovereignty, and this monopoly of force must be upheld.

Fourth, no democracy and no political pluralism can coexist indefinitely with political murder. If the UN murder inquiry and tribunal avoid pursuing the masterminds, political murder will be triumphant in Lebanon and

democracy will be imperiled. There can be no properly free politics as long as “14 March” politicians face death lists.

Further, the July 2005 murder attempt against Defense Minister Elias al-Murr, who had fallen out with Syrian military intelligence, and the September 2008 killing of Druze opposition personality Saleh Aridi, demonstrate the perils that await members of the “8 March” camp who become inconvenient. And it is not just political life that is at stake. Given that chaos and Syrian hegemony have terrorized and corrupted the Lebanese legal system into impotence, only the successful operation of the mixed Lebanese-international tribunal authorized under Chapter VII of the UN Charter in

Security Council resolution 1757 can help restore an independent judiciary to Lebanon.

Fifth, Lebanon cannot exist as a decent society without a tolerant pluralism. It has to accommodate an absolutist party, Hezbollah, which presently dominates but falls greatly short of monopolizing the Shiite community and proclaims, according to billboards: “We are always right (daiman ‘andna al-haqq).” In a democracy people who are “always right” are sometimes difficult to accommodate. Their attitude implies determination to coordinate everyone to the “right” view and grudging acknowledgment of pluralism only as long as the balance of forces compels acknowledgment. Lebanese political life since 2005 has given fair

space to a party like Hezbollah while resisting total minority hijacking of the country's affairs. Outsiders have a duty to assist Lebanon uphold this delicate golden mean of democracy.



CHRONOLOGY

1845: Appointed multi-communal advisory councils for qa'immaqams of Ottoman Mount Lebanon.

1864-1915: Indirectly elected administrative council of Ottoman autonomous province of Mount Lebanon.

1920: Inauguration of French rule under League of Nations mandate, and French extension of boundaries of Mount Lebanon to create modern Lebanese territorial state.

1920-1926: Indirectly elected multi-communal representative council (electorate voting for electoral college, which then elected members).

1926: Lebanese constitution introduced, with bicameral parliament (chamber of deputies and senate). First chamber of deputies appointed.

1927: Change to single chamber parliament, with senate abolished.

1929: Six year non-renewable term fixed for president. First parliamentary elections held.

1932: First and only Lebanese census. 1932-1934: Mandatory power suspends constitution.

1934: First direct elections to parliament.

1939-1943: Mandatory power suspends constitution.

1943: Sixth chamber of deputies abrogates mandate, French briefly imprisons communal leaders, and Lebanon achieves independence under 'national pact' understanding among communal leaders – oral arrangement for sectarian operation of the 1926 constitution.

1948: President Bishara al-Khoury gets constitutional amendment to allow him an extended term.

1952: Bishara al-Khoury forced out of office, smooth constitutional installment of President Camille Chamoun. New president introduces vote for women.

1953-1957: Gerrymandered parliamentary elections as Chamoun struggles to assert authority.

1958: Brief violent breakdown of Lebanese state. Pressures come from creation of the United Arab Republic, and Chamoun's interest in an extended term. US mediation enables elite to step back from the brink.

1958-1964: Presidency of Fouad Chehab, with mild social welfare orientation and mitigation of communal imbalances in the bureaucracy.

1967: Arab defeat in Arab-Israeli war leads to Palestinian assertion in Lebanon, Israeli military incursions, and consequent Christian-Muslim tensions.

1970-1975: Suleiman Franjeh elected president, and cuts back Chehab's interventionist state. Hafiz al-Assad stabilizes Syria, and looks to influence Lebanon. Mounting external pressure on Lebanon, and internal friction.

1972: Seventh and last parliamentary election under the "First Lebanese Republic."

1975-1990: Breakdown of the Lebanese state with prolonged, multi-dimensional warfare in Lebanon. Constitutional framework and pluralist ethos persist nonetheless.

1989: Ta'if agreement to adjust constitution inaugurates "Second Lebanese Republic." Executive power shifted from president to council of ministers.

1990-2005: Lebanese state restored under Syrian hegemony.

1991: Imposed "Brotherhood Treaty" between Syria and Lebanon.

1992: Parliamentary election under Syrian steerage. Rafiq al-Hariri becomes prime minister, and launches reconstruction program.

1995: Syria commands extension of presidency of Elias Hrawi.



1998: Syria selects army commander Emile Lahoud as president, supports de facto buttressing of presidency as core of a Syrian style security machine. Lahoud forces Hariri out of office.

2000: Shiite Hezbollah movement compels Israel to withdraw from southern Lebanon. Hafiz al-Assad dies, and succeeded by Bashar al-Assad as president of Syria. Rafiq al-Hariri scores impressively in Lebanese parliamentary election despite hostility of Syrian/Lebanese security machine, and returns as prime minister.

2000-2004: Rising discontent with Syrian presence among Christians, Druze, and Sunnis after Israeli departure. Hezbollah, Syria's ally, cements supremacy among Shiites. Hariri faces continuous friction with President Lahoud and the security machine.

2004: Bashar al-Assad forces Hariri to agree to an extended term for Lahoud. The US and France sponsor UN Security Council resolution 1559 demanding Syrian military withdrawal from Lebanon.

2005: Assassination of Hariri, "Cedar Revolution," Syrian withdrawal, first free parliamentary elections since 1972, first ever UN murder inquiry fingers Syrian/Lebanese security machine amid further political murders.

2006: Outburst of hostilities between Hezbollah and Israel.

2007: UN Security Council resolution 1757 establishes mixed international/Lebanese murder tribunal. More murders. Hostilities erupt between Lebanese army and Fath al-Islam jihadists. Presidential vacuum when Lahoud's term ends without a successor.

2008: Crisis between "Cedar Revolution" government and parliamentary majority and Hezbollah-led opposition culminates in 8 May Hezbollah takeover of West Beirut. Arab League promotes Doha agreement on army commander Michel Suleiman as new president, national unity government, and new parliamentary election law for 2009.

END NOTES

1-Sources for sectarian demographic trends for the period since Lebanon's first and only census in 1932 include Chamie, J. "Differentials in Fertility: Lebanon, 1971," *Population Studies* 31:2 (1977), 365-382; Faour, M. "The Demography of Lebanon: A Reappraisal," *Middle Eastern Studies* 27:4 (1991), 631-641; Faour, M. "Religion, Demography, and Politics in Lebanon," *Middle Eastern Studies* 43:6 (2007), 909-921; and Harris, W. *The New Face of Lebanon* (Princeton: Markus Wiener, 2006), 82-86. Data come from fertility records and population surveys, for example the 1970 Lebanese government survey of 30,000 households, a population count from the 1988 Hariri Foundation food distribution program, and Lebanese government national family surveys in 1996 and 2004. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, Christians are probably about 35% of the Lebanese population, with Maronites 20-25%; Shiites have become 30-35%; Sunnis represent 25-30%; and Druze are around 5%. The Shiite natural increase rate has declined since the 1980s, and Muhammad Faour demonstrates that northern rural Sunnis have the highest fertility rate today. Differentials within communities are probably as high as between communities.

2-See the official UN transcript of the 24 April 2007 Ban Ki-moon meeting with Bashar al-Assad, pages 3 and 4. President Assad told the secretary-general: "Instability would intensify if the Special Tribunal were established. This was particularly the case if the Tribunal were established under Chapter 7 of the Charter. This could easily ignite a conflict which would result in civil war [in Lebanon] and provoke divisions between Sunni and Shi'a from the Mediterranean to the Caspian Sea ... If the Tribunal was achieved via Chapter 7, it would have grave consequences that could not be contained within Lebanon." On the democratically elected Lebanese parliamentary majority, President Assad observed that "the Syrian people hated the March 14 Movement."

3-In al-Hayat (London and Beirut), 21 May 2007, the respected journalist Muhammad Shuqayr, with information from Palestinian informants in northern Lebanon, named Syrian intelligence officers who were coordinating the Fath al-Islam jihadist group in Tripoli and Nahr al-Bared. Al-Sharq al-Awsat (London), 9 June 2007, reported from "Jordanian judicial sources" that Fath al-Islam leader Shakir al-Abssi ran a training camp in Syria "to house and equip suicide bombers and elements involved in al-Qaeda before their dispatch to battle in Iraq," this before he moved to Lebanon from Syria in 2005. Al-Nahar (Beirut), 22 and 23 August 2007, interviewed former prisoners in Syrian jails on Syrian intelligence mobilization of imprisoned jihadists ("Have Syrian jails become a 'land of support' for jihad in Iraq and Lebanon?").

BIOGRAPHY



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