LEBANON'S NATIONAL SECURITY CHALLENGES AND THE TERRORISM PHENOMENON

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14. ABSTRACT

Lebanon is situated in a very sensitive region of the Middle East. It borders Syria and Israel. Lebanon is a functioning democracy and a confessional state that in its modern history has suffered from foreign military interventions and occupations, and from the effects of a disastrous Civil War that lasted fifteen years. Lebanon faces a number of external and domestic national security challenges that threaten both its national sovereignty and its continuous existence as a unified and democratic nation-state. These national security challenges are becoming increasingly complicated because of the phenomenon of terrorism.

This Strategy Research Project analyzes some of the most important challenges to Lebanon's national security both in a historical context and in view of the terrorism phenomenon. This research establishes that Lebanon and the neighboring region are in need of large and long-term socioeconomic initiatives that can address the underlying conditions that give rise to the phenomenon of terrorism. Lebanon also needs adequate levels of military assistance for its legitimate self-defense concerns.

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ABSTRACT

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LEBANON'S NATIONAL SECURITY CHALLENGES AND THE TERRORISM PHENOMENON

The Republic of Lebanon is located in one of the most sensitive regions of the Middle East. Lebanon borders both the Arab Republic of Syria and the State of Israel. Lebanon became a fully independent state in 1946 and has survived as one of the very few functioning democracies in the Middle East. Lebanon has suffered from a long history of armed conflict, military interventions from other countries, and a disastrous Civil War that lasted for a period of fifteen years (1975–1990). Both in the context of its earlier modern history, as well as during and after its Civil War, Lebanon has coped with the phenomenon of international terrorism long before Al Qaeda's terrorist attack against the United States on September 11, 2001.

The threat of international terrorism against Lebanon's national security and even its survival as a viable nation-state and a functioning democracy in the Middle East has numerous dimensions and is influenced by multiple factors. This research paper will provide an explanation for some of these terrorist threats against Lebanon's national security and the interlinked factors that influence their existence and operation. This paper will offer certain recommendations on the appropriate military, diplomatic, and domestic security strategies as well as on the sociopolitical and socioeconomic approaches that should be used in safeguarding Lebanon's future national security and its national survival as a sovereign and united nation-state.

Historical and Ideological Background

Since the time of the 1975-1990 Civil War, Lebanon has suffered from the consequences of various terrorist activities that were initiated by many domestic and

foreign actors, including certain nation-states that carried out military interventions and at times even occupied sovereign Lebanese territory. This paper focuses on the actions and ideologies of non-state actors, with appropriate explanations on how these actors were and are influenced by the actions and strategic goals of certain nation-states.

The Lebanese historical experience demonstrates the difficulties of defining the concept of terrorism and classifying terrorist acts. Lebanon was, and to a certain extent still is, involved in the historic Palestinian-Israeli conflict and before that Lebanon was occasionally involved with the Arab–Israeli conflict. The organized and military presence of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in Lebanon from the 1960s to 1982 (especially after the PLO's "Black September" of 1970 exit from Jordan) easily gave rise to the commonly-used Western media label of the PLO as a "terrorist organization" and of its "terrorist activities." In a long-term historical context, this definition and accompanying classification has not survived when the PLO has essentially transformed almost to the identity of a nation-state actor in its current form of the Palestinian Authority. The PLO presence in Lebanon, which greatly expanded after the "Black September" 1970 events in Jordan, gave the impetus for increased Israeli military interventions against Lebanon itself, and created the main underlying causes for the Lebanese Civil War of 1975-1990.[1] Thus, although the PLO is not currently viewed as a "terrorist organization" within a historical context, its presence in Lebanon created a number of serious threats against Lebanon's own national security and continuous survival as a viable and unified nation-state. Most notably, the PLO disrupted the balance of the confessional sectarian politics in Lebanon. This disruption gave rise to the 1976 Syrian intervention in Lebanon, and subsequent Israeli military interventions.

Some of these PLO-rooted challenges to Lebanese security continue to this day (e.g.,

the presence of no less than 409,714 Palestinians in Lebanon and the existence of

numerous Palestinian refugee camps that host a number of armed factions).[2] These

challenges are becoming more pronounced on the ideological front.

The PLO had a clear but largely secular ideological objective of establishing the

independent nation-state of Palestine. In this respect, the PLO's ideological and military

struggle can be readily identified with the historical *but largely secular* concepts of Arab

nationalism that toppled a number of Arab monarchies during the 1950s in Egypt, Syria,

and Iraq, and saw the establishment of Arab socialist regimes in those countries, (e.g.,

the military revolt that brought Gamal Abdel Nasser to power in Egypt in 1954).

However, the gradual rise of *political* Islam has largely *replaced* the concept of secular

Arab nationalism as a "new revolutionary" ideological force in the Arab world.

When the modern adherents of radical political Islam deride the Western powers

as "crusaders" they trace the Western military intervention of the Crusades into the Holy

Places of Christianity, Islam, and Judaism during the Middle Ages, and their eventual

defeat by largely Ottoman Turkish military forces. The same lineage of Islamic history

was also involved in the anti-colonial struggle for both Sunni and Shiite Muslims in the

nineteenth and twentieth century's within the Modern Middle East. The reliance on and

the influence of political Islam that had first appeared in the formation of the Muslim

Brotherhood in Egypt in 1929 was rejuvenated *after* the military defeat of Egypt, Syria,

and Jordan by Israel during the June 1967 Six-Day War. In short, Islam as a religion,

ideology, and culture became closely intertwined with historical Arab struggles of anti-

colonialism and self-defense. More fundamental ("pure") forms of Islam also provided

alternative ideological avenues when more secular forms of Arab nationalism were perceived to fail (e.g., the Arab defeat during the 1967 Middle East war).

The writings of Sayyid Qutb (who was executed by the Nasser regime in Egypt on August 29, 1966) and who was one of the modern theoreticians of political Islam, formed the ideological foundation of present-day radical Islam.[3] Qutb – and Pakistani Islamist Mawlana Sayyid Abul A'la Mawdudi – rejected the notion that nationalism and the existence of post-colonial independent Muslim states had any "inherent value" and classified the popular following of the traditional institutions of government for a nation-state (e.g., secular political parties and government leaders), as being akin to paganism (*jahiliyya*).[4] Qutb advocated that the "only just ruler is one who governs according to the revelations of Allah."[5] The oil-rich Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the custodian of the holy Muslim sites of Mecca and Medina, had been safeguarded with United States assistance against the influences of traditional Arab nationalism that had toppled other monarchies in Syria and Iraq. Saudi Arabia, through its promotion and active export of the Wahhabist form of ultra–conservative Islam, safeguarded its internal stability and funneled the volunteer energies of its youth in the defensive *jihad* against the invading military forces of the officially atheist power of the Soviet Union in Afghanistan in collaboration with the United States and Pakistan. Al Qaeda was established under Osama Bin Laden's leadership in the context of that conflict, the Afghan War of the 1980s. Radical Islam also provided political legitimacy and stability for the Pakistani military dictatorship of General Zia ul-Haq which collaborated in the *jihad* against the Soviets in Afghanistan while pursuing a secret program for the development of nuclear

weapons and carrying out its own activities against India, Pakistan's regional strategic rival.

During the 1970s and 1980s, radical Islam was viewed by the United States as a useful "antidote" to both communism and Soviet influence, as well as a counterweight to the more secular form of Arab nationalism (e.g., by Israel in countering the influence of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in the Israeli-occupied West Bank and Gaza). For example, in the 1970s and 1980s Israel had recognized Mujama Al-Islamiya – the precursor of Hamas – in Israeli-occupied Gaza as an "Islamic charity" and did not hinder its religious, educational (inclusive of an Islamic university), and public welfare activities. Israel also looked favorably upon the rivalry that developed between the Gaza Islamists and the PLO in the West Bank.[6] The eventual creation of Al Qaeda and Hamas, the rise of the Iranian-backed Shiite Hezbollah in Lebanon after the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon and subsequent short-lived U.S. military intervention, and the establishment of the Taliban in the Afghanistan-Pakistan axis, proved to be the great "unintended consequences" for the United States and its allies.

Lebanon's geographic position and its religious-cultural mix often became poles of attraction for unwanted regional armed conflicts that spilled over within Lebanese territory, with disastrous effects. Lebanon was and to some extent still is enmeshed in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. However, while the previous stages of this conflict were defined by the largely secular PLO political and armed struggle to gain a national homeland for the Palestinians in the Israeli-occupied West Bank and Gaza, the more recent phases of this struggle are assuming the more strident tone of a conflict that is increasingly driven by religious convictions and/or geopolitical motives that are often

based on ultra–conservative religious-cultural justifications. In a historical development that parallels the evolution of Hamas in Gaza, radical Islamist Palestinian groups have taken hold in various long-established Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon.[7]

As in Gaza, extreme conditions of economic poverty, the absence of meaningful social welfare mechanisms from the Lebanese governmental authorities, and the ideological impact of external armed conflicts such as the United States military intervention in Iraq have created radical Islamist Palestinian groups inside Lebanon that have largely replaced the pre-existing political authority of the PLO. One such group, Fatah al Intifada, with membership that included citizens of Saudi Arabia with previous involvement in armed guerilla operations against United States military forces in Iraq, received press coverage by a journalist for the New York Times newspaper in the Nahr al Bared Palestinian refugee camp close to the major northern Lebanese city of Tripoli in March 2007. Fatah al Intifada already had connections with radical Islamist groups who had carried out the assassination of a United States diplomat in Jordan.[8]

In May 2007, friction between the Lebanese governmental authorities and the armed Palestinian radical Islamic group Fatah al Islam in the Nahr al Bared refugee camp resulted in open armed conflict with the Lebanese Army when Palestinian militants attacked an Army guard post *outside* this camp.[9] The Lebanese Army was obliged to use armor and artillery in order to subdue the Palestinian combatants in this refugee camp who took advantage of the deep underground shelters that had been constructed in the camp by the Palestine Liberation Organization in the 1970s. Without the possession of operational fighter aircraft at the time and access to precision guided munitions (PGMs), the Lebanese Air Force used U.S–made UH-1D Huey transport

helicopters to drop bombs on the Palestinian militants with the aid of global positioning system (GPS) devices.[10] The fighting lasted for a period of fifteen weeks and resulted in the death of 169 Lebanese Armed Forces personnel, approximately 222 militants, and at least 42 Lebanese and Palestinian civilians. This armed conflict resulted in the destruction of many buildings within the camp and dislocated their Palestinian civilian occupants.[11] The Lebanese Army successfully evacuated 30,000-40,000 Palestinian civilians from this refugee camp during the military operations against Fatah al Islam.[12]

Since the 2007 fighting at the Nahr al Bared camp, the Lebanese Army and domestic security forces have continued to engage militant Islamic elements within Lebanon in low intensity warfare on several occasions. The increased presence of radical Sunni Islamist elements within Lebanon and terrorist incidents in Syria motivated a substantial deployment of Syrian troops at the Lebanese-Syrian frontier in September 2008. This Syrian deployment was largely interpreted as dealing with domestic Syrian security concerns rather than as an indication of yet another potential Syrian military intervention in Lebanon.[13]

Hezbollah's Mixed Identity and Lebanon's Fragmented Confessional Politics

The emergence of Hezbollah in the Lebanese and international scene is attributable not only to the fragmented Lebanese confessional politics and domestic Lebanese socioeconomic factors, but also to the frequent Israeli military incursions into and periodic occupations of Lebanese territory. Hezbollah is rooted in the Shiite Muslim segment of Lebanon's population, which primarily inhabits South Lebanon and the Bekaa Valley. The Lebanese Shiite Muslims traditionally belonged to the poorest segments of Lebanon's society. In Lebanon's confessional domestic politics, the Shiite

7

Muslims were represented politically by the Lebanese Communist Party and the pro-Syrian Socialist Nationalist Party during the 1960s and early 1970s. The evolution of the Lebanese Shiite political movement started in the mid-1970s under the leadership of Shiite cleric Sayyid Musa al-Sadr. It included the establishment of the armed Amal militia at the start of the Lebanese Civil War in 1975 and encompassed Shiite clerics that maintained religious, educational, and political contacts with their co-religionists both in Iraq and Iran.[14]

The Israeli military intervention in South Lebanon in 1978 that was directed against the PLO resulted in the displacement of approximately 250,000 Lebanese, and the third year of the Lebanese Civil War convinced the Lebanese Shiites that they could not be protected from both external and internal threats to their survival. The 1982 Israeli military invasion of Lebanon and the subsequent unlawful Israeli military occupation of South Lebanon that dislocated 450,000 Lebanese also led to the formation of Hezbollah (the "Party of God") in 1984-1985.[15] Although United States intelligence sources attribute to Hezbollah the murderous attack against the U.S. Marine Corps barracks at the Beirut Airport in 1983, other sources dispute this and it should be noted that Hezbollah did not come into formal existence until at least a year later.[16] The Shiite Lebanese members of Hezbollah established political and ideological links and began to receive material aid from their Iranian Shiite co-religionists who had prevailed during the Iranian Revolution of 1978 and had established the Islamic Republic of Iran under the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini.

Hezbollah's relationship with the "theocratic republic" of Iran is a complex one that is rooted in the long and deep history of Shiite Islam, which geographically includes

Lebanon, Iraq and Iran, and extends into Pakistan. Shiite scholars and religious centers in Lebanon and in the cities of Najaf in Iraq and Qum in Iran have maintained transnational Shiite links since the sixteenth century A.D. The Iranian Shiite movement that toppled the Shah in 1978-1979 had maintained a presence in exile in Lebanon prior to the Iranian Revolution, and the ideological influences and divisions of the Iranian revolutionary Shiites influenced the Lebanese Shiite political movement. For example, there were armed clashes between the Shiite Hezbollah and Amal groups in the Lebanese Civil War during the mid-1980s.[17] Hezbollah solidified its political and military position in Lebanon by mounting an unrelenting guerilla war against the Israeli military occupation in South Lebanon (this occupation was assisted by the Israeli-aligned South Lebanon Army militia). Hezbollah's actions against Israel enjoyed national support despite Israel's retaliatory strikes against a wide range of Lebanese infrastructure targets that caused many civilian casualties (e.g., the Israeli strike against the UN compound in Qana in April 1996).[18] This level of national support increased and transcended traditional Lebanese political and cultural divisions after the end of the Civil War in 1990.[19] Faced with mounting casualties and declining domestic political support for maintaining the unlawful military occupation of South Lebanon, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak withdrew the Israeli forces from most but not all of Lebanese territory in May 2000 (the Lebanese Shebaa Farms area bordering Israel remains under Israeli military occupation). The Israeli withdrawal from South Lebanon did not end the low–intensity warfare between Hezbollah and the Israeli forces during the 2000-2006 time period. With Iranian assistance that was facilitated by Syria, Hezbollah strengthened its military position in South Lebanon in terms of manpower, organization and

9

infrastructure, and weapons systems (e.g., large numbers of unguided rockets of various calibers, anti-tank precision guided munitions, and guided anti-ship missiles).

Hezbollah also became a political force within Lebanon's confessional and fragmented domestic political scene. Hezbollah, in a loose parallel to the evolution of the Iranian Revolution, underwent a process of political maturation in Lebanon. In Iran, the regime of Ayatollah Khomeini quickly abandoned its drive to "export" the Iranian Revolution in the Middle East, especially when it had to defend Iran against the Iraqi military invasion that resulted in the costly 1980-1988 Iraq-Iran war. Similarly, Hezbollah gradually abandoned its original rigid positions of establishing an "Islamic state" and it became more flexible in seeking political alliances with other Lebanese political factions. In this manner, Hezbollah was able to establish a wider base of popular support within Lebanon for its ongoing guerilla war against the Israeli forces and their allies in South Lebanon. In 1992 Hezbollah participated in the first Lebanese elections after the Civil War and placed eight parliament deputies in the 128-seat Lebanese Parliament. This political victory was attained not only because Hezbollah had established active public welfare institutions among the poor Shiite community that were in turn "feeding" Hezbollah's political support base. Hezbollah had also attained the reputation of being a religious-political movement with "clean hands" and demonstrated fundamental competencies (e.g., it was the Hezbollah movement that was still resisting militarily the Israeli occupation of South Lebanon).[20] Following the departure of Syrian forces from Lebanon in 2005, Hezbollah not only increased its elected representation in the Lebanese Parliament but also gained representation in the Lebanese cabinet itself.[21]

The destruction that was inflicted in Lebanon from a 15-year Civil War led Hezbollah to develop wide social welfare networks that provide considerable levels of assistance in areas such as public health, housing, education, and – given the almost constant friction with Israel – reconstruction. These social welfare networks are based on the work of volunteers, including Shiite women. Although these activities reinforce the impression that Hezbollah operates as a "state within a state," it must be noted that often the social services of the official Lebanese state cannot reach or even completely satisfy the full needs of the Shiites in Lebanon, who continue to constitute the more economically disadvantaged segment of the Lebanese population.[22]

The "mixed identity" of Hezbollah that involves its political party activities, military organization, and public welfare networks does not readily lend itself to its classification as a "terrorist organization." Its presence and function within Lebanon may amount to a "state within a state" with a great degree of political and military power; however, in the world of the confessional and fragmented domestic Lebanese politics this is not a unique situation (e.g., other confessional groups and political movements within Lebanon maintain armed militias for their respective self-defense). Hezbollah's political alliances and civilian constituencies in Lebanon also include members from other confessional groups who do not believe in the creation of an "Islamic state" or in the regulation of their daily lives by an "Islamic code," but have mixed motives for their open or covert support for Hezbollah. For example, Hezbollah is still viewed as a legitimate resistance and deterrent force against Israeli aggression and politically cooperates with both Christian and Druze factions within Lebanon.[23]

Hezbollah's growing power within Lebanon and its regional alignment with Iran against the national security interests of Israel and the United States made Hezbollah a natural target for both countries, especially during the era of the Bush Administration interventionist policies in the Middle East. Since Israel and the United States are preoccupied with the issue of the Iranian nuclear program, U.S. regional policies perceived Hezbollah as an "automatic extension" of Iranian influence that should be defeated irrespective of the consequences for the stability and unity of the Lebanese state and society itself. Israeli contingency planning that involved an extensive bombing campaign of a wide range of civilian targets within Lebanon in case of an armed conflict with Hezbollah had received United States approval in advance of the summer 2006 hostilities.[24] Hezbollah's misjudgment to initiate a military action against Israeli forces with the limited purpose of gaining the freedom of Lebanese and Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli jails (a tactic that had been used successfully in the past) provided the excuse for the massive military confrontation between Hezbollah and the Israeli military forces for thirty-two days in July-August 2006.

The 2006 Lebanon War was a landmark event in the Middle East. From a strategic perspective, it proved the limitations of Israel's military power to effectuate desired political solutions. The 2006 conflict in Lebanon also proved that United States regional policies were focused more on perceived "new battlegrounds" in the long-standing strategic rivalry between the U.S. and Israel with Iran rather than securing Lebanon's own peace and stability and preserving its national unity. United States policy choices were also clouded by its post-September 11, 2001 inflexible but not always unbiased and consistent classifications of "terrorist" organizations.[25] At a great

and unnecessary cost to Lebanon and its broader society, Hezbollah was able to withstand the Israeli military assault and survive politically. Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah, Hezbollah's Secretary General, acknowledged the misjudgment of provoking Israel, but also declared the military stalemate with Israel and Hezbollah's survival as a "divine victory" (albeit a very expensive one for the broader Lebanese society that had begun to enjoy the economic benefits of post-Civil War reconstruction). The end of the hostilities extended the scope of Lebanese central government control in South Lebanon in cooperation with the increased presence of the United Nations peacekeeping force (UNIFIL) under the mandate of UN Security Council Resolution No. 1701. However, although this has increased the relative security for Israel's northern borders, it has not accomplished the United States–Israeli goal of disarming Hezbollah as an independent military force within Lebanon.

Hezbollah's military structure and organization proved its resiliency despite the massive Israeli air bombardment and the assault of the Israeli ground forces that aimed at silencing Hezbollah's rocket strikes against the urban centers of northern Israel. Israeli and United States intelligence had seriously underestimated Hezbollah's military capabilities to wage war essentially as a "popular army." Hezbollah's combat military force included older age university graduates in its ranks and enjoyed the support of the local population that facilitated the logistical support for Hezbollah fighters through communications, transportation and medical evacuation despite the unceasing Israeli aerial and artillery bombardment and the superior Israeli technical assets in monitoring the tactical battlefield, (e.g., both armed and reconnaissance unmanned aerial vehicles and satellite reconnaissance). Unlike the Israeli 1982 invasion of Lebanon against the

13

PLO – which had largely assumed the organizational structure of a conventional army and did not enjoy local popular support – Hezbollah managed to blunt the Israeli ground offensive through the conventional defense of villages that was aided by Russian-made anti-tank guided missiles, and spirited localized guerilla counter attacks.[26] Hezbollah's reliance on its own network of fiber optic communications shielded its command and control from Israeli electronic warfare interference with both military and civilian wireless communications in Lebanon during the 2006 conflict.[27]

Hezbollah's political gains and increased stature following the 2006 Lebanon War manifested themselves during the domestic political instability that prevailed in Lebanon during 2006-2008 until the consensual election of Michel Suleyman as President of Lebanon (President Suleyman is an ex-Chief of Staff of the Lebanese Armed Forces). Hezbollah conclusively demonstrated that its combined political-military force could not be ignored by a United States-supported Lebanese central government. However, Hezbollah's resort to arms in attacking Sunni militias that were aligned with Lebanese Prime Minister Fouad Siniora in May 2008 undermined Hezbollah's political credibility that its weapons and military organization were intended only for self-defense against Lebanon's "external enemies." The neutral but active intervention of the Lebanese Army assisted in halting the violence.[28] In 2008, Hezbollah returned the remains of Israeli servicemen who had been killed in the beginning of the 2006 Lebanon War in exchange for the release of Lebanese citizens that were held by Israel. During the Israeli military expedition against Hamas in Gaza in 2008-2009, Hezbollah did not undertake any substantial actions that would have disturbed the status quo on the Lebanese-Israeli frontier other than mounting considerable criticism against the Arab

governments in the face of the Israeli attacks against Gaza's civilian population and the Hamas political and military structure.

The interaction between the well–organized and armed Hezbollah, the other confessional political and ethnic/cultural groups in Lebanon (with their own armed militias) such as the Druze, and the central Lebanese government always has the potential of instability and armed conflict. However, despite its Shiite "theocratic" nature and philosophy, Hezbollah has opted for maintaining stability while avoiding open armed conflict with the Lebanese government in which Hezbollah participates. The current Hezbollah leadership, as well as most of the established senior leadership in the other confessional groups and factions of the domestic Lebanese politics, matured through the tragedy of the Lebanese Civil War which killed approximately one–tenth of Lebanon's population[29] and, so far, although Lebanon has often reached the political brink of a new civil conflict, this threshold has not been crossed.

The radical form of Sunni Islam and its advocacy for the establishment of a "theocratic regime" that is based on the extreme Wahhabi interpretation of Sharia Muslim law is ideologically opposed within Lebanon by multiple groups, including Shiite Hezbollah. For example, the ideological conflict between the Shiite and Sunni branches of Islam has manifested itself as armed fratricidal conflict in Iraq after the March 2003 United States military intervention, and in the Iranian opposition to the radical Taliban regime in Afghanistan long before the U.S. intervened militarily in Afghanistan after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. As previously stated, Al Qaeda–affiliated groups of radical Islamists have established a presence in Lebanon. Al Qaeda sees Lebanon's territory as a potential springboard for launching direct attacks against Israel

as the PLO did during the 1960s and the 1970s.[30] The establishment of a permanent Al

Qaeda ideological base and physical presence in Lebanon is dependent upon the level

of local popular support and the actions of various regional actors. Syria has itself

become the victim of terrorist attacks by radical Islamist Sunni elements, and the regime

of Syrian President Hafez Al Assad (father of the current Syrian President Bashar Al

Assad) had massacred thousands of Syrian supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood in

the early 1980s.[31] Following the withdrawal of Syrian forces from Lebanon in 2005, and

despite the continuous Syrian meddling in Lebanese internal affairs that includes the

use of violent means, the Syrian regime – which is largely secular and maintains good

relations with Iran – remains worried over the influence of radical Sunni Islam in the

region and the threat that it poses to Syrian stability.

Syria was a conduit of radical Islamic Sunni fighters that joined the guerilla war

against the United States and the Coalition forces in Iraq. These radical Islamic Sunni

fighters also fought against Iraq's government forces and Shiite community. However,

the increased stabilization of Iraq has raised fears that a "reverse exodus" of Sunni

mujahideen is now "contaminating" *both* Syria and Lebanon along the lines of the past

Arab anti-Soviet Sunni *mujahideen* departure from Afghanistan in the late-1980s.[32] In

addition, there are always well-founded suspicions that new geopolitical realignments

and regional threat perceptions may lead to a resurgence of radical Sunni Islam as a

counterweight to Shiite influence from Iran *and* Iraq. Although Iran has ceased its

activities in "exporting" its Shiite Revolution to neighboring Arab states in the Gulf,

various Arab Sunni monarchies in that region are always apprehensive about Iranian

intentions (e.g., there are sizeable Shiite Arab minority populations in Saudi Arabia,

Kuwait, and Bahrain). Available information strongly suggests that Saudi Arabia was engaged in the financing of such Sunni groups in Lebanon under an understanding with the Bush Administration, since the activities of such Sunni groups would still be "controlled" and they could provide a "counterweight" to Hezbollah's political and military presence within Lebanon. Sheikh Nasrallah specifically accused the Bush Administration "of working with Israel to deliberately instigate *fitna*, an Arabic word that is used to mean 'insurrection and fragmentation within Islam'."[33] So far, it has been historically proven (e.g., the genesis of Al Qaeda) that financing of radical Islamic Sunni groups does not guarantee long-term "control" of their activities or of their future targets. Furthermore, in the philosophical realm of Al Qaeda itself, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is considered an "enemy state" since it closely collaborates with the United States in matters of regional security.

Socioeconomic and Demographic Conditions and the Palestinian Issue in Lebanon

Socioeconomic conditions often provide the fertile ground for the breeding of disaffected societies where radical ideologies that rely on the intolerance of other groups can take hold. The desperate resort to terrorism and terrorist activities is only one step away. The recent 2008-2009 massive Israeli military action against Hamas and the civilian population in Gaza was advertised in and largely condoned by the West as an "anti-terror campaign" in one of the "most crowded places on earth." The fact that Israel had imposed an 18-month economic blockade on Gaza that adversely affected Gaza's economy and the health, welfare, and educational opportunities of its residents largely went unnoticed.[34]

Lebanon's status as a confessional state with its inherent domestic political divisions presents unique challenges when it comes to the distribution of the national wealth and the provision of social services. These challenges become exacerbated because of the armed conflicts that destroy large parts of the country's infrastructure which then need to be rebuilt multiple times. For example, the Israeli aerial and artillery bombardment during the 2006 hostilities caused approximately $3.61 billion in direct damages and destroyed or inflicted various degrees of damage to a total of 106,914 housing units throughout the country.[35] The agricultural economy of South Lebanon was materially affected not only by the direct hostilities themselves but also by one million unexploded cluster munitions that were launched by the Israeli forces against both civilian and combatant targets, especially during the last two-three days of the conflict prior to the implementation of the UN-imposed cease fire.

Lebanon is unable to provide state–financed social services – especially medical care – to large segments of its population, especially among the poor. Sayed and Tzannatos indicate that "private spending on social sectors (such as education and health) comes to 15 percent" of Lebanon's gross domestic product (GDP), and that this figure exceeds the corresponding total for both private and government social spending in many other developing and developed national economies.[36] If government social spending is added, this figure becomes 24 percent of GDP, which is much higher than even the corresponding figure for developed countries in Europe. Unfortunately, however, Lebanon is unable to deliver either a corresponding quantity or quality of social services to its population. This lack of capacity to deliver social services has multiple causes. First, Lebanon has expended considerable resources for its post-Civil

18

War reconstruction that was accomplished with large-scale financial borrowing. Lebanon's debt burden is almost 200 percent of its GDP and just servicing this debt consumes approximately 40 percent of the central government spending (the 2006 Lebanon War destruction aggravated the reconstructtion issues).[37] Second, the post-Civil War Lebanese governments have opted for liberal policies in order to encourage rapid economic growth by the private sector. Third, there is great income inequality in Lebanon and approximately eight percent of the Lebanese population lives in conditions of extreme poverty or under the World Bank's "adopted poverty line of US$2.4 per capita per day."[38] The World Bank also points out that during the 1990s "non-resident [monetary] transfers and investments from both the Lebanese Diaspora and Arab nationals pushed up prices for land, housing, and medical services, making them all but unaffordable for lower-income groups and for much of the middle class."[39]

As Sayed and Tzannatos observe, in "the health sector, half of the Lebanese are uninsured and therefore uncovered by modern state-of-the-art facilities in modern hospitals."[40] Thus, although Lebanon's nominal national income per capita at $3,990 (2004 data) is much higher than in certain neighboring states (e.g., $1,130 in Syria, $1,760 in Jordan, $2,490 in Turkey), when the real purchasing power parity of the Lebanese is measured, Lebanon is "on par with Jordan and the Philippines and far behind Malaysia, Algeria, Tunisia and Turkey."[41] Consequently, the sectarian divisions in Lebanon and the relative lack of a government-sponsored social safety net increase the reliance of selected population segments on those who can provide essential social services in return for political allegiances. For example, as has already been mentioned, the Shiite poor largely rely on social service networks that are provided by

19

Hezbollah. In short, political and ideological sectarianism, the lack of state-sponsored social services, and general economic conditions can always provide the dangerous mix that attracts membership to radical ideas and groups.

If the social services situation is bad for the poor Lebanese, it is worse for the poor Palestinian refugees that altogether constitute almost ten percent of Lebanon's own four million resident national population (Lebanese expatriates abroad are estimated to be twelve million).[42] The Palestinian refugees live in less than desirable conditions in Lebanon. Since their status as refugees has always been classified as "temporary" and Lebanon is a small country with a correspondingly small economy, they do not have the right to work and own property in Lebanon, and they have limited access to governmental social services. Moreover, the delicately balanced Lebanese confessional political system does not permit the absorption of the Palestinians as Lebanese citizens.[43] The Palestinian–Israeli conflict and the associated Palestinian refugee problem have been festering for more than sixty years. At the same time, the socioeconomic conditions of the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon are not desirable and the existing economic conditions of Lebanon and the immediate region do not have the capacity to provide immediate relief. For example, because of world economic conditions, there are reduced employment opportunities for skilled immigrant labor (including many Lebanese) even in the oil-rich Arab emirates in the Gulf. The less than desirable socioeconomic conditions of the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon provide a fertile ground for the planting and rooting of the ideology of radical Islam. This ideology usually advocates the rather simple task of self-sacrifice in an armed struggle rather

engaging its supporters in long-term activities of socioeconomic development and reconstruction.

The Needs of the Lebanese Armed Forces

Due to its small financial resources, Lebanon extensively relies on foreign military assistance, and especially on assistance from the United States, for most of its military procurement needs. United States military assistance to Lebanon has been and continues to be held hostage by the U.S. perceptions of what better serves the national security of Israel. Thus, traditionally, weapons systems deemed to be useful for "offensive purposes" and potential threats to Israeli security are not transferred to the Lebanese Armed Forces. The result is that the Lebanese Armed Forces lack modern fighter aircraft and attack helicopters, tanks, self-propelled (SP) artillery, and air defense systems. Thus, Lebanon lacks modern weapons systems for its legitimate self-defense needs against both external and internal threats. This also creates the negative and counterproductive perception that the Lebanese Armed Forces are generically incapable of defending Lebanese territory, thus there is a genuine need for the existence of non-governmental armies within Lebanon (e.g., Hezbollah). A number of examples illustrate this problem. Lacking modern fighter aircraft, the Lebanese Air Force managed to literally resurrect from extended storage four British-made Hawker Hunter F70 fighter aircraft of 1950s vintage and restore them to flight status in late 2008 (the restoration of these aircraft to flight status was delayed by even the lack of operational firing cartridges for the pilots' ejection seats).[44] In December 2008, it was announced that the Russian Federation was willing to donate to Lebanon ten advanced MiG-29 Fulcrum fighter aircraft, and was willing to proceed with the transfer of other

military equipment, including modern T-90 main battle tanks (MBTs), the Tor M1 short range anti-aircraft missile system, and anti-tank guided missiles at deep price discounts. This proposal has been met with immediate negative reaction by Israel and accompanying "skepticism" by the U.S. Department of Defense.[45] Past proposals to modernize the armor inventory of the Lebanese Army that consists of 1950s vintage U.S.-made M-48 and Soviet-made T-54/55 MBTs with surplus German-made Krauss Maffei Wegmann Leopard 1 MBTs from a NATO country met similar resistance and never materialized. The Lebanese Army totally lacks any modern SP artillery.

This lack of modern weapons systems retarded the ability of the Lebanese Army to effectively and rapidly prevail against the domestic threat of the Fatah Al Islam group during the 2007 fighting in the Nahr Al Bared Palestinian refugee camp. The lack of air support from fighter aircraft and attack helicopters was particularly acute. The Lebanese Army ground forces also suffered from ordinary equipment shortages and at times they were at a disadvantage against their opponents (e.g., the Lebanese troops, including those in Special Forces units, lacked night vision goggles while the Palestinian fighters inside the camp possessed such devices).[46] The United States and other countries had to fly tank and artillery ammunition into Lebanon in order to replenish depleted Lebanese ammunition stocks.

United States military assistance to Lebanon, which amounts to an estimated annual figure of $91.56 million for the 2006-2009 period,[47] is a small fraction of the free U.S. military aid to Israel that amounts to $3 billion per year and includes the most sophisticated weapons systems that the U.S. can produce. Thus, a marginal increase in the quality and degree of modernity for the weapons systems that are permitted to be

22

transferred to Lebanon will not appreciably disturb the overwhelming Israeli military superiority in the region.

The United States plays a very active role in the training of the Lebanese Armed Forces officers in the U.S. under the U.S. International Military Education and Training (IMET) military assistance program. The IMET program has also been used for United States training activities of Lebanese military personnel in Lebanon itself. The relevant United States IMET expense in relation to Lebanon amounts approximately to $700,000 per year.[48] The United States, other countries, and the UN have also engaged in training activities in Lebanon in relation to mine clearing and disposal of unexploded ordnance that includes cluster munitions. A 1998 United States training mission in Lebanon was actively involved in an effort to neutralize more than 600 minefields that existed following the end of the Civil War.[49] Unlike the United States perceptions and apprehension over the provision of weapons systems to the Lebanese Armed Forces, the IMET program has made a positive contribution to the relationship of the Lebanese officer corps with the U.S. Armed Forces.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Lebanon has lived as a functioning democracy in the Middle East and survived both the terror of foreign invasions and occupations as well as the terror of a lengthy, bitter, and immensely costly Civil War that served the interests of various regional actors. Lebanon has managed to maintain the delicate balances of its imperfect but still functioning confessional and rather fragmented political system of government. This system can be improved, but it is unlikely to be radically changed in the very near future.

23

Small countries such as Lebanon easily become victims of geopolitical developments and unintended consequences that are clearly beyond their control. When it comes to the modern and rather undefined phenomenon of terrorism, Lebanon can still take steps with the assistance of others in order to address some of the domestic environmental conditions that give rise to this phenomenon, and improve its own legitimate self-defense capabilities against both foreign and domestic threats. Since Lebanon's confessional political system cannot be easily altered, domestic socioeconomic conditions must occupy the center of attention both for the Lebanese government and those foreign countries that provide economic and reconstruction assistance. The Lebanese state must provide a better social safety net that is impartial and successfully transcends political and sectarian lines. Economic assistance from donor countries is needed so that this social safety net can effectively encompass the Palestinian refugees. Although there may be unwillingness to constructively engage in regional "grand design" projects especially in the current environment of tight financial credit, regional economic development projects of a large scale that can provide long-term meaningful employment may prove to be the best antidote to the socioeconomic conditions that feed radical ideologies and the terrorism phenomenon. The United States has almost exclusively focused on matters of security assistance and conventional anti-terrorism work in the region rather than on the long-term benefits of economic development assistance as it did in the 1950s. The European Union (EU) is better positioned to exercise its political and, most importantly, its economic power for engaging in regional transnational development programs in areas such as energy, transportation, and water resource management.[50]

At the same time the United States under the new administration of Barack Obama must engage in an honest dialogue with regional actors in the Middle East aimed at regaining the U.S. reputation as an "honest broker" rather than as an unquestioning platform for the support of Israeli national security interests. Unless this approach is followed, regional instability, undesirable socioeconomic conditions, and the intransigence of regional actors to settle long-festering disputes and armed conflicts will continue to provide new recruits for movements that are governed by radical – and predominantly – Islamic ideologies. Lebanon has been the battleground of rival regional interests and ideologies and desires to exist in an environment of regional peace and stability. In this new context, Lebanon cannot be deprived of material assistance for its Armed Forces that is needed for its legitimate self-defense against foreign and domestic threats to its national security. Similarly, Lebanon must become a regional test case for appropriate levels of socioeconomic assistance that will address the acute needs of its citizens and those of the Palestinian refugees in its territory. This approach not only will promote Lebanon's own stability and unity, it will also contribute to regional peace and stability and will serve the publicly pronounced national security interests of the United States in the greater Middle East as well.

Endnotes

[1] Andre Bou Maachar, *Lebanon: Strategic And Political Challenges And Opportunities*, Strategy Research Project, (USAWC, March 2008), p. 12.

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] Gilles Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam*, (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 2002), p. 23. Qutb had visited the United States in the late 1940s. A devout Muslim, Qutb categorically rejected the American way of life as "immoral."

[4] Ibid., p. 25.

[5] Ibid., p. 26.

[6] Andrew Higgins, "How Israel Helped To Spawn Hamas: Israel's decades-long dealings with Palestinian Islamists reveal a catalog of unintended and often perilous consequences, 'You are going to have big regrets in 20 or 30 years'," *The Wall Street Journal*, (New York, NY, January 24-25, 2009), pp. W1, W2.

[7] Bilal Y. Saab, "Al-Qa'ida's Presence and Influence in Lebanon," *CTC Sentinel*, Vol. 1, Issue 12 (Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, West Point, NY, November 2008), pp. 5-8. Cited by Nerguizian and Cordesman in n. 21 (see below).

[8] Souad Mekhennet, Michael Moss, "In Lebanon Camp, a New Face of Jihad Vows Attacks on U.S.," *The New York Times*, (New York, NY, March 16, 2007), pp. A1, A13.

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[10] Aram Nerguizian and Anthony Cordesman, *The Lebanese Armed Forces: Challenges and Opportunities in Post-Syria Lebanon*, (Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, DC, February 10, 2009), p. 16.

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[14] Lara Deeb, "Hizballah and its Civilian Constitucencies in Lebanon," Nubar Hovsepian, ed., *The War on Lebanon: A Reader*, (Olive Branch Press, Northampton, MA, 2008), pp. 59-60.

[15] Deeb, p. 60.

[16] Bou Maachar, p. 30, citing Trevor N. Dupuy and Paul Martell, *Flawed Victory: The Arab-Israeli Conflict and the 1982 War on Lebanon*, (Hero Books, Fairfax, VA, 1996), p. 207.

[17] Robert Lowe and Claire Spencer, eds., *Iran, its Neighbours and the Regional Crises*, Chatham House, (The Royal Institute of International Affairs, UK, 2006), pp. 24-25 (*Iran and its Neighbours*).

[18] Deeb, p. 61.

[19] Hany T. Nakleh, *The 2006 Israeli War on Lebanon: Analysis and Strategic Implications*, Strategy Research Project, (USAWC, March 2007), p. 2.

[20] Deeb, p. 65; Bou Maachar, p. 9.

[21] Deeb, p. 66.

[22] Deeb, pp. 67-68.

[23] Deeb, p. 69; Bou Maachar, p. 9.

[24] Seymour M. Hersh, "Watching Lebanon: Washington's interests in Israel's war," *The New Yorker*, (New York, NY, August 21, 2006, 28:33), pp. 30-31. There is also credible information suggesting that Israel was planning a massive campaign against Hezbollah since 2004 and that the United States indicated its agreement with such an initiative in a meeting between U.S. President George W. Bush and Israeli Prime Minister Olmert in May 2006. Nakleh, p. 5 and n. 17.

[25] Nakleh, p. 9. It should be noted that following the March 2003 invasion of Iraq, the United States Armed Forces permitted the ethnic Iranian members of the organization Mujahideen Khalq (People's Mujahideen) who were based in Iraq to retain their structure and weapons although this organization had received a "terrorist" classification by the U.S. Department of State. This organization is opposed to the governing regime of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

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[28] Nerguizian and Cordesman, pp. 19-20.

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[31] Paul McCeough, *Kill Khalid: The Failed Mossad Assassination of Khalid Mishal and the Rise of Hamas*, (The New Press, New York, NY, 2009), p. 46.

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[39] Ibid.

[40] Sayed and Tzannatos, p. 334.

[41] Ibid., pp. 334-335.

[42] Khanna, pp. 215, 217.

[43] Kfoury, p. 80.

[44] Nerguizian and Cordesman, pp. 38-39.

[45] Nicholas Blandford, "Lebanon caught in power play over MiG-29 offer," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, Vol. 46, No. 1 (Jane's Publishing, UK, January 7, 2009), p. 14.

[46] Nerguizian and Cordesman, p. 18.

[47] Nerguizian and Cordesman, Figure 27, p. 96.

[48] Jane's Publishing Group, *Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment – Eastern Mediterranean* (Lebanon – Army), (Jane's Information Group, UK, November 13, 2007), p. 8 of 11.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Khanna, p. 219.