

PAPERS ON LEBANON

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THE FOREIGN POLICY OF LEBANON

LESSONS AND
PROSPECTS FOR THE
FORGOTTEN DIMENSION

by

N a s s i f H i t t i



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THE FOREIGN POLICY OF LEBANON: LESSONS AND PROSPECTS FOR THE FORGOTTEN DIMENSION

*Nassif Hitti**

In the history of independent Lebanon, the controversial issues that erupted into political crises and armed violence belong to the realm of foreign policy rather than domestic politics. The 'civil war' of 1958, the conflicts with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in 1969 and 1973 and the all-out war that has been raging for more than 13 years reflected irreconcilable differences over Lebanon's relationship with Egypt, the PLO, Syria and Israel. Whether the sparks that ignited the fighting were domestic or domesticized, they did not conceal the true nature of the existing differences at the time—differences that lie in the main constituencies' contradictory perceptions of Lebanon's relations with its environment.

Unlike the vast majority of Third World countries where foreign policy remains insulated from the influence of domestic politics and well guarded by the regime in power, the demarcation line between foreign and domestic politics is blurred in Lebanon. This is due to two main factors. First, the Lebanese open system where all forms of lobbying for all kinds of goals are allowed. Yet the game that is regulated within certain set of rules and norms in western-type democracies does not know such limits in Lebanon. The symptomatic weakness of the state apparatus and the absence of the statehood value preclude the drawing of parameters, usually defined by widely

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shared consensus, to contain the lobbying game. Anti-state goals become permissible and unorthodox means of pursuing them become plausible.

The second factor lies in the bipolarized culture. Two exclusive identities, in their extreme forms, have been shaping Lebanon's politics, provoking certain crises and making others unsolvable. Integral Lebanonism, espoused by a Maronite-dominated constituency, seeks its historical reference in Phoenicianism. It prides itself on thousands of years of history, looking to the Mediterranean and beyond it to the West¹ with which it identifies culturally and politically, while turning its back to the Arab world. Integral Lebanonism defines its relationship to this world in the most ambiguous terms, devaluating the elements of socio-cultural commonalities and minimizing the importance of political ties.

Against it stands the independent Arabism espoused by a Sunni-dominated constituency, expressed through total identification with the Arab pole of attraction at any particular moment. Egypt, Syria and the PLO assumed this role at different periods in the last four decades. The main criterion of Arabism becomes the relationship that exists between 'the other' in Lebanon and the pole of attraction, an Arabism that rejects diversity and subtle particularities as a threat to the unity of *al-umma*. Such political dependency couched in nationalist terms breeds anti-Arabism and contributes to the confusion between a certain form of political ideology—Arab nationalism—and a socio-cultural identity—Arabism. Nowadays, dependent Islamism, espoused by a radical Sunni and Shi'i constituency exhibits the same general features of the dependent Arabism: depreciation of Lebanonism and total and unconditional identification with a pole of attraction that happens to be Iran.

That such constituencies do not advocate self-restraint on the one hand and that the state is unable to define the rules of the game on the other hand create a situation where a debate over a foreign policy issue degenerates rapidly into one over identity. Rigidity is the natural child of such intense encounters between political religions laden with

¹ See for example the founding fathers' writings: Michel Chiha, *Liban d'aujourd'hui*, Beyrouth, Editions du Trident, 1949, and Charles Corm, *6000 Ans de génie pacifique au service de l'humanité*, Beyrouth, distributed by Dar Al Nahar, 1988.

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symbolism. The lack of a strong constituency that espouses accommodative values tends to increase bipolarization at home and with it a destabilizing foreign policy of paralysis and abstention which in turn has an adverse effect on domestic politics.

While drawing the basic lessons of the war particularly as they relate to the foreign policy area, the paper examines the foreign policies of the different actors, i.e. the state and the main constituencies. It then evaluates the most important instances of those policies with the aim of presenting future potential scenarios of foreign policy for Lebanon.

I

Lessons of War

A glance over the history of the war would reveal certain lessons some of which emerge as basic traits while others constitute cardinal rules, respected while not recognized. These are as follows:

(a) The limited role of violence in serving one's declared goals

If the use of military force proved instrumental in establishing control over one's region, the same force could not produce any more concrete gains beyond the well-defined geographic zone of influence. That zone is the sect-dominated region which constitutes a natural power base for a group or party that derives its legitimacy by addressing the concerns of the sect, reviving its old myths or formulating maximal goals that appeal to a majority within the sect, particularly in times of great torment and uncertainty. Meanwhile, attempts to use force to expand the natural zone of influence proved futile and in many cases counter-productive, leading to military defeats. Thus the attempts by the 'Nationalist leftist' alliance, under the leadership of Kamal Jumblat and with the support of the PLO, to move into the 'Christian enclave' in 1976 were contained and crushed by Syria. The Lebanese Forces faced a similar fate when they attempted in the summer of 1982 to control the Druze statelet that was in the making. This was also the outcome of the pro-Syrian Elie Hobeika's policy to regain control over the Christian statelet in 1986. These are few but major examples of the first lesson: no sectarian group or sect-dominated party, regardless of the non-sectarian slogan it may carry, is allowed to control the territories of another sect. Now that most of the zones of influence have been defined, military force is all the more unprofitable and futile.

(b) *Foreign military power does not translate into the same amount of political influence*

Despite the Israeli military victory in the early phases of the invasion in the summer of 1982, its local 'friends', the Lebanese Forces, refused to co-operate militarily with the Israeli Defence Force (IDF) in a pincer strategy aiming at West Beirut, and the same allies started to distance themselves politically from Israel. The taboo of an open association with Israel and the negative repercussions of sustaining such an alliance in the Arab world were more influential in shaping the allies' behaviour than the military success achieved by Israel. Frustrated with its friends, Israel soon found itself having to rely on naked power to maintain its presence in Lebanon.

The same fate was reserved to the Americans in 1984 when, like the Israelis, they had to withdraw after discovering the uselessness of military power in obtaining the appropriate political results.² While Syria was embattled and its Lebanese allies weakened, every military encounter with the Americans bought the military underdog more clout while it damaged the influence of the US and frustrated its policies. The Arabs allied to the US restrained themselves from lending it any support against Syria—which stood as the 'defender' of the Arabs against foreign invasion—due to public sensitivity towards the US particularly after the Israeli invasion of Lebanon.

Syria, too, went through the same experience. Stronger militarily in the mid-1980s than it used to be a decade ago in Lebanon, it is now weaker politically, unable to hold together its allies and to engineer a political settlement fashioned after its interests. The loose alliance structure it tries to maintain in Lebanon is riddled with conflicts and contradictions that reflect well-entrenched parochial, local and sectarian interests among the members. Thus, despite its military strength, Syria's capabilities are limited to obstructing rather than to shaping a new order in Lebanon.

At the peak of their military power in Lebanon, not one of the actors mentioned earlier was able to convert his overwhelming power into the appropriate amount of influence. Each had his own debacle. The failure to establish a pro-Israeli government in Lebanon in 1982,

² A good analysis of the US policy failure is presented in George W. Ball, *Error and Betrayal in Lebanon*, USA, Foundation for Middle East Peace, 1986.

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the abrogation of the May 17 Accord in 1984, the aborted Constitutional Document in 1976 and the Trilateral Accord in 1986, are all illustrations of the limitations of foreign military power. Other variables relating to domestic and regional particularities also tend to obstruct the conversion process. For the local factions, a main conclusion emerges about the constraints of relying on extra-national alliances to promote one's goals in Lebanon.

(c) *'The sect as a nation' ideology—the culmination of rising sectarianism in Lebanon and in the Middle East in general—is reaching the end of the road due to its inability to deliver a solution out of the stalemate*

The political metamorphosis of the Maronite, Shi'i and Druze communities are good examples. The three main groups—the Kata'eb, Amal and the Progressive Socialist Party (PSP)—that experienced the sectarian revolution through an expansion of their power base and the nature of their discourse, witnessed at the height of sectarian nationalism a fragmentation process and the emergence of new groups and forces either within or as an alternative to the main organizations. A common trait among these organizations is the 'elastic' definition of their 'nation'. It is either the Christian people within and beyond Lebanon or it is Lebanon itself. For another it would be the Druze, or Shi'i one day and the Arab or Islamic nation another day.

Such elasticity is a function of the good political fortune of the party concerned, determined by whether it is on the defensive or whether it needs to be sensitive to certain allies' discourse. Reflecting ideological as well as political and idiosyncratic factors, the fragmentation that is taking different forms is typical of the cases mentioned above. What we observed therefore was an evolution from sectarian organizations to organizations of the sect and subsequently their self-destruction.

(d) *Despite an overt rigidity in defining the contours of the group's identity and its ideological purity, pragmatism prevails in actions*

Almost every party or group has entered into an alliance with all other parties at one point or another during the conflict, even with those at the opposite end of the ideological spectrum. Such alliances have taken a host of forms depending, among other things, on the ideological affinity between the parties involved. Tacit versus open alliances, instant versus more enduring ones have been at work. Alliances based

on co-operation in matters of security have sometimes been concealed by the traditional barrage of verbal attacks among opposed ideological groups who, all the while, refrained from taking military action against each other. Many groups have made strange bedfellows. As the war entered its fourteenth year, a group's short-term interests appeared to be the ultimate goal rather than the fulfilment of the promised goals even if it meant perpetuating the status quo by supporting and strengthening the adversary indirectly. The means to the end became the end goal itself. The achievement of the declared end goals became even more remote as the same conditions which made them implausible were being reinforced. That these alliances are interpreted in Machiavellian terms to sell them to a discontented, astonished constituency is not helping the ideological and political credibility of the parties involved.

(e) *An 'invisible hand' that acts as a balancing mechanism and that is made of the convergence of Arab, regional and international factors, is maintaining the rules of the classical balance of power in Lebanon*

This has led to policies of restraint, respect for 'red lines', limited support to an ally in order to maintain control over his actions, and a *de facto* partition that could never be turned into *de jure*. Looking at the confrontation lines such as the Damascus road, one may wonder how it could be impossible to make a military breakthrough in either direction. That these lines stand as the Wall of Berlin is due more to their being political rather than military fortifications. The balancing mechanism is frustrating the maximalist goals of the anti-status quo forces while diminishing the utility of warfare in their strategies.

Two paradoxes emerged during the war. First, the paradox of political Maronitism³—the non-recognition of other Lebanese groups as *interlocuteur valable* particularly when it comes to their demands to which political Maronitism is either insensitive, intransigent or escapist, preferring instead to deal with the Arab pole of attraction under the assumption, not totally mistaken, that by making concessions to the pole, they do not need to make any to their Lebanese adversaries because the Arab pole is able to deliver them in return for its gains. But on the other hand political Maronitism appeals to the same adversaries

³ Integral Lebanonist constituency.

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to dissociate themselves from their extra-Lebanese allies and to come to terms with it while doing nothing that would encourage what it calls for.

Secondly, the opposition paradox⁴ defined as follows: the constant call for concessions from the other. But to pursue their goals in this respect, the opposition groups resort to an external avenue. By doing so, their demands become secondary to those of the senior Arab partner. This reflects the uneven distribution of power among the allies. When the local/Arab alliance scores certain victories, the benefits usually go to the Arab partner and the local one finds himself having to subjugate his demands to the strategic needs of that partner. Instead of working out a programme of action, the Lebanese partner acts as a mouthpiece for his Arab ally earning the latter his rewards while remaining empty-handed.

II

The Foreign Policies of Lebanon

In this context, foreign policy is defined as the perception of Lebanon's role and the way its relations *vis-à-vis* its environment are conducted. In this regard, the importance of the identity framework is that it provides the paradigm for foreign policy.

The integral Lebanonist constituency: the Switzerland of the Middle East

Of particular interest in this constituency is the drastic change that occurred to a basic underlying pattern of its foreign policy. In the pre-war period, when the Kata'eb party was the main pillar of this constituency, the slogan 'the strength of Lebanon lies in its weakness' was the cornerstone of its policy. It was meant to devalue Lebanon's policy of military preparedness and the co-ordination of its politico-military strategy with the Arab states, particularly the confrontation states, against the threat of Israel. The policy considered that Lebanon's protection and guarantees were best derived from its international friendships and its image as a peaceful country. The same policy was based on a two-fold assumption: that Lebanon needs to maintain minimal or nominal commitment towards a potential Arab

⁴ Dependent Arabist constituency.

strategy *vis-à-vis* Israel, and that Israel does not have any ambitious designs over Lebanon. In other words, Israel is a declared enemy for domestic and Arab political reasons rather than the perceived enemy out of geopolitical or historical concerns. The watershed occurred with the war against the Palestinians.

The newly radicalized constituency under the leadership of Bashir Gemayel turned to a more aggressive policy, for 'international friendships' failed to protect the sovereignty of Lebanon against the Palestinians and their Arab supporters. The crux of the new policy was in building one's military capabilities to protect the 'nation'. Military force became the main component of the new policy and with it the politics of military alliances. On the other hand, the radicalization became more pronounced in its anti-Arabism, distancing the constituency equally from Israel and the Arab world. In this context, alliances would be dictated only by common interests, seeing no psychological barrier in cultivating a semi-covert alliance with Israel if it served the nation's foreign policy goals. On the theoretical level, the Lebanonists—drawing on the Swiss and Austrian models—became more persistent in calling for the neutrality of Lebanon. Of course, the Swiss model was more appealing for it nursed the nostalgia of the Switzerland of the Middle East so dear to this constituency in the past. The Arab disarray, disunity, cold war, inability and unwillingness to face Israel provided enough apologies for the proponents of neutrality.

The dependent Arabist constituency: the Arab Hanoi

If the foreign policy of the Lebanonist constituency was intransigent towards the Arab milieu, the dependent Arabist constituency's policy was characterized by total acquiescence to the same milieu, namely to whoever occupied the driver's seat in the Arab system. Despite its lack of ideological and political homogeneity, the constituency still performs the role of a conduit for the Arab pole's demands in Lebanon and of a platform for its policies in the Arab world.

Under the leadership of Egypt's Nasser, it functioned as an additional spokesman for the Nasserites. More interesting was the role it fulfilled on behalf of the PLO and Syria. Acting to block the pacification of southern Lebanon and turning the latter into a Hanoi for an Arab revolution, it served the purpose of those who needed southern Lebanon as the only available theatre for military operations

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or as a safe pressure point with all the advantages of influencing regional politics, without the risk of direct involvement in a military conflict.

The two basic elements of the constituency's foreign policy consisted of dragging Lebanon into full involvement in the military dimension of the Arab-Israeli conflict and pushing Lebanon to align its policy with that of the pole in the Arab 'cold war'. In other words, their demands and their actions overloaded the Lebanese system, often leading to its breakdown or its malfunctioning. The responsibilities of the Arab *umma* that the Arab states had to shoulder were transferred to Lebanon. The Arab theatre of confrontation with Israel was reduced to its Lebanese part. Lebanon was turned into the only confrontation state, to paraphrase Ghassan Tuéni, in a state of confrontation with Israel. The constituency's foreign policy is basically dictated by the choices and interest of the Arab pole rather than by domestic considerations. Thus, it is a continuation of the foreign policy of the pole by different means.

The dependent Islamist constituency: the launching pad

The foreign policy of this new constituency⁵ exhibits certain similarities with that of the dependent Arabist constituency in its trans-state framework of action. Its identity paradigm is *dār al-islām* and the pole of attraction within the latter is Iran. More vocal than the Arabist constituency today because of the ideological zeal of radical Islamism, it bears greater resemblance, in terms of its dynamism, to the Arabist constituency of the 1960s. The dependent Islamists turned part of Lebanon into a bastion of an Islamic revolution in the Arab world and aim to give the whole of Lebanon such a role. Because of the radicalism of its words and deeds, it stands at odds with the Arab milieu whose order it seeks to destroy. The dependent Islamist constituency conceives of its foreign policy as a launching pad for Iran's Islamic revolution: an ideological and political platform for Iran to disseminate its Islamic model into the Arab world, a theatre of military engagement in the Arab-Israeli conflict

⁵ It groups mainly Hizbulah, the Movement of Islamic Unification and *Amal al islāmiyya* [Islamic Amal].

to influence the conflict diplomacy and Arab policies, and a pressure point for Iran's international policy through the hostage diplomacy.⁶

The state policy: between confrontation and forced accommodation

Two important and opposite types of foreign policy behaviour emerged in Lebanon. Firstly, a confrontational type which normally develops when the regime (*al-ḥukm*) profiting from the support of the government (*al-ḥukūma*), namely the complacency of the Prime Minister, stands up to the demands and interests of the Arab pole. Such a policy would not have been possible without such a consensus. But the confrontational policy did not survive for long. Indeed, the mounting external pressure exerted directly through domestic allies led to a breakdown of the consensus and subsequently of order. The Chamoun policy between 1956 and 1958 and the first phase of Gemayel's regime (1982–3) are two good examples in this respect. In the first case, President Camille Chamoun remained insensitive to the anti-British and anti-French feelings that were running high after the Suez crisis and did not follow Egypt's lead in severing diplomatic ties with the two European states of the trilateral aggression. What followed was a breakdown in the consensus in Lebanon and the resignation of the government. The newly formed government pursued the same policy, thus putting Lebanon on a course of collision with Egypt's Nasser which led to the breakdown of order and the eruption of the civil war in the country.

In the second case, President Gemayel profited from the consensus to work out the May 17 Accord with Israel. Pressure started to build up against that policy, orchestrated by the Syrian pole and soon led to the breakdown of the '*ḥukm-ḥukūma*' consensus and to an increasing level of fighting and violence. Gemayel carried out a reversal of his policy by abrogating the Accord following a military confrontation with Syria's proxies and a direct and open political one with the Syrians.

⁶ The author elaborated on these three 'functions' in a paper presented at the University of Chicago to a conference on Iran held between 8 and 10 April 1988 and co-sponsored by the Center for Iranian Research and Analysis (CIRA) and the University of Chicago; Nassif Hitti, 'Lebanon in Iran's Strategy: Opportunities and Constraints', forthcoming in the publications of CIRA.

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The second type of policy—forced accommodation—consists of making concessions to the Arab pole of attraction without actually addressing the roots of the crisis, chiefly to avoid an escalation of the conflict and to maintain or perhaps enact another consensus. This leads to either policy paralysis or a postponement of a crisis. Both the regimes of Charles Hélou and Suleiman Frangieh have resorted to that policy. The relationship with the PLO between 1968 and 1974 stands as a good illustration of forced accommodation. The signing of the Cairo Agreement by the Hélou regime in 1969 came as the result of a package deal: to shore up the consensus in return for granting the PLO the right to establish a statelet within Lebanon—an autonomous power base from which to conduct its foreign policy. The Melkart Protocol in line with the Cairo Agreement and signed between the state and the PLO in 1973 is another illustration of forced accommodation. While both agreements put a legal seal on an existing structure of influence, they nevertheless constituted an aberration in the logic of the state. Avoiding a crisis at hand was the sole criterion of success in each case at the cost of the state withdrawing from its role as the sole protector of the national territories.

The Predicament of Foreign Policy

For the integral Lebanonist constituency, the historical legacy that reaches back to the Phoenicians produced certain myths that glorify the Lebanese personality and stress its particularities in relation with the Arab environment. Those myths were reinforced by certain socio-economic performances and successes that were partly due to developments in the Arab world but which, nevertheless, helped nourish the image of self-aggrandizement and a sense of superiority towards the same Arab world. In foreign policy, the inflated image led to the prescription of goals beyond the capabilities of the constituency. They led also to an overestimation of Lebanon's place, particularly the Christian part of it, on the Western strategic chessboard. But soon the Lebanonists discovered, particularly in difficult times, that 'their' West sold them for a barrel of oil. The growing feeling of isolation reflected a naive assumption about the 'West's' interests and policy guidelines.

The cultural affinity and the political identification with the West were expected to produce a politico-military strategic commitment by the latter to the Lebanonists' goals and policies. Fighting to protect the

'only western model' in the Arab world was of no political value to 'their' West, nor was the struggle to champion the cause of 'Christian minorities' in the 'bastion of minorities'. Whether it is a messianic mission or a policy aiming at shaping a certain configuration of power in the Arab world,⁷ the goals were always set beyond the available resources.

Lebanon's neutrality, basically in the Arab-Israeli context, is the second cornerstone of the Lebanonist policy. Such a policy suffers from two basic shortcomings. Firstly, a strong consensus at home is needed to launch that policy but this proved impossible, for neutrality in this respect cannot be dissociated from the identity issue. It would have to be based on the assumption that Lebanon is not bound by any particular relationship to the Arab world. By considering that Lebanese-Arab relations are 'normal' inter-state relations, the logic of policy denies the specificities of inter-Arab relations that are the product of a sense of belonging to the larger Arab identity. Secondly, if it is assumed that the first condition is satisfied, self-neutralization as 'a unilateral declaration does not constitute a status of permanent neutrality in international law unless it is accompanied by some form of international agreement or recognition.'⁸ Such a condition cannot be realized due to the strategic choices of the main regional parties involved in the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Meanwhile, the foreign policy of the dependent Arabists suffers from two major problems: inconsistency that leads to loss of credibility, and the reinforcement of the image of being only a conduit and a mirror to others' policies despite the fact that their behaviour is couched in trans-national terms. Otherwise, how can one perceive a logical sequence between the call for implementation of certain policies by Lebanon or the conduct of others through Lebanon on the one hand, and on the other hand the acceptance that the Arab pole—the

⁷ See for example Naoum Farah, 'Liban—L'enjeu', *Politique Internationale*, Summer 1984, no. 24, pp. 229–40. The writer, a high ranking official of the Lebanese Forces suggests that a federal system based on a Christian-Druze axis would help create privileged relations between the Christians of the Lebanon, the Jews of Israel and the Alawites of Syria. According to the author, this would help establish a geopolitical barrier to stop Islamic fundamentalism.

⁸ Cyril Black, Richard Falk, Klaus Knorr and Oran Young, *Neutralization and World Politics*, Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1968, p.18.

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model and the point of reference for this constituency—does not have to abide by the same policy guidelines. Worse still, dependent Arabists may defend the pole's behaviour by resorting to explanations emanating from the logic of the state. The same constituency expects Lebanon to grant maximal freedom of operation for the PLO while shying away from placing the same demands on the Arab pole. Inconsistency knows no limits. In the logic of things, Lebanon is expected to be the only Arab country engaged in a state of permanent *de facto* war with Israel, obstructed from containing that war while others can maintain a state of *de facto* peace with Israel. The only explanation to the predicament of inconsistency is the acceptance of and respect for others' statehood and autonomy and the denial of the same rights for Lebanon.

The second major problem lies in the dependent Arabists' perception of the Lebanese setting. The goals pursued through Lebanon and those set for Lebanon are done independently of its national capabilities. The indifference to the relationship between capabilities and goals definition indicates among other things political short-sightedness and irresponsible behaviour considering the devastating implications such policies could have on the national society. Is it plausible to engage Lebanon in a war of attrition with Israel when 'all is quiet on the Eastern front?' The irony of this policy is clear: while invoking the Arabness of Lebanon to engage the country in a high-risk/low-yield course of action, it alienates a wide segment of the population from an Arab nationalism which is associated with a heavy burden that is beyond their capacity.

On the other hand, the dependent Islamists do their utmost to tie Lebanon to Iran's strategy, at the cost of turning Lebanon into a pariah state because of certain actions which they either carry out or sanction as a means of reaching their goals. Lebanon becomes the launching pad to liberate *dār al-islām* and a zone of confrontation against Israel (*dār al-ḥarb*). While Lebanon bears the burden of a permanent Islamic revolution, Iran can distance itself theoretically from that policy and escape its repercussions. The dependent Islamists' policy reflects the perception of Lebanon as a theatre of operations rather than a state. Meanwhile, the failure of this constituency to greatly influence Lebanon's relations with its immediate milieu and subsequently the state's foreign policy results from the constraints

placed on the Islamists by the two former constituencies, particularly the Arabists who, compared to the others, have fewer capabilities.

As far as the foreign policy of the state is concerned, certain similarities appear from the two most important instances of the confrontation model i.e. the Chamoun policy and the Gemayel first-stage policy. Both policies suffered from a miscalculation of the then regional configuration of power and the ideological make-up that accompanied it. President Chamoun chose to align his policy on the bloc of the past—centred around Iraq and associated with colonialism—rather than the bloc of the future centred around Egypt and the ascending Arab nationalism. President Gemayel chose the American-Israeli option against the Syrian one when the Arab world, which does not necessarily endorse Syria's policies, was unable and unwilling to stand up to it. Despite an unfavourable Arab balance of power and the fact that Arab legitimacy was at odds with their policies, both presidents were overconfident that their extra-regional ally, the US, would not let them down. Chamoun's subscription to the Eisenhower doctrine was not enough to bring him the support of the US which had to wait until after the Iraqi revolution.

Like Chamoun, Gemayel's US policy got him into trouble. It elicited more enmity from his adversaries and neutralized his potential friends. Both leaders suffered from a geostrategic myopia caused by their overestimation of Lebanon's strategic value and of their misreading of the superpower's commitment to their policies. Chamoun discovered that the US had abandoned him⁹ for the sake of a policy of appeasement towards Nasser after he had perceived himself as fighting the US war against what Nasser stood for. Gemayel, too, found that the Americans were more interested in placating the Syrians while he was confronting them because of his US policy. What the two leaders failed to see was that Egypt's Nasser and Syria's Assad, even as adversaries, were by far more important to appease because of their capabilities and regional status than a vulnerable, divided, unconditionally pro-American Lebanon. Both leaders learned the hard way a very basic lesson of *realpolitik*: a *détente* with a regional superpower is more rewarding than an *entente* with an underdog.

⁹ Camille Chamoun, *Crise au Moyen Orient*, Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1963, pp. 11, 424–31.

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On the other hand, the policy of forced accommodation that characterized relations with the PLO during the Hélou mandate and the first part of the Frangieh mandate was also a shambles. Unwilling to stand up to Israel for fear of the repercussions of any limited confrontation with it, thus unable to defend the Palestinians in Lebanon, the state relinquished a main role—ensuring the security of the country. The policy of avoiding even minimal expense led to a war of attrition between the PLO and Israel in Lebanon that proved to be more costly. Indifferent to the necessity of adjusting to the new stage of the Arab-Israeli conflict created by the uncontrollable influx of the Palestinian military machine in Lebanon, the state did not formulate a new politico-security policy to cope with the drastic changes that occurred. Instead, it accepted gradually the prevalence in practice of the *raison de révolution* over the *raison d'état* in determining Lebanon's relations to its milieu.

For the PLO, the Cairo Agreement and the Melkart Protocol constituted the last line of defence to fall back on when the odds were against it. Otherwise, the PLO's behaviour went beyond the modalities of both agreements, for anarchy begets opportunities and a power vacuum invites power expansion. The foreign policy of quick fix carried the seed of future conflict. The attempts to maintain the illusion of a status quo that was already undermined by the new realities led to total destabilization.

Most foreign policy analysts share the view that the wider the gap between the 'psychological environment'¹⁰ and the operational environment of the decision-maker, the more his policies are doomed to fail. The predicament of the state's foreign policy and of the three constituencies lies in their lack of realism. In other words, each of these policies suffered from a distorted reading of some, if not most, of the following elements: the configuration of power at a certain moment in the Arab regional milieu, the underlying patterns of Arab politics, the role of Arab legitimacies, the strategic interests of the Great Powers, the national capabilities, the particularities

¹⁰ Defined by the perception of the decision-maker which is shaped by, among other things, his value system, his ideological preferences and his learning experience. Perception acts as a lense that could distort or change the image of the 'real' or operational environment.

of Lebanon and its geopolitical importance to the other actors. The tendency to formulate goals independent of the constraining regional and domestic elements, to overestimate one element at the detriment of others or to suppress certain elements because such an exercise fits the ideological prism of the concerned party, can never produce a viable foreign policy. Indeed, it feeds more instability at home.

The Plausible Scenarios and the Foreign Policy Implications for the State

Failure of conflict management

That the major power brokers in Lebanon—Syria and the US—would like to avoid a constitutional vacuum which will have an adverse effect on their interests does not necessarily produce a workable formula for conflict management. The election of a new president could indicate a strategic truce, the lowest common denominator, to avoid the worst before resuming the dispute over Lebanon, each expecting afterwards to steer the new regime in its direction. Whereas such a scenario would allow a breathing space for the Lebanese, it does not break the stalemate. Lebanon will continue to experience periods of low-intensity conflict and periods of open warfare—a war of trenches—reminiscent of the First World War.

Meanwhile, the Polandization of Lebanon remains an impossible solution, for the rules and norms that govern inter-state relations in the contemporary system are unlike those of eighteenth-century Europe. Moreover, the disappearance of a state is not a solution that ensures stability. It would upset the regional and international balances of power leading to more tension in the international system. Besides, it sets a dangerous precedent in a nuclear world. In this scenario, we may feature the reinforcement of the *modus vivendi* among the existing statelets not without an uneasy coexistence, that is more a function of regional rather than domestic politics, e.g. the state of confrontation between Syria and Israel, the nature of the relationship between Syria and the US and the adverse partnership between Iran and Syria. On the foreign policy level, the main outcome will be a policy of abstention or paralysis; either the avoidance of more crises, or the mutual neutralization between ‘*al-ḥukm*’ and ‘*al-ḥukūma*’. The issue of whether Lebanon should resume its diplomatic relations with Egypt is a good

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case of what preceded. When the vast majority of the Arab states have done so and while most of the Lebanese political establishment maintains good political relations with Egypt, Lebanon is unable to take the necessary step because of a Syrian veto exerted through the dependent Arabist constituency, more specifically through the Prime Minister's office i.e. the Achilles heel through which the Arab pole at any moment would paralyze the state decision-making process from within.

But there could be certain instances of foreign policy actions where there could exist a consensus between the Lebanonists and Arabists that would allow for the formulation of certain policy decisions. Yet nothing guarantees the implementation or the continuation of that policy which emerged out of a certain conjecture and that would become dysfunctional because of the fluidity of regional politics and their influence over Lebanon. One may pinpoint in this context the decision to abrogate the Cairo Agreement; the outcome of a collusion between 'al-*ḥukm*' and the Syrians. Another example of policy formulation is the position that emerged by consensus in June 1987 concerning the terms of reference of Lebanon's participation in the international peace conference in the Middle East, a position that reflected also the tacit agreement between the forces mentioned earlier.

Successful conflict management

Syria and the US could work out a reform project that introduces some changes in the constitutional structure of Lebanon which meet certain demands of the dependent Arabist constituency without challenging the main interests of the Lebanonist constituency or at least of its moderate factions; a certain arrangement similar, perhaps, to the one reached over Lebanon in 1958 between the United Arab Republic (UAR) and the US and the incomplete reforms at home initiated by the Shihab regime. A redistribution of power among the sects could take place. For example, a new National Pact *à trois* to include the newly powerful Shi'i sect or maybe a National Pact *à quatre*, bringing the Druze into the game as the other contender to this prominent status in the Lebanese sectarian setting. Regardless of what form power sharing takes, it will always reflect cosmetic rather than qualitative change for it will reinforce the basic foundation of the state, its domination by the sect, instead of challenging this cardinal tenet of the

Lebanese national fabric. That a fragile peace will be established does not phase out the new and old detonating elements. They will be controlled or suppressed until a new crisis in the regional milieu reactivates them and breaks the consensus at home, particularly in the area of foreign policy or because of it. The symptomatic weakness and vulnerability of the state will be preserved as well as the conduit that ensures the strong penetration of the state by its regional milieu.

What will emerge is a foreign policy that has to address the constant challenge of striking a balance between the pressures and demands of the Arab milieu and those of the Lebanonist constituency; a policy that may resemble in some instances the consensual one mentioned in the preceding scenarios, but also an escapist policy characterized by evasion and deferment to find itself later on facing more problems when the consensus at the basis of that policy collapses in time of crisis.

Between the two poles of confrontation and forced accommodation there could develop a policy of preventive accommodation. One form of it is a passive policy such as the one followed by President Sarkis between 1976 and 1982: refraining from taking any action which could be provocative to the Syrians¹¹ and thus bringing about more devastating results. Contemplating the cost such action could incur in Lebanon, abstention and self-restraint became the virtues of Sarkis's policy. Another form is active preventive accommodation illustrated by President Shihab's Arab policy between 1958 and 1964, particularly in his rapprochement with Egypt's Nasser which inaugurated his regime in 1958, thereby helping him to consolidate the national consensus and reinforce domestic stability.

Process of conflict solution

Such a desirable scenario could emerge if the new regime has the vision to establish a second republic and subsequently has a national project for that endeavour. In this respect one needs to caution against two opposite mentalities: the quick fix mentality that carries a naive conception of conflict solution which, faced with the first obstacle, will withdraw leaving behind it shattered dreams and failed expectations.

¹¹ See for example, Karim Pakradouni, *Asalām al-Mafqūd*, 5th ed., Beirut: 'Ibr al Sharq li 'l-Manshūrāt, 1984, p. 245 and pp. 282–3.

may contribute later on to a re-evaluation of this relationship. But more important is the growing awareness among the Lebanese, the by-product of a diaspora and its sufferings, that Lebanon, not the sect, the party, the ideology or the Arab pole, is the only actor in a world of states that can provide its citizens with the security, comfort and well-being associated with belonging to a state. Trans-Lebanese ideals remain important: they perform an ultimate function, but only after the conditions for statehood have been met. Then comes the task of developing the foundations and parameters of foreign policy once a national consensus is established. The different geopolitical milieux of Lebanon in order of importance are: the Syrian, the Arab-Israeli conflict defined geographically and functionally, the Arab milieu and the international one. If the latter is the least controversial for foreign policy, the first three are the most controversial in the order in which they appear.

(i) *The Syrian milieu*

History and geography bestowed on Syria a central role in Arab politics which contenders to regional leadership—Nasser in the 1950s, the Saudis in the 1970s and the Iranians in the 1980s—as well as superpowers have recognized and dealt with as such. More important to Lebanon is the fact that Syria is not only its geographical but also its political gateway to the Arab world.

The Lebanese have learned that in case of conflict with Syria, regional and international powers tend to be more sensitive to Syria's rather than Lebanon's interests and demands. That at a certain stage of the conflict a power may tend to use Lebanon to extract more concessions from the Syrians does not change the fact that in the final analysis the Syrian option emerges to the detriment of Lebanon. Thus, regardless of the orientation of the regime in power in Syria, a basic tenet in Lebanese policy should be to seek a relationship of *entente* with Syria. The slogan of security interdependence between the two countries needs to be translated into a concrete understanding that embodies guidelines, not necessarily institutionalized partly because of the sensitivity that can evoke in Lebanon and elsewhere in the Arab world, but basically because institutionalization does not guarantee success. On the other hand, a strong state in Lebanon could guarantee Syria's vital interests. While in a *de facto* partitioned Lebanon Syria

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Set against it is the defeatist, resigned mentality that conceives of the world as moving by a conspiratorial, deterministic game of power beyond our means and thus suggests a fatalistic attitude.

For the national project to take off, it must evolve around the state—the central authority—which is the only potentially credible and neutral actor, if it meets the challenge, to be in the driver's seat. The crux of the national project is to put the state over the sects. A process of upward and gradual abolition of sectarianism would constitute a good step on the path of state building and national integration. No stable order can ever be built on sectarian fear and sectarian injustice. While short-term stability could result from a well-guarded sectarian order, it will fade away when the conditions that created the guarantees for that order change. Long-term stability can only be established on a legitimate order which can absorb the challenges emanating from home and abroad. Politico-cultural decentralization or any new form of consociationalism carries a built-in conflict. Indeed, nursing different sectarian cultures that would encompass different, often contradictory political and national values can never be brought together to produce a harmonious foreign policy, an area left to the central government according to the proponents of political decentralization.

Building up national consensus would require a two-fold process. First, the demystification of the ahistorical integral Lebanonism that sees in Arabism a negation of the Lebanese identity. The national loyalty should be based on socio-political and cultural foundations that have to do with the immediate national past and the choices of the future rather than on an imaginary, inflated history that does not stand the test of the sociological formation and evolution of independent Lebanon. Second, the normalization of Arabism whereby the latter becomes a cultural identity that embodies solidarity rather than being reduced exclusively to the realm of politics; haunted by the idea of the one state while following a policy of self-abnegation by being totally subdued to any Arab pole. In this context, the task of historiography will be the transformation of the artificial exclusivity of identities deriving from politico-ideological reasons into a compatibility of identities.

The growing sentiment of frustration experienced in the different constituencies *vis-à-vis* their respective trans-state ideals is having an adverse effect on their perception of their relationship to them and

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may have full control over certain regions, it always runs the risk of seeing Lebanon turn into its own Vietnam with the difference that Syria, unlike the US, would not be able to withdraw or become totally entangled in the situation for geographical reasons.

In this respect, a contributing element to the normalization of Lebanese/Syrian relations is the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two to phase out a main source of frustration for a segment of the Lebanese society and a successful tool of mobilization against the Syrians in time of crisis. Syria could be encouraged on this path if Lebanon defines the modalities of its Syrian policy; indeed, as the 'soft belly' of Syria, Lebanon should never nurse the idea of subscribing to the Kautilyan principle¹² and thus participate in a policy of containment against Syria for which Lebanon will bear the negative impact. The Shihab regime understood these geopolitical realities the best when it followed a policy of rapprochement with the UAR, greatly motivated by the fact that Nasser was then the leader of Syria.

In formulating a Syrian policy, Lebanon will have to differentiate between vital/primary Syrian interests and political/secondary interests. What pertains directly to the domestic security of Syria and to its regional security particularly with regard to Israel¹³ should constitute a cornerstone in Lebanon's policy. Despite the open system in Lebanon, guidelines should be established so that the basic institutions of the Lebanese democracy, e.g. the media, will not be used by certain states or foreign groups to threaten the security of Syria. Freedom needs to be accompanied by self-restraint so as not to jeopardize the national interests of the country that professes it, otherwise it turns into anarchy whose first victim is freedom itself. Meanwhile, as far as Lebanese/Arab policy is concerned, Syria should come to terms with the fact that Lebanon's policy cannot be dictated by Syria's Arab interests, ideological preferences or alliance politics. Policy differences are legitimate and thus should be manageable as long as they do not threaten the vital interests of either state.

¹² Always try to befriend the neighbour of the neighbour.

¹³ Addressed later on.

(ii) The Arab-Israeli conflict milieu

Lebanon's attempts to disengage itself from the conflict proved to be a failure, providing the regional powers directly involved in the conflict with the only opportunity to advance their goals and to influence the politics and objectives of their adversaries. To the PLO, Lebanon remains the unique theatre where it can exercise its *raison d'être*: fighting a liberation war against Israel and preserving its status as a key actor in the conflict diplomacy. For Iran, the latecomer on the Lebanese scene, Lebanon provided also an opportunity to bring its influence to bear directly on Arab and regional affairs. Meanwhile, Syria has a two-fold policy: a defensive stance to reduce its military vulnerability with regard to Israel through the Lebanese 'corridor', and an offensive one to hold as many cards as possible in the conflict diplomacy. For Israel, Lebanon presented a host of interests ranging from the exploitation of its water resources, to a redrawing of the frontiers after Israel renounced the Armistice agreement, to attempting a separate peace with Lebanon by taking advantage of its sectarian fabric—a goal that Israel has nursed since its inception¹⁴—to finally trying to break the weakest link in the Arab chain through both acts of interference and intervention. Thus, if total disengagement is impossible for regional and domestic reasons, it remains essential to define the terms of engagement to lessen the vulnerability of Lebanon to the dynamics of the conflict.

While the Arab states could be motivated by ideological or political factors to seek a resolution to the Palestinian problem, the core of the conflict, Lebanon should be motivated less by the symbolic solidarity with the PLO and more by geopolitical and demographic considerations. The indifference to Israel's intentions in Lebanon, the misunderstanding of the dynamics of Palestinian nationalism and the unwillingness to accept a certain level of sacrifice, proved fatal to Lebanon: the illusion of an easy way out of the conflict brought Lebanon more into the conflict, but on terms dictated by others. When frustrated by Arab paralysis, Lebanon cannot afford to follow a course of action, like Egypt's Sadat, that is riskier and more costly than the implications of

¹⁴ See Frederic C. Hof, *Galilee Divided: The Israeli-Lebanon Frontier, 1916–1984*, Boulder, Westview Press, 1985, especially pp. 38, 56, 63.

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abstaining from making any separate move that could threaten the vital interests of both Syria and the PLO. Both can frustrate the Lebanese policy and turn Lebanon into a pariah state in the Arab world. To think that Lebanon could follow Egypt's lead in this respect spells ignorance of the tremendous differences that exist between the two states: a strong tradition of statehood in Egypt versus the realities of a vulnerable state in a fragile national setting; the incomparable overall capabilities between the two; and the relative geographic insulation of Egypt versus the geographic centrality of Lebanon from the Arab-Israeli conflict.

The architects of the negotiations with Israel discovered, but at what price, the shortcomings of their approach. Instead of looking at the Lebanese-Israeli negotiations in the context of a wider framework of negotiations between Syria and the US whereby the nature of the latter would determine the outcome of the former, they failed to understand the direction of the linkage between the two and acted instead under the illusion of a reversed linkage. Otherwise how could they have expected Syria to adjust to the modalities of the agreement and the exchanged letters attached to it about simultaneous withdrawal, had it not been for such illusion?¹⁵

From what preceded, four elements emerge as the terms of the Lebanese engagement:

(a) The maintenance of close security and diplomatic co-ordination with Syria, namely in the context of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Otherwise the latter could be a permanent source of friction and tension between the two states.

(b) If it is in Lebanon's interest not to make peace alone, so it is Lebanon's right not to make war alone. Like the other confrontation states, the normalization of the situation on the Lebanese-Israeli border becomes an ultimate and legitimate goal; a task that can be assumed successfully by the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) when it is supported by an effective political consensus.

¹⁵ See the interesting analysis of Ghassan Tuéni, *Une Guerre pour les autres*, Paris, Editions Lattès, 1985, pp. 336-37 and the account of Wadi Haddad, *Lebanon: The Politics of Revolving Doors*, USA, Praeger Special Studies, 1985, pp. 93-4.

(c) The reformulation of new guidelines for the coexistence between Lebanon's *raison d'état* and the PLO's *raison de révolution*. While the PLO should be allowed to operate politically from Lebanon, it has to subjugate its military option to the necessities of Lebanon's security as is the case elsewhere in other Arab states.

(d) The need to pursue a dynamic foreign policy to promote the concept of the international peace conference. It is not enough to bring a timid support to an issue of vital interest.

(iii) The Arab milieu

Until recently, the Arab system could absolve itself from its collective responsibilities towards the Palestinian issue by yielding an unconditional support to the PLO in Lebanon. But gone are the days when tensions and conflicts between Arab states and groups could be limited to Lebanon. Nowadays, others' wars in Lebanon start to spill over more frequently into the vulnerable Arab states. The safety valve that Lebanon was to Arab politics is turning into a detonating device in the Arab world. It is in the latter's interest to help rebuild the state in Lebanon by providing an environment conducive to that end. Meanwhile, like all small states, Lebanon's interest in defending its security and promoting its well-being necessitates an active presence in Arab multilateral institutions. Indeed, the stronger the values espoused by these institutions and the norms intended to govern inter-Arab relations, the better Lebanon's interests are served.

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