THE UNRAVELING OF LEBANON'S TAIF AGREEMENT

Limits of Sect-Based Power Sharing

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Summary

Since the upheavals that began in 2011, states in the Middle East with plu-
ralistic, heterogeneous societies have collapsed, driving a renewed interest in
sectarian power-sharing systems as possible models for these countries' rehabil-
itation. Lebanon has just such a system in which religious communities share
power. Although it is flawed and unraveling in many ways, it has helped keep
the country at peace and provides valuable lessons for the region.

An Unraveling System

- The Lebanese political system is based on a sectarian division of constitu-
  tional powers and administrative positions, guaranteeing the representa-
  tion of certain groups while also contributing to decisionmaking paralysis.

- The flaws of the sect-based governance system in part led Lebanon into civil
  war. The 1989 Taif Agreement, which put an end to the war, reshuffled the
  system. Syria was made the postwar power broker and given guardianship
  over Lebanon.

- After Taif, a divisive tension arose between Lebanon's two main Muslim
  communities, the Sunnis and Shia. Syria managed the divisions while also
  exacerbating them.

- Sunni-Shia frictions sharpened after the assassination of Lebanon's prime
  minister and Syria's 2005 withdrawal from the country. They further
  intensified with the 2011 outbreak of the Syrian civil war.

- Today, the Lebanese state is deadlocked. Lebanon has no president, and
  parliament has been paralyzed since 2013.

- Many Lebanese seem to believe their system is the least bad option com-
  pared with neighbors, but the state's dysfunction raises doubts about
  implementing the Lebanese model elsewhere.

Implications for Lebanon and the Region

- For a Lebanon-inspired system to work in other states in the region, sig-
  nificant societal adjustments would be required.

- Time and historical experience have largely rendered sectarianism com-
  monplace in Lebanon, and it is now deeply entrenched in the collective
  ethos and national behavior. Other Arab countries lack this characteristic.
  Models of centralized states that rely on a unifying definition of national

identity for state building are the rule across the region, and the idea of pan-Arabism has traditionally been more attractive than that of states constructed around subnational identities.

- There are typically no winners and no vanquished emerging from crises in Lebanon. This has helped Lebanon's sect-based system survive since the 1940s. This type of culture is missing in many Arab states.

- Lebanon's system held together in the past in large part thanks to an external regulator, Syria. The chaotic state of Lebanon's system today is to a considerable degree due to the absence of that external force. It is difficult to imagine an outside power could help guarantee peace in other Arab states.

Introduction

The upheavals in the Arab world that began in December 2010 and continue to this day in a number of countries shook the most solid pillars of what had been considered a stable, even immutable, Arab order. Several countries long considered solidly under the control of authoritarian regimes have fragmented, bringing to the fore realities that had largely been beneath the surface. One of these realities was the heterogeneous nature of the social fabric in a number of Arab states, and, therefore, the fragile relationship between this social reality and the states themselves, which were openly challenged in the revolutionary process.

All across the Middle East today the political systems of a number of countries are eroding, and states themselves are unraveling, while their societies are fragmenting, perhaps irremediably. This is particularly true in the Levant, where identity politics have come to predominate, and where, until recently, disparate sectarian, ethnic, and tribal groups coexisted in mosaic-like social environments, for the most part in heavily centralized, strongly nationalistic state systems.

Because of this unraveling, the decadelong process of nation building in a number of mixed states proved to be elusive, despite the strong, even brutal, dynamics that were brought to bear. Instead, substate and subnational identities now increasingly appear to prevail. Their consolidation is, in part at least, a defense mechanism, the answer to perceptions of threat, which are frequently defined and described in sectarian terms. In the past, substate and subnational identities were kept in abeyance in the presence of state apparatuses much more focused on defending a privileged minority clan than on enhancing the public interest.

Today, the broader Sunni-Shia rift, which has had dramatic repercussions in the Levant in particular, is the most visible and explosive of these identity-shaped responses. However, beyond the purely sectarian question (one that takes religion as a determining factor in behavior), the question of minorities—or groups that define and perceive themselves as being marginalized by a dominant community or suppressed by an aggressive minority—is also at play in the Middle East. Identity reformation expresses itself in sectarian terms, as well as in ethnic or even tribal terms, depending on which Arab country is affected. Identity reformation tends to express itself in terms of sect in Bahrain, Iraq, Kuwait, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Syria, or elsewhere in the Levant and in the Gulf—where Sunnis, Shia, Christians, and other minorities often coexist. It tends to do so more in ethnic terms elsewhere—Kurds or Turkmen in northern Syria and Iraq, and Berbers in the Maghreb.

In all these cases, the dynamics of disintegration that have been unleashed will be difficult to reverse without new and inventive means of political reintegration. On the social level, and in cases of civil conflicts or wars, this will entail processes of reconciliation, justice, and the redistribution of resources. On the political level, countries will have to go through structural political change, even political reengineering, to devise new power-sharing formulas that can take the new realities into account and come to grips with them.

The dynamics of disintegration that have been unleashed in the Arab world will be difficult to reverse without new and inventive means of political reintegration.

The challenge ahead, if the Arab world is to emerge from the long night in which it seems to have entered, will be to try to find the proper balance between a more unified national identity and sociological and political pluralism, as a prelude to democracy. Such a balance will be very difficult to attain.

Over the course of the past century, since the development of the modern Arab state system, pan-Arab nationalism has developed amid nationalistic political cultures that only partially approximated the ideal of Arab nationalism as well as sub-state loyalties and allegiances. These loyalties and allegiances were suppressed by authoritarian regimes through mechanisms of state centralization, which aimed to overwhelm and marginalize primordial ties in the state. The process came at the expense of individual rights and freedoms.

Of all the Arab states, only Lebanon pretended to offer a different answer. It crafted an unusual power-sharing and governing system, based on a different definition of identity than in other Arab countries. Lebanon gradually adopted a political system built on sectarian representation, itself influenced by developments during the Ottoman period. This was done as soon as the state of Greater Lebanon was formally established under French authority on September 1, 1920.

Political sectarianism in Lebanon was refined and embraced by the independence movement in November 1943 through what became known as the National Pact, an unwritten agreement that laid the foundations of a sectarian system in the postindependence republic. Surprisingly, the pact survived the civil war of 1975–1990. The conflict began, in part, because of calls to abolish political sectarianism. Yet political sectarianism was reaffirmed and even consolidated in the Taif Agreement of 1989, also known as the Document of National Accord. In that regard Lebanon has the illustrious privilege of having been a pioneer in the creation of a system based on sectarianism and also a laboratory highlighting its dysfunctions and limitations.

Political sectarianism has had its successes as well as its sad and bloody moments of failure and shame. It is worth investigating both extremes and reexamining the origins and history of Lebanese sectarianism, its translation into a political structure, and the dynamics of its unraveling in the period leading up to 1975. The conditions under which the system was resurrected and reshaped after the war and how, nowadays, it is showing its limitations

also merit attention. The question of how, or whether, the confessional system can still deal with and adapt to the many structural challenges that it faces again in 2016 can be addressed by focusing on Lebanon. And, given the strong and profound relationship between Syria and Lebanon since the two countries' inception, the dynamics of the ongoing conflict in Syria, and that country's disintegration, are weighing most heavily on the future prospects of the Lebanese system.

In light of this, the many flaws in the Lebanese system have become increasingly evident. What is striking in the current regional political context, however, is that because all the experiments elsewhere in creating strong centralized states have failed, some analysts and policymakers are willing to look at the Lebanese system, or experience, in a new way. Their interest lies in determining what can be taken from, or influenced by, Lebanon and applied to mixed Arab countries in deep crisis, and what is to be avoided at all costs. For example, analysts as well as policymakers observing post-2003 Iraq have often referred to an "Iraqi Taif" to govern communal relations in the future—in reference to the Lebanese postwar reconciliation and power distribution agreement. More recently, some attempts to address the mayhem in Syria have led to discussions of adopting some features of Lebanon's system to bring about an eventual "Syrian Taif."

Similar calls may involve other countries in the region as the quest for new and more flexible paths to accommodate different identities, integrate societies, and allow for political power sharing become unavoidable. This is why an assessment of Lebanese sectarianism conjures up some lessons that could have relevance for the region. The Lebanese experience may form the basis for a reflection on what may be applied elsewhere, and what, on the contrary, would best be abandoned.

A Muslim-Christian National Pact

Lebanon's system of political confessionalism (*al-taifiyya al-siyasiyya*), or political sectarianism, was originally an answer to a sociological and ideological challenge. A sectarian distribution of power had already been adopted under the Ottoman Empire, since the inception of the administrative region of Mount Lebanon during the nineteenth century as the nucleus of modern Lebanon. The governing system that was introduced after the civil war in Mount Lebanon in 1860, the *mutasarrifiyya*, like the arrangement adopted earlier to end the conflict of 1840, accepted the various religious sects as political actors. In the post-1860 period, and under the authority of a non-Arab Christian Ottoman governor known as the *mutasarrif*, an administrative council was created in which seats were reserved for the six main religious sects in Mount Lebanon, proportional to their overall numbers.[1]

What is notable here is that this post-1860 power-sharing and local governance formula followed a conflict that had pitted the Druze against the Maronites, the two main communities of the semiautonomous Mount Lebanon region. Further tensions later on, not to mention the civil war of 1975, were similarly ended through power-sharing and political rebalancing arrangements, though the pursuit of nonsectarian systems of political accommodation was never attempted.

From a multicommunal society, Lebanon was thus transformed into a multicommunal state system. The sociological reality, a relatively neutral one at the beginning, was used by the founders of the Lebanese polity to become the prime consideration of their political order. To paraphrase the Marxist formula regarding social classes and their formation, the adoption of political sectarianism in Lebanon could be considered similar to the passing from a group (or a community) in itself to a group (or a community) for itself. After that, the culture of political sectarianism became gradually entrenched in the collective consciousness and political practice of Lebanon's political and social elites.

On the ideological level, political sectarianism indirectly answered a challenge that emerged from the conditions in which the Lebanese entity was born. The formation of Greater Lebanon after 1920 could not be considered—whether by its detractors or partisans—anything more than a French colonial construct undertaken with the active complicity of Maronite elites and on their own behalf. For both the Maronites and the French, while motivated by different reasons, the aim was to provide Christians with a quasi-national homeland in a Muslim-majority Middle East. Maronite elites saw this venture as the crowning moment of a long-maturing project of a Lebanese nation,[2] in which the ambiguous relationship between Lebanonism and political Maronitism was never resolved.[3] For France, in the midst of its growing rivalry with Great Britain, the motive was to satisfy its geopolitical interests. It sought a vanguard in the Levant that would allow France to project its ideology in the region, alongside a policy of minority protection—that of the Christians at the forefront.

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Thus, from the outset, Maronite elites had to invent a founding narrative that would supersede and transcend their new state's very crude raison-d'être. Given Lebanon's new demographic and sociological makeup, created by the enlargement of the country around a core of Mount Lebanon, a more inclusive discourse was needed to better accommodate the Muslim sects that had been integrated into the new state and that demographically were almost as numerous as the Maronites. In other words, hegemony needed to be transformed into a more commonly accepted national story in order to supersede and absorb the cleavages between the main communities.

Additionally, the plethora of competing narratives and legends surrounding the Lebanese entity and its legitimacy—from the myth of Phoenician ancestry, to the Maronite presence described by France's King Louis IX as a

"rose between two thorns," to the country as an outpost of the Arab conquest of the Levant—had to be balanced.[4] The emirate (until 1841), the nucleus of Greater Lebanon that reflected Maronite-Druze joint sovereignty, had already been grounded in the idea of a land of refuge for persecuted communities. This narrative delved into the early history of religious schisms and conflicts in the region, from the original fragmentation of primitive Christian churches to the Arab and Muslim conquest and its repercussions on the Middle East. This was thus seen as a convenient framework to encompass other religious groups, provided its scope was widened and it was granted a universal dimension. Lebanon was therefore to be considered a land of communal coexistence, mainly between Islam and Christianity, and a bridge between the East and the West, between Arab lands and Europe.

A consequence of Lebanon's national power-sharing pledge was the decision to reserve highly important government positions for particular communities.

Such ideas were precisely what Bechara el-Khoury, Lebanon's president at the time, and Riad al-Solh, the prime minister, integrated into the National Pact of 1943.[5] According to Solh's formulation, the National Pact's primary aim was to "Lebanonize Lebanese Muslims and to Arabize Lebanon's Christians."[6] In the pact Christians were supposed to renounce alignment with the West (mainly France), while Muslims were to forgo any notion of integrating Lebanon into a larger Arab nation.

With respect to the details of governance and the structure of the independent state, the National Pact put in place what both Khoury and Solh considered a fair distribution of power between the two religious communities, but one that would grant a large margin of superiority to the Christians. Parliamentary representation, based on ratios reflecting communal demographics, was six to five in favor of Christians over Muslims. The same ratio was adopted in the cabinet and in the civil service.

The most fascinating aspect of the National Pact, however, is one that is frequently overlooked, and yet is the most important: the allocation of the three top positions in the state to specific communities. The pact implied that the president of the republic would be a Maronite, the prime minister a Sunni, and the speaker of parliament a Shia. This was never formally stated or spelled out, but it has been left untouched ever since, indicating the strength of the pact and its superiority over rigorously written constitutional texts. Another consequence of this implicit power-sharing pledge was the decision to reserve highly important government positions for particular communities. Maronites were to get the lion's share, especially in vital sectors of the state. The commander of the army, the heads of military intelligence and the state security services, as well as the governor of the central bank, to name a few, were all Maronites.[7]

Political sectarianism had two sides. On the one hand it allowed disparate groups to come together by providing the Lebanese people with the framework to devise a social contract. On the other hand, power sharing almost necessarily introduced a corrosive machinery for the distribution of spoils. This allowed

corruption to become an accepted form of political behavior relatively quickly; over time, it translated into state inefficiency and the paralysis of decisionmaking. More important, and this is the main flaw of the sectarian model, is that reinforcing sectarian identities and providing them with full-fledged political and legal status came at the expense of convergence toward a common identity.

Consociational Democracy and Its Unraveling

By opting for a system based on political sectarianism, the founders of the Lebanese Republic effectively joined the club of so-called consociational democracies, a political model that flourished after World War II. By seeking to establish states on the basis of permanent compromise and consensus, consociationalism was an inventive way of reconciling social heterogeneity with parliamentary democracy.[8] The political unit was not only the individual but also the group. In Lebanon, religious sects were both political and legal entities, in which the rights of individuals were balanced by the guarantees given to the sects. If the notion of guarantees was mainly dear to the Christians, relating to the fears and threats they perceived in a Muslim-majority Middle East, it gradually expanded over time to encompass almost all other religious groups. Guarantees thus became another word for minority rights, a kind of material and symbolic security mechanism in which a community was assured a place in the sun whatever the changing conditions.

However, consociational democracies must meet certain conditions to function in a lasting way. These include a stable and peaceful regional environment, as well as economic growth with efficient redistributive mechanisms ensuring a socioeconomic balance between the various segments of the polity.[9]

Both conditions, in addition to many others, were cruelly lacking in Lebanon's case before 1975. Muslim political forces began demanding a greater share in a system they were more or less forced to join. Although aspirations for a unified Arab state prevailed in the Middle East, the idea that individual states were now permanent gained traction over time. If Muslims still doubted the idea of a Lebanese nation, they nevertheless began to accept the state, at least as a livable framework. Hence it became necessary for them to substantially ameliorate the conditions of their participation in this state—displaying precisely the reflexes of citizenship that their Christian partners had long demanded.

Consequently, participation (*musharaka*) became a rallying cry for Muslim politicians. This was especially true after changes in the system opened up new avenues for fundamental political change in the country.[10] The quest for greater participation emanated from highly conflictual regional dynamics, such as the escalating Arab-Israeli conflict, the rise of Palestinian militancy, inter-Arab rivalries, and the Cold War and its projections on the Middle Eastern stage. The convergence of these factors was largely the origin of Lebanon's war in 1975.

Taif's Rebalancing Act and the Sunni-Shia Question

The Lebanese conflict was not all about political sectarianism, nor was it only about the redistribution of sectarian shares in the political system. Indeed, such issues were largely tackled, and more or less agreed upon, during the early stages of the war, well before the Taif Agreement.[11] However, the domestic dimension of the war was very much about sectarianism. When Muslim political forces began contesting the system during the 1960s, it was with the aim of rebalancing powers and prerogatives between Muslims and Christians. By the 1970s this had evolved. On the eve of the war, Muslims were demanding fundamental change and the introduction of a one-person, one-vote democratic system.[12]

Yet by 1989, after multiple rounds of fighting, more than 100,000 deaths, and immeasurable destruction, all that the Taif Agreement did about sectarianism was readjust the old system. With the exception of ties with Syria and Lebanon's relations with its regional environment, Taif was much more about reorganization than transformation.

The agreement was organized around three guiding principles: the establishment of a new balance between the unity of Lebanon and its political system and the diversity of the country's political and social structure; the transfer of executive power from the presidency of the republic to the Council of Ministers as a collective body; and the principle of parity between Muslims and Christians in the parliament, the cabinet, and the higher echelons of the civil service, regardless of future demographic developments.[13] The agreement also called for the establishment of a sectarian-based senate, which guaranteed the say of religious groups by granting them oversight on vital national affairs and matters that referred to the pact, after the deconfessionalization of parliament; introduced administrative decentralization; mentioned revising the civil status law system; and called for the creation of a national committee to discuss the abolition of political sectarianism, though probably with little expectation that it would be implemented. Furthermore, Taif laid the groundwork for privileged relations between Lebanon and Syria, with implications for the two countries' political environment. Of the three principles, the first two are the most relevant for this discussion of Lebanese sectarianism. However, the third would, arguably, turn out to be the most important.

Behind the benign facade of a transfer of executive prerogatives from a once-omnipotent presidency to the Council of Ministers, Taif reorganized constitutional powers and apparatuses. It also put in place an entirely new paradigm for a sectarian balance of power by ending the political and symbolic hegemony exercised by the Maronite establishment. However, the destination of the transferred presidential powers remained unclear. By vesting such powers in the cabinet, where religious parity

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was a formal guarantee of equality among communities, Taif also disseminated and diffused power, making it difficult to locate and exercise. Nor was it clear who was to be held accountable for decisions. This situation was exacerbated by several provisions of the agreement that were, probably intentionally, left vague and subject to interpretation.

At first sight, the Sunni prime minister appeared to be the main beneficiary of this transfer of power. Nevertheless, other measures were adopted to avoid such an outcome. As the master of cabinet agendas, the prime minister had to draft them with the speaker of parliament. Taif stipulated that the executive and legislative branches were separate but that they "should work in synergy and coordination" to optimize political action. To that was added the fact that the prime minister was to be nominated after obligatory consultations between the president and speaker and the president's consultations with parliamentary blocs in the presence of the speaker. In the Council of Ministers all important decisions required a two-thirds majority, giving implicit veto power to one of the three larger anticipated blocs of ministers—those of the president, the speaker of parliament, and the prime minister. This was repeatedly true of the Shia ministers, more homogeneously organized and disciplined than the others, held together by the tight alliance between the Amal Movement (a Shia political party created in the 1970s) and Hezbollah, backed by Syria.

What has animated political life and reality since the Taif Agreement is the three-tiered interaction among Christians, Sunnis, and Shia.

So if the Sunni prime minister appeared to some as the new king, the ultimate kingmaker was nevertheless the Shia speaker—at least that is what the experience of Taif's implementation has shown until now. The speaker has been granted enhanced powers, and the speaker's term has been extended to correspond with that of parliament, normally four years. The speaker also has been granted extensive control over legislative activity and potentially has major influence over the votes of Shia ministers and parliamentarians.

At best, behind the formal facade of parity between Muslims and Christians, what has really animated political life and reality since the Taif Agreement is the three-tiered interaction among Christians (with the Maronite component gradually melding into the broader Christian community), Sunnis, and Shia. Maronite preeminence was indeed ended by Taif, but it was in turn replaced by the rising and competing preeminence of the two principal Muslim sects, and this happened well before Sunni-Shia polarization came to characterize the Middle East.

Syria as Taif's First and Ultimate Regulator

Beyond the text, Taif was largely shaped by the way it was implemented after 1990 and how Lebanon was governed, both by its new leaders and Syria, which exercised control—or tutelage—over the country. From the outset, many

observers and critics of Taif determined that the shortcomings in the means of governance outlined by the agreement were intentional, for reasons pertaining to Syrian power. The international guarantors of Taif had unanimously accepted that Syria be allowed to impose a de facto protectorate over Lebanon and its political life. Taking full advantage of the leeway it was granted, Syria played a permanent and subtle balancing act between Christians and Muslims in general, between Maronites, Sunnis, and Shia more particularly, and between Sunnis and Shia specifically, initiating many of the tensions that are present today.

More important, Syria's management of Lebanon was defined exclusively by its own priorities. These were of two sorts: The first was regional, pertaining to Syria's position on the Middle Eastern chessboard, and its relations with the Arab world and with the West, the United States in particular. The second related to maintaining delicate balances inside Syria, expertly manipulated by then president Hafez al-Assad and increasingly affected by the imperative of ensuring his own succession.

Syria's tutelage over Lebanon was accepted by the international community in exchange for Damascus's constructive participation in the peace process with Israel, an outgrowth of the Madrid Conference of 1991. From Syria's perspective, in line with its first priority, this role allowed it to gain leverage in the negotiations by manipulating the still-open front in Israeli-occupied southern Lebanon, in which Hezbollah played an important role. At the same time Syria was the overseer and de facto protector of the lucrative reconstruction process in Lebanon, guided by Rafik Hariri, the indispensable prime minister as of 1992. This allocation of roles allowed Syria to award Hariri's political patron, Saudi Arabia, as well as other Gulf and Sunni-majority Arab states, a stake in stabilizing the country, while at the same time extracting enormous financial profits for its own elite through this protection mechanism.[14]

Assad's highly accurate reading of power relations in Lebanon and the region permitted him to play effectively on both levels. At moments of stalemate or crisis in the negotiations between Syria and Israel, Hezbollah operations in southern Lebanon would all of a sudden escalate, sometimes culminating in mini-wars, leading to rapid intervention by international actors. When, on the contrary, the process was smoother, or when Assad's relations with France, the United States, or Saudi Arabia were good, the obstacles faced by Hariri's governments were eased, projects were passed on to parliament and swiftly approved, with notable acceptance by all Shia and pro-Syrian ministers in the cabinet. Resistance and reconstruction became the dual Syrian options in Lebanon, while also reflecting the polarization existing in the region. Metaphors aimed at illustrating this balancing act flourished. Some were even devised by the actors themselves, such as the Druze leader Walid Jumblatt, who characterized Lebanon as both "Hanoi and Hong Kong"—a reference to the country's simultaneous embrace of militancy and its pursuit of profit mainly through the Hariri-led reconstruction effort.[15]

Translated internally in Lebanon, however, resistance and reconstruction divided the major political forces in the country: the Shia community, through Hezbollah, which increasingly manifested the communal ethos and aspirations and embodied the project of resistance to Israel; and the Sunni community, represented by Hariri and his allies, who were the caretakers of economic and financial reconstruction. Assad, between his aim of simply ameliorating Syria's position at the negotiating table or waging open warfare against Israel, something more in line with Iranian aims, left the endgame ambiguous. For Syria, both options coexisted and competed with each other, an attitude that soon permeated Lebanese political culture.

These contending approaches gradually became opposing projects for Lebanese society. Their imposed coexistence created cracks in the political system thanks to their mutual exclusiveness. The Hariri project was economically and politically liberal, insofar as it was linked to globalization and ties to the West that Hariri willingly cultivated through his relations in France and elsewhere. In contrast, the Hezbollah project was increasingly perceived as one of a country and society endlessly at war, mobilized against Israel and the West. This was implicitly confirmed in the party's inclination toward the idea of an economy focused on war. To Hezbollah, such an economy was opposed to one whose orientation would be geared toward regional interdependency and integration, always suspected as being one facet of an eventual Arab-Israeli peace process. That is not to mention Hezbollah's palpable support for a parallel society in the areas under its control.

The second part of Syria's balancing act related to the ways Hafez al-Assad had stabilized his rule within Syria since 1970, when he seized power and began forming a tightly knit apparatus of control. His method of rule blended ruthlessness with the subtle maintenance of sectarian, regional, and sectoral balance inside Syrian society and among its elites. With his grip firmly on the process of Lebanon's political rehabilitation, Assad put in place a system that incorporated the Lebanese and Syrian political spheres in a complementary way. Marginal adjustments in the Syrian system were made through the influence exercised by Syrian actors in Lebanon—a way for Assad to expand the pie, thereby distributing more wealth and power and allowing him to reinforce his supremacy.

Toward the end of the 1990s the succession question in Syria became a growing worry for the aging and increasingly ill president. The balance between the different wings constituting the inner core of his regime had to be sustained to facilitate the smooth handover of power to his son Bashar. Reconstruction and resistance became Syrian agendas as well, each one embraced by a segment of the regime's men, so that even in Syria cracks appeared in the edifice of Assad rule.

Things became clearer in 1998, when the Syrian president effectively handed the Lebanese file to Bashar. The two-decade-old game of balancing power began to falter, caused by a number of factors. Foremost among these was the fact that the dynamics of succession in Syria needed to rest more firmly on a

foundation of external resistance and steadfastness. One reason for this was Bashar's defiance toward the Sunni old guard that had loyally accompanied his father to power, and which he perceived was resisting his own rise. This paralleled his developing antipathy toward Hariri, his ways, and what he represented. For Bashar and his entourage, Hariri became increasingly dispensable, even as the Syrian heir apparent was more comfortable with individuals such as Hezbollah's secretary general, Hassan Nasrallah. To this was added his strong suspicion that Hariri had deeply penetrated his father's system and even bought off senior Syrian officials, the implicit assumption being that this was done with a specific anti-Alawite intent on his part.[16]

On the Lebanese scene, the clear-cut signal of an underlying shift in Syria came with the election as president of the army commander, Emile Lahoud, in 1998 and the rapid removal of Hariri as prime minister. Few analysts doubted that these two crucial decisions had been taken by the younger Assad, with the backing of an entourage that had started to paint Hariri and Harirism as the potential spearhead of a Wahhabi plot to weaken or dismantle the regime in Damascus.[17]

The End of Ambiguity: Lebanon Regionalized

The early stages of Sunni-Shia tension in Lebanon lie in the country's postwar order as well as the dynamics in Syria. Not always hidden, such tensions were nevertheless contained by the presence in Lebanon of the Syrians and the reflexes of a consociational culture that discouraged overt sectarian behavior. The tension was to become uncontrollable, however, and to transform itself into outright conflict when the many changes affecting Lebanon's political environment began to accumulate. It was because of regional dynamics that the sectarian balance, with its many ambiguities since the time of the Taif Agreement, was undermined.

The early stages of Sunni-Shia tension in Lebanon lie in the country's postwar order as well as the dynamics in Syria.

In short, the international consensus around Syria's effective protectorate of Lebanon started to erode after 2001, and then became more openly questioned. The post–September 11 paradigm shift in Washington and the invasion of Iraq in 2003 were crucial turning points. Regionally, Israel's unilateral withdrawal from Lebanon in May 2000, followed by the death of Hafez al-Assad in June, brought about a new Lebanese landscape in which the idea of resistance became a source of discord. Meanwhile, Syria was growing wary of developments in the region, fearing that after the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003, Bashar al-Assad's was next. Assad's belief that his regime was encircled and besieged was confirmed in his mind with the passage in September 2004 of the French- and U.S.-backed United Nations Security Council Resolution

1559 that called for Syria's withdrawal from Lebanon, the restoration of normal political life in the country, and the disarmament of Hezbollah.[18]

Only time will tell if, as Syria and its Lebanese allies asserted, Rafik Hariri was responsible for, or at least an active partner in, the passage of the resolution, his aims being to force a Syrian pullout from Lebanon and even induce regime change in Damascus. The anti-Hariri feeling, already prevalent in Bashar al-Assad's circles, with all its sectarian underpinnings, reached a climax. Not only had Hariri reneged on the original contract with Syria's leadership when he came to power, namely to be the caretaker of Syrian interests in Lebanon and an obedient instrument on behalf of the Sunni community; he was now perceived as a vital threat to the Assad regime itself, on behalf of his Saudi patrons and probably, in Assad's mind, of France and the United States.

This was the political climate that surrounded Hariri's assassination in February 2005.[19] His death was without doubt a quasi-fatal blow to the balance put in place in Lebanon after 1990. It was the first and strongest earthquake in the Sunni-Shia balancing act that until then Syria had successfully managed. It also ended Syrian oversight of Lebanon's governance structure that had prevailed until that time. In this regard, Hariri's assassination brought on the clinical death of Taif.

> **Rafik Hariri's assassination was the first and strongest earthquake in the Sunni-Shia balancing act that until then Syria had successfully managed.**

This upheaval almost completely transformed the mechanisms of sectarian competition in Lebanon by eliminating one of its main local pillars, Hariri, and by undermining Syria's role as the main regional arbiter in the country. The latent tension between the two main sectarian contenders for power, the Sunnis and Shia, suddenly came out into the open. The gloves were off, and violence emerged as an ever-present possibility.

When, in the weeks after Hariri was killed, large numbers of Lebanese descended on Martyrs' Square in central Beirut to protest the Syrian presence in their country and demand that those behind political assassinations in Lebanon face justice, it was evident that one main component of the country, the Shia community with its political representatives, was absent. This absence was an indication of the sharp divide in Lebanon at the time, which has only widened since then. For Lebanon's Sunnis, Hariri's assassination represented an unbearable offense, one whose sectarian impact would increase amid suspicions that Hezbollah was involved. The indifference of the Shia was perceived as a breach of the tenets of peaceful sectarian coexistence that had prevailed until then.

The years that followed, between Hariri's assassination in 2005 and the beginning of the uprising in Syria in 2011, were characterized by uncertainty, bloodshed, and persistent violence. In July 2006, the war between Hezbollah and Israel established the party and the community on whose behalf it claimed to speak as a prominent regional force. Furthermore, Hezbollah's proclaimed victory was appropriated by Bashar al-Assad. The way he did so,

however, reignited sectarian fires. In a speech before a conference of the Syrian Journalists Union on August 15, 2006, Assad stated that he considered that among those on the losing side in the war were the Arab states that did not support Hezbollah, headed by what he referred to as "half-men,"[20] and the March 14 coalition in Lebanon, whose Sunni leaders he had once labeled servants of Saudi Arabia.

The situation would only get worse. More than a year later, in May 2008, Hezbollah, responding to a government decision it opposed, deployed gunmen in a coup of sorts in western Beirut's predominantly Sunni neighborhoods.[21] The party and its allies surrounded the residence of Saad Hariri, Rafik's son, obliging him to seek the protection of the Lebanese army, and ransacked his television station. To Beirutis this harked back to the Lebanon of the 1980s, when militias ruled the streets.[22] The Saudi ambassador fled the capital in a private yacht, having disguised himself to avoid the wrath of pro-Syrian, particularly Shia, militiamen.

This would be repeated a few years later when, in early 2011, Hezbollah withdrew from the government of then prime minister Saad Hariri because of the progress by the Special Tribunal for Lebanon and the likelihood—at the time—of it accusing Hezbollah of Rafik Hariri's assassination. This torpedoed the Saudi-Syrian deal and blew up Saad Hariri's government. Not long afterward, Hezbollah again sent threatening messages when it deployed unarmed men wearing black shirts in several locations of Beirut, as an implicit reminder of what had taken place in 2008. Furthermore, in the years after Rafik Hariri's killing, a long series of political assassinations occurred, paralyzing Lebanese political life. Politicians, journalists, and public intellectuals belonging to the same camp hostile to Damascus and its Lebanese allies were all targeted.

The Syrian Bonfire and Lebanon's Sectarian Flames

By the time the Arab revolutions began in 2010–2011, taking on acute sectarian dimensions throughout the Middle East, sectarian cleavages were already running deep in Lebanon. The stage was set, the actors were prepared, and the breakdown in Syria only exacerbated matters. Syria had long behaved as an arsonist-firefighter, provoking crises it would then be asked to resolve. By 2011 the arsonist may have been out of Lebanon, but the fire it had largely contributed to spreading was burning with heightened intensity. And Syria was out only in direct and visible ways. Its influence was still pervasive, in part because the conflict in Syria had widespread repercussions in Lebanon. For the Lebanese, calculations of gains and losses from the war in Syria were no longer restricted to their own country. They were now assessed in the larger Syrian-Lebanese sphere, as if the two countries, going back in time, were almost one again.

As for Hezbollah, the fall of Assad's regime would have represented a strategic setback to what was referred to as the resistance axis. It would have led to a disruption of Iran's supply line to the party and represented the first stage in a possible extension of Sunni power from Lebanon to Syria to, eventually, western Iraq. Paradoxically, the Shia perception of threat was not allayed by Hezbollah's military power, even as the party conducted itself with a mixture of hubris and arrogance. Hezbollah loudly trumpeted its military involvement in Syria, which was accompanied by an attitude of intolerance and a tendency to tightly control its social space and to silence dissent in Shia ranks.

On the opposing side, for Lebanon's Sunnis and their non-Sunni allies, Assad's fall would bring justice after a long series of grievances. It would also roll back Iran's hegemony in the Levant and reactivate the conditions for a free and viable Lebanon as had been envisaged in 2005. To Sunnis, recent years have been characterized by incessant humiliation and an accumulation of resentments along with a sense of despair and impotence in confronting Hezbollah's superior military force.

Here a fascinating paradox was at play. Sunni political forces had come a long way since Lebanon's creation in accepting the state and integrating into it. The Taif Agreement had reconciled them with their country, and the long years of Harirism had given them a feeling of ownership of the venture, or at least a good part of it. It is this embrace of Lebanonism that now stands to be broken by the rivalry between the main Muslim sects, as Sunnis suspect Shia of seeking to unilaterally redefine the state to their advantage. The timidity, erosion, and, later, physical absence of the traditional Sunni leadership, and the fact that the ensuing vacuum was increasingly filled by radical Salafi factions empowered by the battle in Syria, reinforced this impression.

Squeezed between the two major Muslim sects, whose struggle expanded beyond Lebanon to Syria, Lebanon's other religious sects began feeling more endangered than ever and increasingly defined themselves as minorities.

Squeezed between the two major Muslim sects, whose struggle expanded beyond Lebanon to Syria, Lebanon's other religious sects began feeling more endangered than ever and increasingly defined themselves as minorities.[23] Since the end of the war in 1990, Lebanon's Christians had internalized a feeling of marginalization and defeat, even coining a word for this: "disenchantment" (*ihbatt*), which became a political slogan at times. The turn of events in 2005 had brought on a new political posture, one no less self-marginalizing and potentially self-destructive. Polarized between the two Muslim sects fighting for their own legacy in Lebanon, Christians were then subjected to the frightening imagery of the decline and exile of the Syrian and Iraqi Christian communities.[24]

Here again the paradox was striking. More than a century earlier, Arab, particularly Levantine, Christians had been at the vanguard of the Arab Awakening that brought about a revival of classical literature and arts, as well as introducing ideas of nationalism, secularism, statehood, and other concepts that helped shape the Arab sense of modernity.[25] Now that the Arabs were rising up against

their autocratic rulers under the banner of what Christians considered disturbing platforms and slogans—for instance, the key role of political Islam in the uprisings and the introduction of sharia law in several states' constitutions and legislation—the Christian mind-set was reverting to self-preservation. For a large number of Christians, their fears were accompanied by an irresistible appeal to emigrate, as shown by the dramatic erosion in the number of Christians all across the Middle East over a period of decades.[26]

Faced with such existential questions, Lebanon's Christians have been divided over how to respond. One part of the community has called for alignment with other armed and bellicose minorities in the region in an alliance of minorities (*hilf al-aqalliyyat*). Both the Assad regime and Hezbollah have promoted this idea, albeit under the rubric of the protection of Christians, as a counterweight to rising radical Sunni Islamist groups in the region. Another part of the community has drawn from what remains of liberal Arab nationalism and moderate Islamist traditions in vowing never to divorce from the Arab majority, implicitly the Sunnis. Proponents of this view are wagering on an Arab Awakening–like revival, a liberal and pluralistic venture that would ultimately bring Christians security, in line with the aspirations that spurred the Arab revolutions.

As the war in Syria has continued, sectarian cleavages in Lebanon have started to shift increasingly from an interest-based orientation to an identity-based orientation.

Among the Druze, the region's unraveling has engendered the same feelings of anxiety and fear. However, their response has been slightly different, due to the fact that the community is much more fragile, facing a demographic decline, and is concentrated in a triangular stretch of land between Lebanon, Syria, and Israel. The Druze have no doubt that the decades ahead will be filled with fierce infighting in the broader Muslim community and that they will have to deploy all their talents of survival to endure. In this regard, from the Lebanese mountains to Druze areas in Syria, the community has regularly entertained notions and fantasies of engaging in autonomous security while remaining neutral, or has yearned for the establishment of de facto buffer zones guaranteed by regional powers, in a quest for communal preservation and survival.

As the war in Syria has continued, sectarian cleavages in Lebanon have started to shift increasingly from an interest-based orientation to an identity-based orientation, and from one that is political to one that is much more symbolic. In other words, the mechanisms of political identification have taken on a more existential dimension, characterized by a zero-sum approach to politics that is incompatible with the more traditional means of pursuing interests, such as power games, negotiations, and other forms of transactions. The fear factor has come to supersede everything. Both levels were never mutually exclusive, intermingling with and reinforcing one another. However, while intersectarian competition was originally oriented toward political grievances and revolved around issues of prerogatives, representation, power sharing, governance,

and a say in decisionmaking, and while mobilization was made in a political, although very sectarian, context, the struggle has taken on a religious coloring, with individuals and groups defining themselves as endangered communities.

The violence in Syria, with its unbearable images and stories of political-sectarian aggression, has led to a vicious cycle of attacks and retaliation. As a consequence there has been an ever-greater resort to religious zeal and identification, encouraged by radicals providing funding. In their efforts to mobilize and recruit, parties on all sides of the sectarian divide in Syria have instrumentalized religious symbols and discourse. Apocalyptic legends have been revived, generating more extremism.

The lines between interest-based politics and identity politics have become fatally blurred. Under interest-based politics, all issues, small or large, remain negotiable, exchangeable, and transactional. Under identity politics, which now predominates, matters cannot be negotiated because everything is viewed as being linked in some way to communal survival. Extreme violence has highlighted the existential aspect of the issues. Negotiation and compromise are perceived as a first step to defeat, loss, surrender, and, ultimately, slaughter.

Conclusion

The sectarian resurgence across the Middle East and the violent dislocation of several of the region's states and their very uncertain futures have underscored the need for new formulas of power sharing and sectarian accommodation. These could allow communities with subnational identities to coexist in larger entities, while at the same time contributing to their preservation. To many observers of crumbling nations such as Bahrain, Iraq, Syria, Libya, and Yemen, the Lebanese model of political sectarianism may represent a framework for conflict resolution in shattered Arab political societies facing problems of inclusion and power sharing and serve as an example for their political reconstruction.

To many observers of crumbling nations such as Bahrain, Iraq, Syria, Libya, and Yemen, the Lebanese model of political sectarianism may represent a framework for conflict resolution.

However, as appealing as this idea may seem, it comes with several caveats. The first involves the background of the formation of the Lebanese system. Time and historical experience have largely rendered sectarianism commonplace in Lebanon's social and political culture, so that it is now deeply entrenched in the collective ethos and national behavior. This is completely lacking in other Arab countries where, on the contrary, models of very centralized Jacobin states (which rely on a unifying definition of national identity for state building) are the rule and where the idea of pan-Arabism was always more attractive than that of states constructed around subnational identities. Lebanon has always been admired in Arab political culture and envied for its social and cultural liberalism and openness, but also very much vilified and denigrated for its system of governance that has

undermined national identity, while generating crisis after crisis, interrupted by sporadic wars.

Lebanonism has also been tarnished by an original sin. The country was established on the ruins of the dream of Arab unity after 1920. The narrative of the National Pact sought to idealize the country's sectarian-based system, injecting it with an element of universalism—that of coexistence and dialogue between Christianity and Islam. What would be the grand narrative of other societies in the Arab world, one that could legitimize sectarian political systems in states that had once glorified Arab nationalism?

Another limitation to the adoption of a Lebanese formula in other Arab countries has to do with the fact that these are very different societies in terms of demographics and size, and in the way states are collapsing. Over time and despite crises and conflicts, Lebanon always emerged from its travails thanks to a desire to preserve what it had rather than allow permanent breaks. Lebanon's sectarianism was largely perpetuated by a recurring formula to overcome crises—that there was no winner and no vanquished. Such an outlook was deeply rooted in society and the political elite, and was often imposed by outside intervention. This allowed for hegemony and preeminence to be better accepted, or at least more smoothly translated and imposed,[27] through governance mechanisms that accommodated those on the losing side as well. Lebanon's demographic makeup, originally defined by parity between Muslims and Christians and later by a division roughly of thirds among Sunnis, Shia, and Christians, was an additional helping factor in that regard, easing the implementation of a consociational culture by ignoring or concealing the true demographic weight of each sect.

This is definitely not the case in Arab countries where a consociational culture is missing. Nor is it likely in countries where cruelty, bloodshed, and population displacements have rendered reconciliation difficult. And it is particularly challenging in places where a demographic majority feels strong resentment toward a repressive minority in power, or where demographics are so imbalanced that the majority does not see why it has to make concessions to the smaller sects.

Another impediment to the adoption of a Lebanese-style sectarian solution has to do with regional sponsorship of any such system. It was clear that the Taif Agreement could function only because it had an external regulator, Syria, that could enforce decisions thanks to its domination. Which power or set of powers could ultimately emerge to guarantee peace in Syria? Or Iraq, Yemen, and Bahrain? To what extent would outside powers be accepted and respected, and for how long? Lebanon's crisis today is in large part due to the absence of a regulator, a reminder of the limitations of its endlessly patched-up system.

As far as Lebanon is concerned, today it is at a crossroads, facing three potential choices. For its first choice, the country could, once again, mend its system of political sectarianism in a way that addresses its imbalances and

discrepancies, mainly those affecting the Sunni-Shia relationship. Yet such a possibility is not endlessly on offer. A revision of the political system needs to take into account the prevailing balance of power and reflect it as accurately as possible. Because the regional and domestic situations are in flux, it is almost impossible to conceive of engaging in such a process under present conditions. Moreover, a modified system is not likely to be sustainable for long before new variables intervene to again alter the way it functions. It is therefore probable that simply patching up Lebanon's consociational model will not bring about a lasting solution to the problem of balancing social diversity and political unity.

From gradualists to those advocating a radical and sharp abolition of political confessionalism, the main premise of the second choice is that Lebanon will always be doomed to lurch from crisis to crisis for as long as it is cursed with a system that creates dissatisfaction at home and invites permanent interference from outside. It is, ironically, the chaos in the region that tarnishes the achievement of such a project today. At a moment when strongly centralized states are disintegrating, the challenge would be to prove that Lebanon, the most kaleidoscopic of all Levantine societies, could produce a secular, tolerant state. The reality is that because of its political culture, political economy, and social makeup, Lebanon is shaped in such a way that its transformation into a centralized Jacobin system remains very difficult.

The third choice is to put in place a more diffuse political system—running the gamut from forms of decentralization all the way to federalism and even partition. Advocates of such efforts believe it is necessary to boldly face reality and Lebanon's history of repeated conflicts and imagine something fundamentally new. For some Christians, an amicable divorce would be the last guarantee preventing the community's disappearance. For Sunnis, where such approaches are starting to make headway, it could be seen as the optimal way of keeping emboldened political Shiism at bay, until better times. As for the Shia community, the jury is still out. The community's main representative, Hezbollah, sometimes creates the impression that it would accept a more decentralized system, which would allow it greater autonomy to maintain its independent weapons arsenal; yet in its discourse, the party claims to seek a strong centralized state.

What the option fails to take into account is the balance of power that would come to define any discussion about establishing a more diffuse system. Most important is how this might affect the bargaining capacity of each community, which would allow it to enjoy a satisfactory share of an already small territory. Final outcomes will be defined by such a balance and who can impose what on others. Some communal representatives who believe that federalism or extensive decentralization would protect their share of power may come to realize that, if the present system is altered, they would retain much less than they initially expected. It is in this sense, for instance, that many have advised Christian advocates of a federal solution to stick to Taif, since it gives their community parity, instead of looking to replace it with a new system

that might leave Christians further diminished because their bargaining power today is limited.

Whatever the answers, some points will have to be kept in mind. Since the formation of the Lebanese system, all changes, both gradual and profound, have followed episodes of violence of some sort. The challenge today is to negotiate a new system of governance without Beirut once again paying so heavy a price. At the same time, any attempt at revisiting Lebanon's political system could hardly fail to be affected by the Syrian crisis. What Syria's ordeal has highlighted is the paradoxical nexus between plurality and authoritarianism. The Lebanese model, despite all its shortcomings and the criticism of its neighbors, accommodated pluralism as much as possible, and exceptionally well when compared with an environment of authoritarian systems and dictatorial regimes. Now that Syria, and more particularly the centralized Syrian state, is imploding and Lebanon's system is collapsing under the weight of its own contradictions, the recourse to either model—the centralized state or the consociational state—should be raised only with caution.

Since the formation of the Lebanese system, all changes, both gradual and profound, have followed episodes of violence of some sort.

Lebanon's system of political confessionalism is in crisis, and all other political models entail crippling costs and potential pitfalls. What the Lebanese should consider is that the entire Middle East is today in disarray, so that transformations of any sort, anywhere, are unlikely. They should, for now, seek consolation in the fact that while Lebanon is by many benchmarks a failed state, their society is stronger, more resilient, and more inventive than the state.

The Lebanese formula is far from being a road without bumps. On the contrary it is one where accidents occur all too frequently, and it is dangerously nearing a tipping point. The Lebanese should thus admit that theirs is a country of permanent precariousness, of endless instability, a country perpetually on the brink.

Notes

1   Seats were reserved for Maronites, Greek Orthodox, and Greek Catholics (or Melkite Uniates) on the Christian side and for Sunnis, Shia, and the Druze on the Muslim side.

2   See Carol Hakim, *The Origins of the Lebanese National Idea: 1840–1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013).

3   The Arabic term for the relationship between Lebanonism and political Maronitism is *al-Maruniyya as-Siyassiyya*, coined by the late Lebanese intellectual Munah al-Solh, to designate a diffuse set of political attitudes and behaviors Maronites displayed toward power and politics. With time, it came to designate the resulting domination that this led them to exercise over the apparatus of the state and a wide array of social and other political resources.

4   See Kamal Salibi, *A House of Many Mansions: The History of Lebanon Reconsidered* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

5   During a parliamentary session in November 1943, Khoury and Solh made pledges regarding the way they envisaged governance of the country if it were to become independent. The National Pact's principles are found in the record of this legislative session.

6   Salibi, *A House of Many Mansions*.

7   Political sectarianism was not something in which to take pride, even by those who conceived it and have lauded it. That is why it has always been regarded as a temporary arrangement, and the necessity to move beyond it one day was viewed as a desirable objective. Article 95 of the Constitution (amended on November 8, 1943) regulates the distribution of cabinet seats and positions in the civil service by stating: "As a *provisional* measure, and in keeping with the desire for justice and harmony, the religious communities shall be adequately represented in the civil service and in the cabinet, *provided that it does not harm the interests of the state*." (Emphasis added.) See Theodor Hanf, *Coexistence in Wartime Lebanon: Decline of a State and Rise of a Nation* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1993), 72.

8   One of the founding figures of the school of consociational democracies is Arend Lijphart, author of *The Politics of Accommodation: Pluralism and Democracy in the Netherlands* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968); "Consociational Democracy" in *World Politics* 21, no. 2 (1969); and *Democracy in Plural Societies* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977).

9   Another condition for consociational democracies to function in a lasting way is one relating to intra-sectarian competition and politics.

10 The presidency of Fouad Chehab (1958–1964), for example, was relatively transformational, in terms of sectarian equilibrium and interaction as well as economic readjustment and distribution.

11 The first document addressing constitutional changes was the Constitutional Document (*Al-Wathiqa al-Dusturiyya*) in 1975. It was followed by draft documents published after a 1983 national dialogue conference in Geneva and one in Lausanne the following year. The same applies to the so-called Tripartite Agreement signed between the warring militias in Damascus in 1985.

12   The most powerful political proposal seeking fundamental change, put forth by a coalition of Muslim political forces, leftist political parties, and figures close to the Palestinian national movement, called for the abolition of political sectarianism, with the exception of the presidency of the republic, which was to be reserved for a Christian, though not necessarily a Maronite, and the post of prime minister for a Muslim, though not necessarily a Sunni.

13   See Hanf, *Coexistence in Wartime Lebanon*, 587.

14   The tentacular Syrian-Lebanese web of corruption was a crucial part of Lebanon's and Syria's political economies between 1992 and 2005. See Reinoud Leenders, *Spoils of Truce: Corruption and State-Building in Postwar Lebanon* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012).

15   In addition to "Hanoi and Hong Kong," other metaphors were also used, such as Nadim Shehadi's reference to the "citadel" and "the Riviera," in "Riviera vs Citadel: The Battle for Lebanon," *openDemocracy*, July 13, 2007.

16   See Joseph Bahout, *Les entrepreneurs Syriens: économie, affaires et politique* [Syrian entrepreneurs: economics, business, and politics] (Beirut: CERMOC, 1994).

17   Nicholas Blanford, *Killing Mr. Lebanon: The Assassination of Rafik Hariri and Its Impact on the Middle East* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2006).

18   See Joseph Bahout, "Liban-Syrie: Une alliance objective franco-américaine?" [Lebanon-Syria: A Franco-American alliance objective?] (paper presented at French Institute for Interational Relations conference, Paris, September 5, 2005).

19   See Nicholas Blanford, *Killing Mr. Lebanon*. Opponents of Syria regard Rafik Hariri's assassination as a joint Syrian-Hezbollah venture, with all the sectarian repercussions entailing from this.

20   Seth Wikas, "The Damascus-Hizballah Axis: Bashar al-Asad's Vision of a New Middle East," Washington Institute, August 29, 2006, http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/the-damascus-hizballah-axis-bashar-al-asads-vision-of-a-new-middle-east.

21   Nadim Ladki, "Clashes Bring Lebanon Death Toll to 81," *Mail & Guardian*, May 12, 2008, http://mg.co.za/article/2008-05-12-clashes-bring-lebanon-death-toll-to-81.

22   Hilal Khashan, "The Rise and Growth of Hezbollah and the Militarization of the Sunni-Shiite Divide in Lebanon," Middle East Institute, January 26, 2016, http://www.mei.edu/content/map/rise-and-growth-hezbollah-and-militarization-sunni-shi%E2%80%99-divide-lebanon; and Michael Young, "The Consequences of a Hezbollah-Led Opposition Victory in Lebanon's Elections," interview by Bernard Gwertzman, Council on Foreign Relations, May 28, 2009, http://www.cfr.org/lebanon/consequences-hezbollah-led-opposition-victory-lebanons-elections/p19512.

23   The term *aqalliyyat* is now flourishing. It both denotes a feeling of demographic, and therefore political, decline and signals an implicit call for protection, something the international community, whether in Syria or Iraq, has echoed and reinforced.

24   Two sarcastic Lebanese terms, "Shia Christians" and "Sunni Christians," have been used to describe the polarization and the alignment of what is supposed to still be, at best, a community making up "half" of the political system, but already melting, politically at least, into the agendas of the principal Muslim sects.

25   The Arab Awakening was the intellectual, and later political, tradition that developed in Mount Lebanon, then a part of Bilad al-Sham, and in Egypt at the turn of the nineteenth century. The Arab Awakening strived for an Arab Renaissance.

26   "And Then There Were None," *Economist*, January 2, 2016, http://www.economist.com/news/middle-east-and-africa/21684795-fed-up-and-fearful-christians-are-leaving-middle-east-and-then-there-were.

27   See Perry Anderson, "The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci," *New Left Review* 1, no. 100 (November–December 1976): 5–78.

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