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TWO-LEVEL GAMES IN A BATTLEGROUND STATE:  
LEBANON AND FOREIGN POLICY

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## Introduction

Since its independence from France in 1943, Lebanon has been a military and ideological battleground in the Middle East. Lebanon is fractured among competing sectarian communities, each with their own interpretation of the identity of the state. For some, Lebanon is one of the last remaining Christian refuges in the Middle East whose ancestry can be traced back to Phoenician merchants and sailors. For others, Lebanon orients itself east to Syria and its Arab neighbors. Still others prefer the state gaze neither east nor west, but embrace its unique, cosmopolitan identity. Whichever vision one holds, Lebanon's identity is nothing but contested, which becomes a source of domestic conflict.

One result of this domestic contest is that Lebanon lacks a single, unified foreign policy. Instead, the divergent conceptions of the identity of the state result in a collection of foreign policies that are held by various state, sub-state, and non-state actors. Without understanding domestic Lebanese politics, it becomes impossible to fully appreciate its multiplicity of foreign policies and external relations. Because of the fractured political and foreign policy environment, external regional and international actors direct their policies not only at the Lebanese state, but also at these sub-state and non-state actors.

Under these conditions, regional political dynamics played out in Lebanon are best understood as a two-level game that combines domestic and foreign politics. Analyses such as ours must therefore examine political events on multiple levels of analysis, and reconcile the debates among different schools of international relations (IR) theory to adequately place Lebanon within a broader regional context; the Montréal School is a theoretical framework that allows us to do so by linking domestic politics to regional environments. Furthermore, this approach helps demystify Lebanese politics by establishing a durable analytical structure. While

the domestic and international actors involved will fluctuate, the two-level game endures, allowing analysts to more clearly comprehend the complex environment that is Lebanese politics.

We conduct our analysis by employing IR theory to explain actions the foreign policies of and towards Lebanon, and attempt to place Lebanon within a broader regional framework. To illustrate the domestic and regional conflicts that play out in the state, we employ primary documents, including recently leaked US diplomatic cables and Lebanese print media sources, the academic literature on Lebanon, its foreign relations, and the interests of external actors, and interviews with US government officials, Lebanese political figures, and academics.

This paper has been divided into three sections; the first introduces the Lebanese political system and the role of sectarianism. The second address competing theoretical approaches that are applicable to our analysis, which include Realism, Constructivism, the Bureaucratic Politics model, and the Montréal School framework. The third section is comprised of two case studies—the Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon in 2005, and the 2006 Israel-Hizbullah War—to illustrate our theoretical approach and findings.

## **Sectarianism and the Lebanese System**

A historically divided and multi-confessional land, Lebanon is comprised of eighteen different nationally recognized sects. Under its constitution, political power is formally divided amongst these in a consociational arrangement, with political and bureaucratic positions distributed according to sectarian identity. In 1920, under a League of Nations mandate, France established Greater Lebanon by knitting together seven regions into one country. Upon achieving

independence in 1943, Christians and Muslim Lebanese agreed upon a “National Pact” to share control of the country.<sup>1</sup> Under this agreement, the major religious groups split control of the government, with a Maronite Christian as president, a Sunni Muslim as prime minister and a Shi’a Muslim as speaker of parliament. Reflecting the demographic makeup of the country, the parliament was split into a 6 to 5 Christian to Muslim ratio. The National Pact also recognized Lebanon’s identity as outwardly Arab, but with Western cultural links, which was designed to end Muslim advocacy for unification with Syria and Christian demands for French military protection.<sup>2</sup>As a result of the power-sharing structure organized by the National Pact, no individual sect was politically or militarily powerful enough to either dominate another or shape the national identity and political orientation of the state in its own communal image. Dating back to at least the nineteenth century, conflicts between the Christian, Muslim and Druze communities were prevalent, demonstrating the deep mistrust and anxiety that existed between the sects.<sup>3</sup>

This mistrust erupted in 1975 into civil war between the rival confessional factions within Lebanon. The civil war was the result of perceived injustices in the political system, as religious groups fought to both transform and maintain the status quo distribution of power and influence in the government. In 1976, Syria entered Lebanon under the guise of reestablishing stability and order to its war-torn neighbor.<sup>4</sup> On October 22, 1989, the 62 remaining members of the 1972

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<sup>1</sup>The National Pact was a gentlemen agreement between Maronite political leader Khoury and Sunni political leader Sohl. The National Pact strengthened the Maronite authority and power in Lebanon by establishing full executive power to the Maronite President and gave the Christians a 6:5 ratio majority in Parliament over the Muslims. The National Pact was achieved through a non-violent communal rupture but rather because of a deeper understanding on the political, social and economic issues facing Lebanon, between the Sunni Muslim elite and the Christian elite. The Pact paved the road to a defined confessional system in which the roles of each sect became clearly distinct.

<sup>2</sup>Traboulsi, Fawwaz. *A History of Modern Lebanon*. London: Pluto Press (2007), pp 109-11.

<sup>3</sup>Azar, Edward. “Lebanon and its political culture: conflict and integration in Lebanon.” In *The emergence of a new Lebanon*. Praeger Publishers, 1984, p 40.

<sup>4</sup>Lawson, Fred H. “Syria’s intervention in the Lebanese civil war, 1976: a domestic conflict explanation.” *International Organization*, Vol. 38, No. 3 (Summer, 1984), pp 451-2.

Lebanese parliament, which had fallen apart due to the war, signed the Ta'if Agreement, ending the civil war.<sup>5</sup> Mediated by Saudi Arabia and the United States, the agreement aimed to balance the numerous communal interests and redistribute power and authority in Lebanon. While maintaining the same assignment of a Maronite president, Sunni prime minister and Shi'a speaker that was present under the National Pact, Ta'if adjusted the balance within the parliament. The number of seats increased from 99 to 128, while the former Christian majority ratio was changed to a 50-50 split in seat apportionment between Christians and Muslims.

The agreement was a starting point in the pursuit of positive change to the confessional system established by the National Pact. On its surface, the Ta'if Agreement offered Lebanese politicians an opportunity to move away from the flaws of the National Pact and set the country on the "path to peace and reconstruction."<sup>6</sup> Rather than abolishing the confessional system outright, Ta'if sought to maintain the power-sharing system, while adjusting it to reduce the internal tensions that led to the civil war.

Traboulsi describes the National Pact "one of the most unstable political power relations imaginable," while Ta'if "created another system of discord. The Christian population, in particular, viewed themselves as the losers in the post-war era, as they were demographically outnumbered, yet felt underrepresented, cheated by the system, insecure and alienated."<sup>7</sup> Throughout the text of the Ta'if Agreement, the importance of Lebanon's sovereignty is only sporadically mentioned as a necessary component of national unity and reconciliation. "<sup>8</sup> Despite the discord present within the system after Ta'if, Syria emerged as the dominant actor in

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<sup>5</sup>Abu-Hamad, Azis. "Communal Strife in Lebanon." *Journal of International Affairs*, (Summer 1995), p 49.

<sup>6</sup>Traboulsi, Fawwaz. *A History of Modern Lebanon*. London: Pluto Press (2007), p 240.

<sup>7</sup>Reinkowski, Maurus. "National Identity in Lebanon since 1990." *Orient: Deutsche Zeitschrift für Politik und Wirtschaft des Orient* 39, 1997 : 501 see: [http://www.freidok.uni-freiburg.de/volltexte/4357/pdf/Reinkowski\\_National\\_identity\\_in\\_Lebanon.pdf](http://www.freidok.uni-freiburg.de/volltexte/4357/pdf/Reinkowski_National_identity_in_Lebanon.pdf)

<sup>8</sup>Traboulsi, Fawwaz. *A History of Modern Lebanon*. London: Pluto Press (2007), pp 244.

post-war Lebanon, acting as the regulator of Lebanese affairs, mitigating inter-sectarian conflict by exerting its political control.<sup>9</sup> Ta'if recognized the increased role Syria played in Lebanon, emphasizing the “special relationship” between the two states as the result of “blood relationships, history and joint fraternal interests.”<sup>10</sup>

Further, Ta'if stipulated that Syria would redeploy its troops to the Bekaa Valley near the Syrian border two years after constitutional reforms were passed.<sup>11</sup> Salloukh contends that Ta'if committed Lebanon to a pro-Syrian alignment and paved the way for “bilateral agreements that underscored Lebanon’s pro-Syrian foreign policy, both at the regional and international levels.”<sup>12</sup> Thus, Ta'if imposed genuine constraints on Lebanon’s ability to formulate a foreign policy absent external influence, limiting the country and its sub-national actors to its restrictions.

## Comparative Theoretical Framework

The foreign policy of Lebanon and foreign policy making toward Lebanon have traditionally proven to be difficult subjects for theoretical analyses. A theoretical model of Middle East IR with Lebanon at its analytical focal point must account for a broad range of behavior by state, sub-state, and non-state actors.<sup>13</sup> The model must address Lebanon’s role in the Middle East, both as a participant and as a battleground for regional and international conflict

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<sup>9</sup> Interview with Bassel Salloukh, Mar 17, 2011.

<sup>10</sup> Ta'if Accord, 22 October 1989.

<sup>11</sup> Salloukh, Bassel. “The Art of the Impossible: The Foreign Policy of Lebanon,” in Bahgat Korany and Ali E. Hillal Dessouki, eds., *The Foreign Policies of Arab States: The Challenge of Globalization*, New Revised Edition (AUC Press, 2008): p 288.

<sup>12</sup> Salloukh, Bassel. “The Art of the Impossible: The Foreign Policy of Lebanon,” in Bahgat Korany and Ali E. Hillal Dessouki, eds., *The Foreign Policies of Arab States: The Challenge of Globalization*, New Revised Edition (AUC Press, 2008): p 288.

<sup>13</sup> We define “sub-state” actors as those operating within the structure of the state (e.g., members of parliament), and “non-state” actors that those operating outside the structure of the state (e.g., religious leaders). Both sub-state and non-state actors can influence foreign policy, regardless of their affiliation with formal state institutions.

and political competition. It must also address two interrelated elements: the domestic political environments of both Lebanon and external participants (e.g., their political structure and the relationships between sub-state actors; distributions of political power; regime type), and the regional environment and conditions that influence external behavior towards Lebanon (e.g., military and ideological interstate conflicts; strategic considerations and alliances).

A theoretical approach to Lebanon and its role in the Middle East must also have applications beyond a discreet analysis of Lebanese politics. Our critique of existing theoretical models, and the alternatives we advocate, can be applied to a general analysis of IR of the Middle East, as can our use of the Montréal School as a framework to understand state behavior. Finally, our application of the Montréal School's two-level theoretical framework to Lebanon can be used to draw comparisons to other weak states and inform analyses on the regional and international roles of contemporary Iraq, Yemen, Afghanistan, and other states with factionalized political environments and penetrated by external forces.

In the pages that follow, we survey competing theoretical approaches relevant to our analysis, and highlight their utility and deficiencies. No single theoretical approach proves either wholly applicable or devoid of explanatory power. We end by offering an alternative framework—the Montréal School of IR—that is informed by our theoretical survey, and explains the broad range of behavior observed in our case studies by addressing variables on both the domestic and regional levels of analysis.

## **Realism**

The standard, or 'traditional' theory of IR—realism—is helpful in explaining some aspects of the foreign policies and behaviors we observe, but has limitations. Realism defines a set of conditions under which states interact, and makes assumption about how states respond in

their environment. In his contribution to the literature, Waltz makes three claims: first, states are the dominant actors in international affairs and are coherent units that execute foreign policies in the pursuit of their national interest. While domestic foreign policy debates exist, the decision makers are relatively united in defining what constitutes their national interest.<sup>14</sup> Second, because states exist in an anarchic international environment, their national interests are defined by national security concerns and power; their foreign policies are crafted to address these concerns.<sup>15</sup> Third, military force is an effective tool for achieving their foreign policy objectives.<sup>16</sup> Realism is thus a theory of “a few big and important things”<sup>17</sup> – balance of power between states, and military force. Realism does not reject social, economic, or ideological variables than influence state behavior, but argues that they are less important than a state’s security concerns.<sup>18</sup>

Realism is a useful tool in understanding some elements of foreign policies towards Lebanon that we observe. For example, Israel’s incursions into Lebanon in 1978, 1982 to 2000, 2006, and briefly in 2007 were all meant to confront national security threats from the Palestinian Liberation Organization and Hizbullah.<sup>19</sup> Likewise, Syrian intervention in Lebanon in

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<sup>14</sup> Waltz, Kenneth N. *Man, the State and War: A Theoretical Analysis*. New York: Columbia University Press (4<sup>th</sup> Ed, 1965) pp 178-179.

<sup>15</sup> Waltz, p 160.

<sup>16</sup> Waltz, p160.

<sup>17</sup> Waltz, Kenneth N. “Reflections on Theory and International Politics: A Response to my Critics”, in Robert O. Keohane (ed.), *Neorealism and Its Critics*. New York: Columbia University Press (1986) p 329.

<sup>18</sup> Kaarbo, Juliet. “Power Politics in Foreign Policy: The Influence of Bureaucratic Minorities.” *European Journal of International Relations* 4.1 (1998) p 67-68.

<sup>19</sup> On the 1978 invasion 1982-2000 occupation of South Lebanon, see Traboulsi, Fawwaz. *A History of Modern Lebanon*. London: Pluto Press (2007) p 206, 213-215; on the 1982 Operation Litani, see Saunders, Harold H. “An Israeli-Palestinian Peace.” *Foreign Affairs* 61.1 (1982) p 100-101; on the 2006 Israel-Hizbullah War, see Brom, Shlomo. “Political and Military Objectives in a Limited War Against A Guerilla Organization”, in *The Second Lebanon War: Strategic Perspectives*. Tel Aviv: Institute for National Security Studies: 13-23; on the 2007 Israeli incursion into south Lebanon, see interview with Mark Rasmussen, 20 March 2011.

1976, and its occupation until 2005 were designed to achieve its national security objectives.<sup>20</sup> However, realism has limited utility in analyzing other regional actors because national security and balance of power concerns do not always dominate international relations. Walt argues that states form alliances not to balance against power, but against threats. In Walt's analysis, 'threat' is defined by the geographic proximity between states, their offensive capabilities, and perceived intentions.<sup>21</sup> However, Gause notes that perceptions of threat can also include domestic and transnational political identities.<sup>22</sup> Walt and Gause highlight a broader range of variables than Waltz in explaining state-to-state relations.

Examining Lebanon's foreign policy reveals another deficiency of realism. Fundamentally, Lebanon breaks realism's assumption that states are 'coherent units'. As Salloukh notes, "most significant for Lebanon's foreign policy [are] its national and cultural cleavages, where different segments of the population [subscribe] to their own 'visions of Lebanon'...Local [Lebanese] actors deploy transnational ideologies or bandwagon with external actors to strengthen their positions in domestic political struggles."<sup>23</sup> Therefore, Lebanon is not a 'coherent unit' because domestic actors create their own individual foreign policies that are independent of a 'national interest'.

## **Constructivism**

Constructivist theory offers an alternative account of international affairs, in which state relations are not always determined by the balance of power or threat, but negotiated under

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<sup>20</sup> Weinberger, Naomi Joy. *Syrian Intervention in Lebanon: The 1975-76 War*. New York: Oxford University Press (1986) pp4-7; Abukhalil, As'ad. "Determinants and Characteristics of Syrian Policy in Lebanon", in *Peace for Lebanon? From War to Reconstruction*, ed. Deirdre Collings. Boulder: Lynn Rienner Publishers (1994) pp 130-133.

<sup>21</sup> Walt, Stephen. *The Origin of Alliances*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press (1990) p 5.

<sup>22</sup> Gause, Gregory F. III. "Balancing What? Threat Perception and Alliance Choice in the Gulf." *Security Studies* 13.2 (Winter2003/4) pp 273-275.

<sup>23</sup> Salloukh, Bassel F. "The Art of the Impossible: The Foreign Policy of Lebanon." *The Foreign Policies of Arab States: The Challenge of Globalization* eds. Korany & Dessouki. New York: Cairo University Press. New Revised Edition (2008): p 284.

norms of behavior and identity. As Barnett notes, “all groups of actors including states, have norms that regulate their behavior...Regional order emerges not only because of a stable correlation of military forces [i.e., balance of power] but also because of stable expectations of shared norms...States implicate their identities as they defend or advance a regional order.”<sup>24</sup> Political and national ideologies can be used as weapons, just as military force can, to compel states to change behavior by imposing costs on their failure to do so. By highlighting the role of norms in regulating state behavior, Barnett rejects the realist notion that balance of power or threat is the primary regulator of state behavior.

Although national security concerns are present in external states’ foreign policies toward Lebanon (e.g., Israel’s security interests in south Lebanon, or Syria’s interest in Lebanon as part of its geo-strategic calculations vis-à-vis Israel), so too are non-military conflicts. Lebanon is not only a battleground for military conflict, but also an ideological battleground. Domestic factors are another source of international ideological conflict. “Most Arab governments are engaged in intense ideological conflict domestically, they become suspicious and intolerant of divergent regimes [or neutral states like Lebanon]. They [cannot] help but see these regimes and their own domestic opposition in the same light.”<sup>25</sup>

One example of the ways in which ideological battles are fought out in Lebanon is the regional contest between Saudi Arabia and Iran. While this battle plays out in other arenas as well, both states support their Lebanese allies as proxies in a larger regional battle for influence that is, in part, religious but also political. Saudi Arabia seeks to defend its status as leader of the Sunni Muslim community and its pro-Western foreign policy orientation; Iran challenges Saudi’s

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<sup>24</sup> Barnett, Michael N. *Dialogues in Arab Politics: Negotiations in Regional Order*. New York, Columbia University Press (1998) p 6.

<sup>25</sup> Noble, Paul C. “The Arab System: Opportunities, Constraints, and Pressures.” *The Foreign Policies of Arab States: The Challenge of Globalization* eds. Korany & Dessouki. Boulder: Westview Press: Cairo (1984) p 43.

pro-Western orientation and presents itself as an alternative to the pro-American status quo. Both states are in a unique position to leverage Islamic identities to their advantage and enhance or defend their transnational influence.<sup>26</sup>

The strength of Constructivism is its ability to explain influences on international affairs that are not based on the balance of power between states, or military conflict. However, in our analysis, Constructivism is limited in its utility because, like realism, it is primarily focused the relationships between states. While the origins of identity or ideological conflicts on the international level may be domestic, it seeks to explain the relationships between states. In Lebanon, issues of identity and ideology are a significant source of conflict, can be used to explain internal alliance building, and are helpful in demystifying Lebanese foreign policy making.

## **Bureaucratic Politics**

As noted above, the realist assumption of ‘coherent units’ breaks down when applied to Lebanese foreign policy making. Allison and Halperin offer an alternative approach—the Bureaucratic Politics model—in which they argue, “the ‘maker’ of government policy is not one calculating decision-maker, but rather a conglomerate of large organizations and political actors who differ substantially about what their government should do on any particular issue and who compete in attempting to affect both government decisions and the actions of their government.”<sup>27</sup> In this model, sub-national actors influence the foreign policy making process and can affect international conflict.

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<sup>26</sup> Noble, Paul C. “From Arab System to Middle East System? Regional Pressures and Constraints.” *The Foreign Policies of Arab States: The Challenge of Globalization* eds. Korany & Dessouki. New York: Cairo University Press. New Revised Edition (2008) pp 105 -109.

<sup>27</sup> Allison, Graham T. & Morton H. Halperin. “Bureaucratic Politics: A Paradigm and Some Policy Implications.” *World Politics* 24.Supplement: Theory and Policy in International Relations (Spring 1972) p 42. Keohane & Nye

The Bureaucratic Politics model is helpful in understanding Lebanese foreign policy making. Because of the consociational distribution of political power, competing sectarian communities and parliamentary coalitions control different elements of the state bureaucracy, while simultaneously advancing their own foreign policy agendas. To illustrate: when the Lebanese Prime Minister meets with the US Ambassador, he is not speaking only on behalf of the Lebanese state—though this may be one of the roles he plays. He also speaks as a representative of a particular political party, coalition, and sectarian community. While the phenomenon of elected or appointed representatives embodying multiple identities and functions are hardly unique to Lebanon, because of the consociational balance of power and the conflicts over national identity it fosters, the parochial agendas of sub-state and non-state actors are a primary factor in their external relationships. Likewise, when external actors shape their foreign policies toward Lebanon, they often target specific actors that most effectively serve their interests, to supplement their formal relationship with the Lebanese state. For example, Iran advances its foreign policy agenda in Lebanon by directing support to Hizbullah, not the Lebanese government.<sup>28</sup>

## **The Montréal School**

Realism's focus on state-to-state relations and military conflict is ill-suited to analyze Lebanon's role in the international system, but can be useful in explaining some actions of external actors in Lebanon. Barnett's constructivism illuminates the non-military types of conflict being played out in Lebanon, while Allison and Halperin's model of bureaucratic

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make a similar argument concerning "multiple channels" of actors involved in the foreign policy making process and their affect on interstate relations. See: Keohane, Robert . & Joseph S. Nye. *Power and Interdependence: World Politics in Transition*. Boston: Little, Brown & Company (1977) p 24.

<sup>28</sup> Fuller, Graham E. "The Hizbullah-Iran Connection: Model for Sunni Resistance". *The Washington Quarterly* 30.1 (Winter 2006-07) pp 141-144.

politics explains Lebanon's collection of foreign policies. The above assessment has articulated why traditional realist assumptions of IR do not always apply to the Lebanese example, and that elements of other theories and models are more appropriate. However, we must reconcile these disparate elements and integrate them into an analytical framework that is parsimonious, but also broad enough to account for the range of behaviors we observe in Lebanon.

The way to integrate these disparate analytical approaches and their different levels of analysis is by applying the Montréal School of IR. The Montréal School is an analytical framework that can be used to explain the relatively broad range of behavior observed in the foreign policies of and toward Lebanon by emphasizing the importance of two categories of variables: domestic politics and the regional environments in which states exist. As Noble argues, "The foreign policy of states is shaped by domestic conditions, by the values and perceptions of policy-makers, and by the global and regional environments in which they exist. National concerns [or sub-national in the case of Lebanon] influence what governments would *like* to do, but the environment determines what they are *able* to do."<sup>29</sup> Noble's characterization of foreign policy describes a two-level game, a phenomenon Putnam observed as one in which:

Domestic groups pursue their interests by pressuring the government to adopt favorable policies, and politicians seek power by constructing coalition among those groups. At the international level, national governments seek to maximize their own ability to satisfy domestic pressures, while minimizing the adverse consequences of foreign developments. Neither of the two games can be ignored by central decision-makers...Unlike state centric-theories, the two-level approach

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<sup>29</sup> Noble (1984) p 41.

recognizes the inevitability of domestic conflict about what the ‘national interest’ requires.<sup>30</sup>

We argue that the two-levels the Montréal School analyzes—domestic conditions and regional environments—represent two categories of variables that can reconcile the IR theories and frameworks we surveyed. Domestic variables include the Bureaucratic Politics model; regional environments include realism and constructivism, however, constructivism also has domestic applications as well. The utility of the Montréal School is that it does not advocate a particular theory—at least in the case of Lebanon—but instead argues that the mechanics that define IR are shaped by the two-level game between domestic and regional, or international factors. Additionally, this framework does not assume that all states behave in the same manner or are driven by the same concerns. If this were the case, there would be no need to examine domestic politics and drivers of individual states’ foreign policies.

The value of the Montréal School is its parsimony, by integrating a complex set of variables to examine the domestic and regional environments in which these relationships exist. The Montréal School is particularly well-suited to an analysis of Lebanon and its place in the international system because it can account for balance of power and national security concerns, battles over ideology and identity, and domestic politics.

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<sup>30</sup> Putnam, Robert D. “Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games.” *International Organization* 42.3 (Summer 1988) pp 434, 460.

## Case Studies

We now analyze two case studies – the Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon in 2005, and the 2006 Israel- Hizbullah war – to apply these theoretical models and illustrate the utility of the Montréal School of international relations.

### 2005 Syrian Withdrawal from Lebanon

After entering Lebanon in 1976 sensing the opportunity to “[reign] in the PLO and [strengthen] Syria’s position in the Arab-Israeli conflict,”<sup>31</sup> Syria maintained a constant presence in Lebanese political life. During the subsequent occupation, Damascus wielded considerable political influence in Lebanon, using Lebanon to achieve its domestic and regional objectives. Syria justified the legitimacy of the occupation by arguing that without Syrian guardianship Lebanon lacked “a climate favorable to political dialogue.”<sup>32</sup> Through the support of its allies over the next 25 years Hizbullah, Syria was able to maintain this presence. Syria bolstered Lebanese groups from across all confessions favorable to its presence, as part of an effort to end the civil war and establish special ties between Syria and Lebanon. Syria’s presence, though, did not go without opposition. Some Lebanese militias, particularly the Christians under Michel Aoun, waged wars against the Syrian occupation.<sup>33</sup> By exploiting the weakened Lebanese state during the civil war, Syria established a hold on Lebanese politics.

The Ta’if Agreement of 1989, negotiated under Saudi guidance, ended the Lebanese civil war and established a new system of governance of shared power between the Muslim and Christian population, in order to diffuse domestic tensions. Importantly for Syrian interests, the

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<sup>31</sup> Kerr, Michael. “‘A Positive Aspect to the Tragedy of Lebanon’: The Convergence of US, Syrian and Israeli Interests at the Outset of Lebanon’s Civil War.” *Israel Affairs*, Vol. 15, No. 4, (October 2009), p 359.

<sup>32</sup> Pogany, Istvan. *The Arab League and Peacekeeping in the Lebanon*, (Aldershot: Avebury, 1987) p 75.

<sup>33</sup> Reinkowski, Maurus. “National Identity of Lebanon since 1990.” *Orient: Deutsche Zeitschrift für Politik und Wirtschaft des Orient*, 39, 1997. p 493.

agreement recognized the “strength from the roots of neighborhood, history, and joint strategic interests, between Lebanon and Syria.”<sup>34</sup> By acknowledging, at least for the time being, Syria’s strength in maintaining some order in Lebanon through its military presence, Ta’if allowed Syria greater leeway to manipulate the system to its advantage. During this time, Syria’s power in Lebanon remained unquestioned, as Damascus took control within Lebanon and oversaw the “transition from war to peace.”<sup>35</sup>

Syria’s presence within Lebanon provided Damascus a considerable advantage in pursuing its regional interests, without directly engaging with other actors. Chief among Syria’s objectives within Lebanon are its antagonisms with Israel, the United States and Saudi Arabia, and its alliance with Iran and sub-national organizations within Lebanon, particularly Hizbullah. In particular, Syria viewed Lebanon as central to Hafez Asad’s “strategy of confronting Israel.”<sup>36</sup> Utilizing these Lebanon-centered relationships, Syria established itself as an influential player in the region. In doing so, Syria sought to defend itself from the perceived external threats to its security.<sup>37</sup>

However, domestic debate over Syria’s presence did not disappear. Threatened by Syrian moves to replace him, as well as a growing power struggle with Syrian-backed President Emile Lahoud, Hariri became increasingly frustrated with Syria’s continued control over Lebanese domestic politics.<sup>38</sup> Most prevalent amongst this was Syria’s desire to extend Lahoud’s term as president for another three years, despite Hariri’s opposition; Syria reasoned doing so would provide continuity in Lebanon’s government, as its relationship with the US continued to

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<sup>34</sup> Ta’if Accord, October 24, 1989.

<sup>35</sup> Salloukh, Bassel. “Syria and Lebanon: A Brotherhood Transformed.” *Middle East Report* 236, (Fall 2005), p 18.

<sup>36</sup> Kerr, Michael. “‘A Positive Aspect to the Tragedy of Lebanon’: The Convergence of US, Syrian and Israeli Interests at the Outset of Lebanon’s Civil War.” *Israel Affairs*, Vol. 15, No. 4, (October 2009), p 359.

<sup>37</sup> El-Hokayem, Emile. “Hizbullah and Syria: Outgrowing the Proxy Relationship.” *The Washington Quarterly*, (Spring 2007), p 37.

<sup>38</sup> Blanford, Nicholas. *Killing Mr. Lebanon*. I.B. Tauris: New York, p 87.

dissolve.<sup>39</sup> Though having served most of his term with Syria's blessing, Prime Minister Rafik Hariri came to lead an anti-Syrian, pro-Western alliance, along with Druze leader Walid Jumblatt and numerous leaders in the Christian community. Representatives from nearly every major sect joined the anti-Syria coalition, with only major Shi'a parties refusing to join, exemplifying the expanding nature of Lebanese animosity against Syria. This sectarian divide resulted in a dramatic "[polarization] over the presence of Syrian troops," which set the course for further discord in the country down the road.<sup>40</sup> In October 2004, after months of stalled negotiations within the government and an expanding conflict with Lahoud and Syria,<sup>41</sup> Hariri resigned his position in protest Syria's dominance in Lebanese politics.

### *Principal Sub-national Actors*

On February 14, 2005, a roadside bomb exploded alongside the motorcade carrying Rafik Hariri through Beirut, killing the former prime minister, along with 21 others. The assassination "catalyzed a crisis that was slowly heating up within Lebanon before his death brought it international attention,"<sup>42</sup> galvanizing elements of the population against the Syrian occupation and others in support of Syria's role in Lebanon. From Hariri's assassination came two political movements: the anti-Syrian March 14 coalition, headed by Hariri's son, Saad; and the pro-Syrian March 8 coalition, with Hizbullah as its main party.

#### March 14

A popular and influential businessman, Hariri's death shocked many Lebanese, particularly those opposed to Syria's continued presence. Though assassinations had been

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<sup>39</sup> Blanford, Nicholas. *Killing Mr. Lebanon*. I.B. Tauris: New York, p 91.

<sup>40</sup> Salem, Paul. "The Future of Lebanon." *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 85, no. 6 (Nov.-Dec. 2006), p 15.

<sup>41</sup> Blanford, Nicholas. *Killing Mr. Lebanon*. I.B. Tauris: New York, p 91.

<sup>42</sup> "Q&A: What is Syria's Role in Lebanon?" *Christian Science Monitor*. March 7 2005. <  
<http://www.csmonitor.com/2005/0307/p07s02-wome.html>>

attempted previously against anti-Syrian leaders, Hariri was the highest ranking victim and target. His assassination exposed the fragility of the sectarian balance and how far the two confessions' interests had drifted.<sup>43</sup> In particular, the Sunnis saw Hariri's assassination as a blow to their power, as much of that centered on the extent of his influence. Opposition leaders and their supporters gathered across the country, but primarily in Beirut, demanding Syria's exit and the restoration of Lebanese self-sovereignty.

The protests, which came to be referred to internationally as the Cedar Revolution, represented a wide swath of the Lebanese population, with members of every confessional group, numerous political parties and civil society organizations condemning the government.<sup>44</sup> Analysts at the time made much of the disparate nature of the protestors, as followers of many of the faiths within Lebanon took to the streets. Additionally, the protesters seemed to represent far more of the educated and wealthy from within Lebanon.<sup>45</sup> For many, the protests served as a unifying event, with protestors "raising not the flags of their respective political parties, but the national flag."<sup>46</sup>

The gatherings, which continued nightly for several weeks, called for the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon, the end of Syrian political influence in Lebanese and an international investigation into Hariri's assassination. The Lebanese government at the time was headed by the pro-Syrian leaders Prime Minister Omar Karami, Hariri's replacement, and President Emile Lahoud. The protestors demanded their resignations and for new elections to be held, free of Syrian influence. Lahoud felt his influence rapidly declining as the protests grew,

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<sup>43</sup> "Lebanon's Politics: The Sunni Community and Hariri's Future Crescent", *Middle East Report # 96*, 26 May 2010: p 10

<sup>44</sup> Safa, Oussama. "Lebanon Springs Forward." *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 17, No. 1, (January 2006), p 31.

<sup>45</sup> "Hizbullah Leads Huge Pro-Syria Protests in Central Beirut." *NY Times* 8 March 2005. <  
<http://www.nytimes.com/2005/03/08/international/middleeast/08cnd-beirut.html>>

<sup>46</sup> "Lebanon finds unity in street rallies." *BBC News* March 3 2005. <  
[http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/4315223.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/4315223.stm)>

pushed for negotiations to settle the dispute in government, including asking for Karami's resignation.<sup>47</sup> Two weeks after Hariri's death, as protestors gathered in Beirut's Martyr's Square, Karami tendered his resignation to Lahoud, whilst a no-confidence measure was moving through the parliament.<sup>48</sup> The protestors saw this as a victory, but this was short-lived as Lahoud invited Karami to form a new government a week later. Karami, though, expressed his intention to resign if a new government failed to materialize; one never did.<sup>49</sup>

## March 8

In response to the anti-Syria protests, competing rallies, organized by Hizbullah, sprung up to offer an alternate direction for the future of Lebanon. These rallies differed in composition from the Cedar Revolution's with "far more women with covered heads and men in traditional dress" in attendance.<sup>50</sup> Largely organized by Hizbullah, these rallies echoed the calls for Lebanese sovereignty presented by the March 8 protestors, but with dramatically alternative messages and goals for the country.

Hizbullah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah, included demands for international actors to refrain from "meddling with our country."<sup>51</sup> The March 8 gathering denounced UN Resolution 1559, recognized Syria's role in Lebanon and insisted on being included in any new government that formed after Karami's resignation.<sup>52</sup> Nasrallah criticized the United States and other nations for attempting to impose their will on the Lebanese people. In rejecting 1559, Nasrallah declared,

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<sup>47</sup> Safa, Oussama. "Lebanon Springs Forward." *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 17, No. 1, (January 2006), p 32.

<sup>48</sup> "Lebanese ministers forced to quit." *BBC News* February 28 2005. <[http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/4305927.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/4305927.stm)>

<sup>49</sup> Blanford, Nicholas. "Lebanon Catches Its Breath." *MERIP*, March 23, 2005. <<http://www.merip.org/mero/mero032305>>

Sakr, Etienne. "The Politics and Liberation of Lebanon." *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, vol. 9, no. 4 (December 2004), p 98.

<sup>50</sup> "Hizbullah Leads Huge Pro-Syria Protests in Central Beirut." *NY Times* 8 March 2005. <<http://www.nytimes.com/2005/03/08/international/middleeast/08cnd-beirut.html>>

<sup>51</sup> "Hizbullah rallies Lebanese to support Syria." *CNN* 9 March 2005. <[http://articles.cnn.com/2005-03-08/world/lebanon.syria\\_1\\_tauf-accord-anti-syria-syrian-troops?s=PM:WORLD](http://articles.cnn.com/2005-03-08/world/lebanon.syria_1_tauf-accord-anti-syria-syrian-troops?s=PM:WORLD)>

<sup>52</sup> Safa, Oussama. "Lebanon Springs Forward." *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 17, No. 1, January 2006, p 33

“We tell the whole world that we refuse the 1559 resolution. Isn’t this Western democracy? The majority is rejecting Resolution 1559.”<sup>53</sup> During the first Hizbullah rally, held on March 8, 2005, Nasrallah told Syrian supporters, “Today, you decided the future of your nation and your country today you answer the world.”<sup>54</sup>

For many within the March 8 camp, the biggest threat to Lebanon came not from Syria but Israel. Hizbullah is supported primarily by Lebanese Shi’a; as the predominant religious group in Lebanon’s south, the Shi’a were more directly affected by the 18 year Israeli occupation of Lebanon from 1982 to 2000, holding. Indeed, having faced Israel, some March 8 protesters believed that the March 14 protests were American and Israeli manufactured, with Nasrallah declaring to them, “What you did not win in war, I swear, you will not win with politics.”<sup>55</sup>

However, the motives behind the March 8 protests cannot be described as entirely supportive of Syria’s presence in Lebanon because of a strong allegiance to Syria. In the years following Israel’s withdrawal from Lebanon in 2000, Hizbullah grew stronger in its role within Lebanon, allowing it to become more independent from Syria’s manipulation.<sup>56</sup> Nevertheless, the continued presence of Syria in Lebanon was seen by the Shi’a as providing them cover in south Lebanon, where it pursued its anti-Israeli agenda.<sup>57</sup> The loss of Syria in Lebanon would result in a diminishment of Hizbullah’s power. From this, the militia feared an increase in international pressure to disarm, which would limit its ability to style itself as opposition to the Israeli threat.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> “Hizbullah rallies Lebanese to support Syria.” *CNN* 9 March 2005. <[http://articles.cnn.com/2005-03-08/world/lebanon.syria\\_1\\_tauf-accord-anti-syria-syrian-troops?\\_s=PM:WORLD](http://articles.cnn.com/2005-03-08/world/lebanon.syria_1_tauf-accord-anti-syria-syrian-troops?_s=PM:WORLD)>

<sup>54</sup> “Hizbullah Leads Huge Pro-Syria Protests in Central Beirut.” *NY Times* 8 March 2005. <<http://www.nytimes.com/2005/03/08/international/middleeast/08cnd-beirut.html>>

<sup>55</sup> “Hezbollah Leads Huge Pro-Syria Protests in Central Beirut.” *NY Times* 8 March 2005. <<http://www.nytimes.com/2005/03/08/international/middleeast/08cnd-beirut.html>>

<sup>56</sup> El-Hokayem, Emile. “Hizbullah and Syria: Outgrowing the Proxy Relationship.” *The Washington Quarterly*, (Spring 2007), p 36.

<sup>57</sup> Blanford, Nicholas. “Lebanon Catches Its Breath.” *MERIP*, 23 March 2005. <<http://www.merip.org/mero/mero032305>>

<sup>58</sup> Safa, Oussama. “Lebanon Springs Forward.” *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 17, No. 1, January 2006, p 33

Additionally, making up a significant portion of the pro-Syrian camp within Lebanon are the Syrian guest workers. These workers are estimated to send millions of dollars every year back to Syria.<sup>59</sup> As a consequence, both these guest workers and Syria would prefer a continued Syrian presence within Lebanon, in order to maintain that cash flow. As Brian Montopoli of the Columbia Journalism Review pointed out the guest workers “are pretty likely to show up at a rally in support of Syria, particularly because the withdrawal of Syrian troops might seriously complicate their lives in Lebanon.”<sup>60</sup>

### *International Actors*

In addition to the two competing domestic factions that sprang up following Hariri’s assassination, international actors responded to the events. Some were forced to act, due to circumstances surrounding the assassination, while others intervened in order to pursue their particular agendas with regard to Lebanon and the region as a whole.

### Syria

Utilizing its relationships with Lebanese domestic players, Syria established itself during the civil war as an influential player in the region. Syria viewed the country as a battleground by which to disrupt American and Israeli interests in the region, without directly engaging either.<sup>61</sup> In doing so, Syria sought to defend itself from the perceived external threats to its security,

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<sup>59</sup> “Q&A: What is Syria’s Role in Lebanon?” *Christian Science Monitor*. 7 March 2005. <<http://www.csmonitor.com/2005/0307/p07s02-wome.html>>

<sup>60</sup> Montopoli, Brian. “Who Are Those Guys, Anyway?” *Columbia Journalism Review*, 10 March 2005. <[http://www.cjr.org/behind\\_the\\_news/who\\_are\\_those\\_guys\\_anyway.php](http://www.cjr.org/behind_the_news/who_are_those_guys_anyway.php)>

<sup>61</sup> El-Hokayem, Emile. “Hizballah and Syria: Outgrowing the Proxy Relationship.” *The Washington Quarterly*, (Spring 2007), p 37.

“especially US hegemony in the Middle East after the fall of Baghdad in April 2003 and the persistent Israeli menace.”<sup>62</sup>

As a result of contested borders, over the past 30 years, Israel and Syria have fought both directly and indirectly in Lebanon, as each utilizes at times tenuous alliances with Lebanese groups against the other. Syria views the Lebanese Bekaa Valley as the “soft underbelly” in its security, through which Israel would be able to launch assaults with little resistance.<sup>63</sup> Syria’s ability to use its relationship with Lebanese groups against Israel has proven effective in achieving both Syrian goals to confront Israel, as well as the local organizations’ to bolster their domestic influence.<sup>64</sup>

The outbreak of protests against its presence in Lebanon threatened Syria’s desired role and its perceived ability to protect itself. In a March 1, 2005, interview with Time magazine, Asad said, “When there’s trouble externally, it will affect Syria ... If you don’t have peace, you have to spend most of your money on the army and security issues. All these factors won’t make reform fast. It will definitely be slow. We are living under tension ... You can’t have reform under tension.”<sup>65</sup> As a result, Syria relied upon Hizbullah to counter the growing pressure from the United States and other international actors to abide by 1559 and withdraw from Lebanon. For Syria, the tacit support of Hizbullah served as a way to highlight Syria’s role in regional politics, even if this was waning.<sup>66</sup>

Nevertheless, Asad recognized the necessity to withdraw from Lebanon, as a result of mounting international pressure. In that same Time discussion, Asad stated that Syria would be

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<sup>62</sup> Salloukh, Bassel. “Demystifying Syrian Foreign Policy under Bashar” in *Demystifying Syria*. p 160.

<sup>63</sup> Salloukh, Bassel. “Syria and Lebanon: A Brotherhood Transformed.” *Middle East Report* 236, (Fall 2005), p 15.

<sup>64</sup> Interview with Bassel Salloukh, 17 March 2011.

<sup>65</sup> Klein, Joe. “Appointment in Damascus.” *Time*, 6 March 2005.

<sup>65</sup> <http://www.time.com/time/columnist/klein/article/0,9565,1034673-2,00.html#ixzz1KrlxTwn4>

<sup>66</sup> El-Hokayem, Emile. “Hizballah and Syria: Outgrowing the Proxy Relationship.” *The Washington Quarterly*, (Spring 2007), p 43.

fully withdrawn from Lebanon “in the next few months, not after that.” Despite several political maneuvers to back away from, and sidestep, this statement Asad’s prediction proved true.<sup>67</sup> Over the next week and months, Syria began redeploying its troops to the Bekaa Valley, eventually withdrawing them completely. On Tuesday, April 26, 2005, following a military ceremony, the final Syrian troops exited Lebanon, ending the Syrian military presence in Lebanon after 29 years.<sup>68</sup> Following the exit, the leader of the Syrian Army, General Ali Habib, said, “Syria has now fulfilled [the 1559] demand. Syria never had any desires or ambitions in Lebanon except to preserve its unity.”<sup>69</sup>

After its withdrawal from Lebanon and the loss of direct influence inside Lebanon, Syria seemed resigned to a diminished role. However, it has pursued other means to achieve its goals vis-à-vis Lebanon. Rather than attempting to reassert itself militarily in Lebanon, a prospect Cordesman believes is only possible if another major civil war breaks out in Lebanon, Syria’s best opportunities in Lebanon are through the pursued an increase in its soft power capabilities.<sup>70</sup> Syrian influence remains prevalent within Lebanon, as it is still able to affect elections through its connections with Lebanese elites.<sup>71</sup>

## Saudi Arabia

Next to Syria, Saudi Arabia is perhaps the second most influential Arab country within Lebanon. On numerous occasions, the Kingdom played the role as mediator in internal disputes

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<sup>67</sup> Klein, Joe. “Appointment in Damascus.” *Time*, 6 March 2005.

<<http://www.time.com/time/columnist/klein/article/0,9565,1034673-2,00.html#ixzz1KrlxTwn4>>

<sup>68</sup> Safa, Oussama. “Lebanon Springs Forward.” *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 17, No. 1, (January 2006), p 34.

<sup>69</sup> Fattah, Hassan M. “Last Syria Force Leaves Lebanon, but Political Puzzles Remain.” *New York Times*, 27 April 2005. <<http://www.nytimes.com/2005/04/27/international/middleeast/27lebanon.html>>

Sakr, Etienne. “The Politics and Liberation of Lebanon.” *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, vol. 9, no. 4 (December 2004), p 99.

<sup>70</sup> Cordesman, Anthony. “Summer Wars in Lebanon?” *CSIS*, 22 June 2007. <[http://csis.org/files/media/csis/pubs/070622\\_cordesman\\_commentary.pdf](http://csis.org/files/media/csis/pubs/070622_cordesman_commentary.pdf)>

<sup>71</sup> “Paul Salem briefing.” *CSIS*, 28 July 2005. <

[http://csis.org/files/media/csis/events/050728\\_paul\\_salem\\_briefing.pdf](http://csis.org/files/media/csis/events/050728_paul_salem_briefing.pdf)>

between Lebanese confessions. In 1976, Saudi influence led to the legitimization of Syria's intervention in Lebanon, through the recognition of the Arab Deterrent Force by the Arab League.<sup>72</sup> In 1989, through Saudi mediation, the Ta'if Agreement was reached, establishing the new order of Lebanon with Syrian dominance.<sup>73</sup>

In the first week of March 2005, Asad travelled to Riyadh to meet with Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah bin Abdel-Aziz. Asad's visit followed a meeting with the Qatari emir, demonstrating his desire to dampen tensions between the many Gulf states and his handling of the protests in Lebanon. As a close ally of the United States, as well as having its own stake in Lebanon, the kingdom took a hard line against Syria, pushing Asad to withdraw his troops "rapidly." Threatening a continuation of already strained relations between the two countries, "Abdullah told Asad Syria must start withdrawing soon; otherwise Saudi-Syrian relations will go through difficulties."<sup>74</sup>

The relationship between the two countries was on already tenuous grounds, as Rafik Hariri was also a citizen of the kingdom and had a close relationship with the royal family. As a result, for Saudi Arabia, the assassination of Hariri was perceived as "a strike against one of its own," intensifying its demands for a full investigation into the matter.<sup>75</sup> Additionally, the perceived failure of Syria to abide by its Ta'if Agreement instructions, as seen by Saudi Arabia, was seen as an affront to the nation that hosted the negotiation.

Within Lebanon, Saudi Arabia focused on supporting Lebanese Sunnis to counter the Iranian influence on Lebanese Shi'a. Additionally, sensing an opportunity to push its agenda in

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<sup>72</sup> Sakr, Etienne. "The Politics and Liberation of Lebanon." *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, vol. 9, no. 4 (December 2004), p 91.

<sup>73</sup> Ta'if Accord, 22 October 1989.

Salloukh, Bassel. "Syria and Lebanon: A Brotherhood Transformed." *Middle East Report* 236, (Fall 2005), p 18.

<sup>74</sup> Zaaroura, Mayssam. "Saudi ruler demands rapid Syrian withdrawal." *The Daily Star*. 4 March 2005.

<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Politics/Mar/04/Saudi-ruler-demands-rapid-Syrian-withdrawal.ashx#ixzz1KrsSb4cP>

<sup>75</sup> Safa, Oussama. "Lebanon Springs Forward." *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 17, No. 1, (January 2006), p 32.

the wake of Syria's withdrawal from Lebanon, Saudi Arabia attempted to limit the extent of Syria's relationship with Iran.<sup>76</sup> Saudi Arabia saw Lebanon as a battleground through which it could engage with Iran indirectly and counter the Islamic Republic's growing stature in the Arab world. In providing support to the Sunni Lebanese, Saudi Arabia essentially became their patron to confront Hizbullah domestically and Iran regionally.<sup>77</sup>

## United States

Having played a central role in Lebanon in the early 1980s, through its involvement in the Multinational Force, the United States faced a series of defeats, most particularly the 1982 Marine barracks bombing. In the following years, the US shifted its approach toward Lebanon through its interactions with Syria, accepting Syrian domination in Lebanon after the civil war, in exchange for Syrian support during the Gulf War against Iraq.<sup>78</sup>

It wasn't until after the attacks of September 11 that the United States felt compelled to redefine its strategy throughout the Middle East, including its relationships with Lebanon and Syria. In December 2003, the US Congress passed the Syrian Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act and President George Bush signed into law. The act defined Syria's continued presence in Lebanon as illegal and unacceptable.<sup>79</sup> This was followed by Executive Order 13338 in May 2004 imposing sanctions on Syria for its alleged support of terrorism, continued presence in Lebanon and interference in the stabilization of Iraq.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Perthes, Volker. "The Syrian Solution." *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 85, no. 6 (Nov.-Dec., 2006) p 35.

<sup>77</sup> Interview with Greg Gause, 4 May, 2011.

<sup>78</sup> Edelman, Eric S. and Mara E. Karlin. "Fool Me Twice: How the United States Lost Lebanon – Again." *World Affairs*, (May/June 2011), p 34.

El-Hokayem, Emile. "Hizballah and Syria: Outgrowing the Proxy Relationship." *The Washington Quarterly*, (Spring 2007), p 37.

<sup>79</sup> Sakr, Etienne. "The Politics and Liberation of Lebanon." *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, vol. 9, no. 4 (December 2004), p 92.

<sup>80</sup> Executive Order 13338, 11 May 2004. <<http://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/sanctions/Documents/13338.pdf>>

American pressure on Syria grew in September of 2004 when, with the support of France, the United States pushed through the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1559. The resolution condemned the continued Syrian presence within Lebanon, calling for all “remaining foreign forces to withdraw from Lebanon” and cease intervening in the Lebanese political process, as well as “for the disbanding and disarmament of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias.”<sup>81</sup> In the months immediately following its passage, despite the hopes of its authors, the resolution failed to achieve its goals in the months, as Syria tightened its grip. In the wake of Hariri’s assassination, however, the United States led the Western push for Syria to comply with 1559. Speaking out against Syria’s continued presence in Lebanon, President George W Bush connected the issue with other US regional concerns:

“Just as the Syrian regime must take stronger action to stop those who support violence and subversion in Iraq – and must end its support for terrorist groups seeking to destroy the hope of peace between Israelis and Palestinians – Syria must also end its occupation of Lebanon.”<sup>82</sup>

For the United States, the protests erupting after Hariri’s assassination represented something of a victory. The Bush Administration’s Freedom Agenda had gained some promotion following pro-democracy rallies elsewhere in the world, but Lebanon represented the first such event in the Middle East. The United States saw the potential to promote the Cedar Revolution as an example of its rhetorical successes in the region. Bush declared that the protests in Lebanon

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Sakr, Etienne. “The Politics and Liberation of Lebanon.” *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, vol. 9, no. 4 (December 2004), p 93.

<sup>81</sup> United Nations Security Council Resolution 1559, 2 September 2004.

<sup>82</sup> “Beirut Protesters Denounce Syria.” *BBC News* 21 February 2005. <[http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/4283543.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/4283543.stm)>

“would amount to a ring ‘on the doors of every Arab regime,’” and, in a message to the Lebanese protestors, that “the American people are on your side.”<sup>83</sup>

The United States expanded its newfound role in Lebanon by supporting the many demands of the protestors, as part of a way to connect Lebanon to its regional objectives. Claiming a connection between the Cedar Revolution and the elections held in Iraq in January 2005, an idea supported by Walid Jumblatt,<sup>84</sup> the US sought to push forth its designs for a new Lebanon, free from Syrian dominance and with a more pro-West outlook. Despite the ill-conceived nature of this proposal, the protests had little to do with Iraq and everything to do with Hariri’s assassination, the United States seized upon the rhetoric as an opportunity to limit Syria’s regional role, calling for the strengthening of Lebanese institutions, an investigation into Hariri’s assassination and isolating Syria.<sup>85</sup>

### *Theoretical Implications*

In the months and years preceding, Syria had been defiant in the face of international pressure, with President Lahoud reiterating the mantra that Syria’s presence was a “‘stabilizing’ factor and should be preserved.”<sup>86</sup> The combination of UN Resolutions and various criticisms from the United States were not seen as legitimate threats to Syria’s continued domination in Lebanon. This all changed in the wake of Rafik Hariri’s assassination, as Syria became the focus of intense international pressure regarding its presence in Lebanon. Increased scrutiny from

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<sup>83</sup> “Hizbullah Leads Huge Pro-Syria Protests in Central Beirut.” *NY Times* 8 March 2005. <

<http://www.nytimes.com/2005/03/08/international/middleeast/08cnd-beirut.html>>

Edelman, Eric S. and Mara E. Karlin. “Fool Me Twice: How the United States Lost Lebanon – Again.” *World Affairs*, (May/June 2011), p 35.

<sup>84</sup> Jumblatt likened the elections to the fall of the Berlin Wall, describing them as “the start of a new Arab world.”

Edelman, Eric S. and Mara E. Karlin. “Fool Me Twice: How the United States Lost Lebanon – Again.” *World Affairs*, (May/June 2011), p 35.

Blanford, Nicholas. “Lebanon Catches Its Breath.” *MERIP*, 23 March 2005.

<<http://www.merip.org/mero/mero032305>>

<sup>85</sup> Edelman, Eric S. and Mara E. Karlin. “Fool Me Twice: How the United States Lost Lebanon – Again.” *World Affairs*, May/June 2011, p 35.

<sup>86</sup> Sakr, Etienne. “The Politics and Liberation of Lebanon.” *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, vol. 9, no. 4 (December 2004), p 93.

Saudi Arabia pushed Syria and reevaluations of the United States' position in region pushed Syria to reassess its role in the region. The US-led invasion of Iraq, and the numerous criticisms levied by the United States against Syria's activities in the region, left Syria concerned for the security and stability of its own government.<sup>87</sup>

The assassination of Rafik Hariri served as the critical rallying point through which regional actors, particularly Saudi Arabia and the United States, could further pressure Syria to acquiesce to their vision of the regional order. This lay in direct contrast to Syria's national interest in Lebanon: preserving its ability to counter Israeli advances through Lebanon.<sup>88</sup> The threat posed by the United States' presence in Iraq and Saudi Arabia's regional influence pushed to Syria to reorganize its position in the region through allegiance realignments and restructuring. The ever-present and increasingly vocal external threats forced Damascus to recognize withdrawal as the best option in order to maintain as much of regional power as possible.

The loss of its ability to directly influence Lebanon through a military presence, however, did not limit Syria's ability to affect Lebanon in any way. Rather, Syria recognized the fragile state of Lebanon's domestic politics following its withdrawal and sought to use it to its advantage. The two political factions that emerged in Lebanon after Hariri's assassination competed with one another over the future of Lebanon and, essentially, the very nature of the Lebanese identity. Both sides struggled to pursue their interests on how to advance their agendas, while foreign actors sought to utilize the divide to best achieve their goals in the region.

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<sup>87</sup> Executive Order 13338, 11 May 2004. <<http://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/sanctions/Documents/13338.pdf>>

Sakr, Etienne. "The Politics and Liberation of Lebanon." *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, vol. 9, no. 4 (December 2004), p 93.

"Beirut Protesters Denounce Syria." *BBC News* 21 February 2005. <[http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/4283543.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/4283543.stm)>

<sup>88</sup> Kerr, Michael. "'A Positive Aspect to the Tragedy of Lebanon': The Convergence of US, Syrian and Israeli Interests at the Outset of Lebanon's Civil War." *Israel Affairs*, Vol. 15, No. 4, October 2009, p 359.

Operating under the guidelines of the bureaucratic politics model, Syria offered its implicit support to Hizbullah, recognizing the resistance movement as its best chance to maintain a presence within Lebanon. The March 8 coalition, headed by Hizbullah, accepted the inevitability of Syria's withdrawal, but sought to maintain a strong relationship with Syria. In contrast, the March 14 coalition, headed by Hariri's son and comprised of a wide swathe of the Lebanese populous, rallied around a vision of a national Lebanese identity free of the perceived undue influence of Syria. These contrasting visions were present in the messages put forth by the pro-March 14 head of the Maronite Council of Bishops, Patriarch Nasrallah Sfeir, and the pro-March 8 Foreign Minister Jean Obeid and Muhammad Issa, secretary-general of the Lebanese Ministry for Foreign Affairs. Sfeir urged members of parliament to reject the Syrianization of Lebanon and called upon Hizbullah to disarm; while Obeid, a Maronite supporting Lahoud, and Issa stressed Syria's role in maintaining Lebanon's stability in the post-civil war era, pushing for Syrian-Lebanese brotherhood, and accepting Hizbullah's role as defender against Israel.<sup>89</sup>

In addition to Syria, latching onto this internal divide were the United States and Saudi Arabia. Both saw the March 14 coalition as an opportunity to gain prominence within Lebanon. The United States foresaw a Syria-free Lebanon that would inherently pursued interests "parallel to those of the United States."<sup>90</sup> Further, the United States saw the peaceful rallies of March 14 as a blueprint for the future of popular-led regime changes across the Arab world. Additionally, for both the United States and Saudi Arabia, March 14 provided the chance they were looking for to diminish Syria's role in the regional politics game.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Sakr, Etienne. "The Politics and Liberation of Lebanon." *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, vol. 9, no. 4 (December 2004), pp 94-95.

Blanford, Nicholas. "Lebanon Catches Its Breath." *MERIP*, 23 March 2005.  
<<http://www.merip.org/mero/mero032305>>

<sup>90</sup> Sakr, Etienne. "The Politics and Liberation of Lebanon." *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, vol. 9, no. 4 (December 2004), p 95.

<sup>91</sup> Safa, Oussama. "Lebanon Springs Forward." *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 17, No. 1, January 2006, p 34.

Within the context of the 2005 Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon, and the events surrounding it, laid the groundwork for recognizing the role the two-level game plays in defining Lebanese role in international relations. The confluence of Syria's diminishing power to influence the region's political system and the rise of competing identities within Lebanon, both of which were seized upon by external actors for numerous purposes.

## **2006 Hizbullah-Israel War**

On July 12 2006, Hizbullah, backed by Iran, launched a series of rocket attacks into Israel's northern border, killing eight Israeli soldiers and capturing two others. These events elicited a full blown military response entangling the region in a multi-dimensional conflict<sup>92</sup>. The war came at a time when Iran was facing mounting pressure over its nuclear program but above all at a time when there was growing domestic tension between the pro-and anti-Syrian factions as a result of the Syrian withdrawal in 2005.

The four week war showed the capabilities and disadvantages of an asymmetric conflict between a non-state actor and a state. Hizbullah launched rocket attacks (rockets which Hizbullah received from Iran via Syria) against cities and towns in northern Israel. In response, Israel carried out air strikes against Hizbullah's infrastructures in southern Beirut and simultaneously launched a full-scale ground operation in Lebanon "with the hopes of establishing a security zone free of Hizbullah militants."<sup>93</sup> Israel was convinced that the war would be 'quick and easy' and that it would "weaken Iran in any upcoming showdown, and

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<sup>92</sup> "2006: Lebanon War." *BBC.com*, 6 May 2008. [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/7381389.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/7381389.stm)

<sup>93</sup> Blanchard, Christopher. "Lebanon: The Israel-Hamas-Hezbollah Conflict." *CRS Report for Congress*, 15 September 2005. <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL33566.pdf>

eliminate what the United States considers a major opponent in the war on terrorism.”<sup>94</sup> Almost a month later , on August 11, 2006, the U.N. Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 1701, calling for a “full cessation of hostilities based upon, in particular, the immediate cessation by Hizbullah of all attacks and the immediate cessation by Israel of all offensive military operations.”<sup>95</sup>

### *Sub-National Actors*

#### Hizbullah

*Why did Hizbullah launch a surprise attack on Israel in July 2006?* There is a growing body of possible explanations to understand Hizbullah’s behavior in the summer of 2006. Some analysts believe that Nasrallah’s intentions were strictly related to effectuate a prisoner exchange with Israel; while other observers claim that Hizbullah may not have calculated the extent of Israel’s response and was expecting “the usual, limited” Israeli response typical of the period since 2000. Other observers look at Syria’s military withdrawal from Lebanon as the beginning of Hizbullah’s actions as an extension of Syrian and Iranian policy.<sup>96</sup> For them the movement was acting at the “behest of or with the approval of Iran, its main sponsor,” in order to divert international attention from the deadlock over its nuclear programs.<sup>97</sup> On the American side, U.S. CENTCOM Commander general John Abizaid speculated that Syria and Iran were exploiting the situation created by the kidnapping, rather than having planned the attacks.<sup>98</sup> Furthermore former U.S. State Department Coordinator for Counterterrorism Henry Crumpton asserted that Syria and Iran do not control Hizbullah, but Hizbullah’s leaders might ask Iran for “permission if its

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<sup>94</sup> Salem, Paul. "The Future of Lebanon." *Foreign Affairs* 85, no. 6 (November 2006): 13-22. *Middle Eastern & Central Asian Studies*, EBSCOhost (accessed April 19, 2011)

<sup>95</sup> UN Security Council Resolution 1701, August 11, 2006.

<sup>96</sup> El-Hokayen Emile, “Hizbullah and Syria: Outgrowing the Proxy Relationship,” *The Washington Quarterly*, Spring 2007: 44

<sup>97</sup> Blanchard, 34.

<sup>98</sup> Myre Greg and Mouawad, “Israel: Build up at Lebanese Lines as Fight Rages,” *The New York Times*, July 22 2006.

actions have broader international implications.”<sup>99</sup> But while these speculations depict Hezbollah’s reliance on international actors, Emile El-Hokayem argues that Hezbollah’s objectives are often misunderstood. In fact since Israel’s withdrawal from Lebanon in 2000, and thus the removal of the threat in South of Lebanon, Hezbollah’s has tried to justify its *raison d’être* as a military resistance.<sup>100</sup> The key challenge for the ‘resistance movement’ was to preserve a consensus across sectarian lines on the legitimacy of its weapons and as a result maintain the status of a patriotic resistance force. Hezbollah was able to justify its *raison d’être* by claiming that “Israel never withdrew from a small area-- the contested Shebaa Farms.”<sup>101102</sup>

Up to 2005, Hezbollah could count on Asad’s regime – an external enforcer – to protect its weapons. However Syria’s departure from Lebanon changed the strategic environment in which Hezbollah operated. The need to reaffirm itself domestically pushed the movement to redefine its role in the political system through the cultivation of political alliances for domestic and regional reasons. Additionally, Hezbollah sought a formal Cabinet position, to approve its status as the ‘Resistance’ and addressing itself as “a sincere and natural expression of the Lebanese people’s right to defend its land and dignity in the face of Israeli aggression, threats, and ambitions as well as of its right to continue its actions to free Lebanese territory.”<sup>103</sup> The statement resulted in widespread criticism from the other sects who called for Hezbollah to disarm. Once again Hezbollah in the face of mounting criticism felt the need to assert itself and

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<sup>99</sup> Baxter Sarah and Mahnaimi Uzi, “Iran’s President Recruits Terror Master,” *Sunday Times* (London), April 23, 2006.

<sup>100</sup> El-Hokayem Emile, “Hezbollah and Syria: Outgrowing the Proxy Relationship,” *The Washington Quarterly*, Spring 2007: 44

<sup>101</sup> Soderberg, Nancy. “Peacekeepers are not Peacemakers.” *New York Times*, 2 August 2006.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/08/02/opinion/02soderberg.html>

<sup>102</sup> \*On April 16, 2000, Israeli officially withdrew from South Lebanon sparking controversy on where the exact locations of the border between Israel and Lebanon was. On June 16, 2000 UN Secretary General Kofi Annan declared that Israel had complete its withdrawals. Despite UN’s approval, Hezbollah backed by Syria, contested (and still does) that Shebaa Farms—an area on the western slopes of Mount Herson—belongs to Syria. (Kaufman 2002:576/577)

<sup>103</sup> El-Hokayem, 44-45.

reaffirm the value of its arsenal by carrying out the July 12 operation. A few hours after Hezbollah's raid, capturing the two Israeli soldiers, and the resulting Israeli response, Nasrallah held a press conference in which he declared that Hezbollah had no intention to start a war, but only to negotiate for a prisoner exchange. Nevertheless, Nasrallah announced that if Israel "want[ed] a confrontation, we are ready and we have some surprises for them."<sup>104</sup>

The 2006 war exposed the deep internal divisions within the Lebanese government. Immediately following the war's outbreak, a rift emerged between President Lahoud and Prime Minister Siniora. Lahoud was convinced that Hezbollah still maintained the same determination it had in 2000, following Israel's withdrawal. Telecommunications Minister Marwan Hamade told Lahoud at a meeting of the Council of Ministers: "Look at what your friends did."<sup>105</sup> Lahoud countered that the Resistance would walk away from the war victorious, "as Israeli can't destroy them." Lahoud also claimed that Israel had been preparing this war for some time now. Siniora responded by stating that Hezbollah had acted without consulting the government, and thus threatened the entire country with its unilateral action. He pushed for negotiating with Israel through the United Nations for a ceasefire.<sup>106</sup>

In the first few days of the war, some members of the Lebanese government followed by the other moderate Sunni Arab states in the region, such as Saudi Arabia, criticized Hezbollah for initiating the war on Israel. Members of the March 14 coalition and Jumblatt accused Hezbollah of carrying out a Syrian-Israeli agenda.<sup>107</sup> Some Sunni within the March 14 coalition believed

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<sup>104</sup> Pakradouni, Karim. *Les Annes Resistance*, p 412.

<sup>105</sup> Pakradouni, Karim, *Les Annes Resistance*, p 412.

<sup>106</sup> Pakradouni, Karim, *Les Annes Resistance*, p 413.

<sup>107</sup> Pakradouni, Karim, *Les Annes Resistance*, p 420.

that Hizbullah's attack was a Syrian-Iranian backed attempt to drive out March 14 coalition and to then take over Lebanon.<sup>108</sup>

On the other side of the spectrum, Hizbullah and the Shi'a community felt that the opposing coalition was encouraging the war in order to obliterate the resistance movement. For many, Israel's actions were not directed against Lebanon, but against Shiites. Some clerics claimed that Israel's and its supporters' objective was to "cleanse" the south of Shiites, sending them to Syria or beyond.<sup>109</sup> Hizbullah played to that perception, asserting that "to eliminate the weapons of the resistance is to eliminate the Shiites, and to eliminate the Shiites is to eliminate Lebanon."<sup>110</sup>

In this highly emotional context Sunni-Shi'a tensions escalated while Israeli attacks in southern Beirut intensified.<sup>111</sup> During the war, members of the March 14 coalition and Jumblatt's Progressive Socialist Party privately supported Israel's actions against Hizbullah. Christians and Sunni hoped that Israel's military capability would either destroy Hizbullah or at "least make sure that it "could not return to the status quo ante."<sup>112</sup> Saad Hariri made a commitment to the USA that when the moment was ripe he would "F\*\*\* Hizbullah."<sup>113</sup>

On July 26, 2006, Siniora joined the foreign ministers of Russia, the United States, Italy Germany, France, the UK, Spain, Canada, Greece, Cyprus, Turkey, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and the UN (represented by Kofi Annan), EU (Javier Solana) and the World Bank in a conference held in Rome.<sup>114</sup> Siniora presented a seven-point plan in an attempt to fill the

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<sup>108</sup> Salem, Paul. "The Future of Lebanon." *Foreign Affairs* 85, no. 6 (November 2006): 13-22. *Middle Eastern & Central Asian Studies*, EBSCOhost (accessed 19 April 2011)

<sup>109</sup> Crisis Group interview, Sheikh Saad Allah Khalil, Qulaili, South Lebanon, 27 April 2007.

<sup>110</sup> "Hezbollah and the Lebanese Crisis," *Crisis Group*, Middle East Report N°69, 10 October 2007.

<sup>111</sup> Salem, Paul. "The Future of Lebanon." *Foreign Affairs* 85, no. 6 (November 2006): 13-22. *Middle Eastern & Central Asian Studies*, EBSCOhost (accessed 19 April 2011)

<sup>112</sup> Interview with Salloukh, 17 March 2011.

<sup>113</sup> Hariri Wants Lebanese Marshall Plan," *Al-Akhbar*, <http://www.al-akhbar.com/node/7574>

<sup>114</sup> Ozerov, O. "Hot Summer in the Middle East." *International Affairs*, No1, Vol 53, 2007: 33-42 (39)

diplomatic vacuum. Of the seven points, two stand out as attempts to limit Hizbullah's role in Lebanon: Point Three called for the UN to take control of the Shebaa Farms, until the delineation of borders and establishment of Lebanese sovereignty; and Point Four called for the Lebanese government to maintain the monopoly of force within Lebanon and the disarmament of all non-state actors, as provided for in the Ta'if Agreement.<sup>115</sup> This challenged Hizbullah's role as the protector of southern Lebanon, a policy adopted since Israel's withdrawal in May 2000.<sup>116</sup>

Lahoud criticized Siniora's visit in Rome claiming that: Siniora had no authority to talk on behalf of Lebanese foreign politics because he did not have the approval of the Council of Ministers before presenting the seven points; Siniora hadn't sought the president's approval, which, according to the constitution, is necessary in order to sign treaties.<sup>117</sup> Lahoud contested Siniora's plan, claiming that the underlying message of the points was an attempt to force the disarmament of Hizbullah and thus lead to the end of the resistance.<sup>118</sup> Hizbullah supporters saw Point Four as a direct challenge to Hizbullah's role as the 'defender of Lebanon,' while Hizbullah's critics saw Point Three's focus on the Shebaa Farms, a "favorite propaganda" tool of Hizbullah, as an opportunity to limit its activities.<sup>119</sup> Lahoud's criticism strengthened his ties with the Shi'a political party Amal and Mohammad Fneiche, a Hizbullah MP and the minister of energy and water. "The agreement for the withdrawal of Israel from Shebaa Farms, said Hamadeh, would, regardless of the outcome go far in removing Hizbullah's favorite propaganda

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<sup>115</sup> "The Seven Steps of H.E. Prime Minister Fuad Siniora's Plan." 2 August 2006.

<sup>116</sup> Feldman, Shai. "The Hezbollah-Israel War: A Preliminary Assessment." Middle East Brief, No.10, September 2006.

<sup>117</sup> Pakradouni, Karim, *Les Annes Resistance*, p 427.

<sup>118</sup> Pakradouni, Karim, *Les Annes Resistance*, p 427.

<sup>119</sup> Embassy Beirut. "Hamadeh Sees Resolution Of Shebaa Farms As Means To Neutralize Hizballah Ideologically." August 1, 2006. <<http://www.cablegatesearch.net/cable.php?id=06BEIRUT2511>>

tool. Hamadeh offered that Lebanon is, “still hostage to Syria and Hizballah” as long as the issue of Shebba can be kept alive among the Lebanese.<sup>120</sup>

The outcome of the war, and people’s perception of it across the region, fed into the notion that Lebanon depended on Hizballah for its security and thus further legitimized Hizballah’s status of a ‘Resistance Movement.’ At the end of the war, while Nasrallah was chanting victory, members within the March 14<sup>th</sup> coalition were accusing Hizballah” of provoking the destruction of Lebanon and were hoping to “reverse the perception” in the Arab-Muslim street that Hizballah was the victor.<sup>121</sup> Gemayel said that the Druze and the Christians would be out front in holding Hizballah, and specifically Nasrallah, publicly accountable for dragging Lebanon through weeks of war.<sup>122</sup> In Lebanon, however, the response was mixed. In demonstrating its power to confront and, by its measure, defeat Israel, Hizballah became a “source of pride and relief” amongst its supporters. However, the extent of its military capabilities and ability to unilaterally wage war against Israel concerned non-Shi’a. Hizballah’s rising power with its core supporters was contrasted by its “rapid decline among others.”<sup>123</sup>

### *International Actors*

#### Israel

Since the Israeli unilateral withdrawal from Lebanon in May 2000, Hizballah had repeatedly provoked Israel through cross-border attacks, rocket launches and soldier abductions without receiving a vigorous Israeli military response. Despite the prevalence of attacks immediately following the withdrawal, Hizballah’s rhetoric emphasizing the Jewish state’s

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<sup>120</sup> Embassy Beirut. “Hamadeh Sees Resolution Of Shebaa Farms As Means To Neutralize Hizballah Ideologically.” August 1, 2006. <<http://www.cablegatesearch.net/cable.php?id=06BEIRUT2511>>

<sup>121</sup> Embassy Beirut. “Lebanon: Amin Gemayel Seeks Coordinated Strategy To Weaken Hizballah.” 9 August 2006. <<http://www.al-akhbar.com/node/7091>>

<sup>122</sup> Embassy Beirut. “Lebanon: Amin Gemayel Seeks Coordinated Strategy To Weaken Hizballah.” 9 August 2006. <<http://www.al-akhbar.com/node/7091>>

<sup>123</sup> “Hizbollah and the Lebanese Crisis ,” *Crisis Group*, Middle East Report N°69, 10 October 2007.

illegitimacy, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak believed Israel could not afford to start another large-scale military campaign in Lebanon for two main reasons: A limited amount of time had passed since Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon and reentering Lebanese soil would damage its diplomatic image in the region; in the latter half of 2000, Israel became preoccupied with the Second Palestinian Intifada, which was draining the country's resources and prevented any other meaningful operations.<sup>124</sup>

This line of thinking persisted after Ariel Sharon took office in 2001, whose advisers cautioned him that any massive military operation in Lebanon could further isolate Israel in the international arena. Israel's restraint ceased when on June 25, 2006 Hamas militants kidnapped Gilad Shalit, an Israeli soldier, after killing two others in a cross raid attack in the Israeli border with the Gaza strip.<sup>125</sup> A few days later, Nasrallah publicly linked the Hamas and Hizbullah kidnappings, declaring "that he would conduct joint negotiations for all the abducted soldiers."<sup>126</sup> In a July 12, 2006, security debate, Deputy Prime Minister Shaul Mofaz warned that the link between those two groups "had to be broken without delay."<sup>127</sup> At the time, Israel's government was relatively new and its three top officials, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, Defense Minister Shimon Peres and Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni, had minimal military experience. Generally, new governments often respond drastically to provocations as they might feel pressure to assert themselves in the domestic and international arenas.<sup>128</sup> After six years of restraint, Israeli government approved a military campaign against Hizbullah, in response to the security threat that the non-state actor posed to its borders.

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<sup>124</sup> Inbar, Efraim. "How Israel Bungled the Second Lebanon War." *Middle East Quarterly*, Summer 2007, p 57.

<sup>125</sup> Wikinson, Peter. "Timeline: The evolution of Hamas." CNN.com, 30 December 2008.

<http://edition.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/meast/12/30/hamas.profile/index.html>

<sup>126</sup> Ze'ev Schiff. "Israel's War With Iran." *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 85, No. 6 (Nov.-Dec.2006), p 25.

<sup>127</sup> Ze'ev Schiff. "Israel's War With Iran." *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 85, No. 6 (Nov.-Dec.2006), p 25.

<sup>128</sup> Ze'ev Schiff. "Israel's War With Iran." *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 85, No. 6 (Nov.-Dec.2006), p 25

## United States

Olmert's full blown military attack in Lebanon was perceived by the United States as a necessary step to guarantee Israel's security and its right to self defense. President George W Bush expressed his belief in the right of sovereign nations to "defend their people from terrorist attack, and to take the necessary action to prevent those attacks."<sup>129</sup> He further emphasized that the conflict in Lebanon was more complex than it appeared because of Hizbullah's relationship with Iran and Syria, noting Syria's long-term role as a sponsor of Hizbullah through facilitating the shipment of Iranian weapons into Lebanon. Bush described Iran's defiance of the international community through its nuclear weapon program and support to terrorist groups as a threat to the region and preventing the pursuit of peace.<sup>130</sup> Soon after the beginning of the war, the US engaged in the planning of Israel's retaliatory attacks. The Bush Administration was convinced that a successful military campaign against Hizbullah's main infrastructures could relieve Israel's security concerns and also "serve as a prelude to a potential American preemptive attack to destroy Iran's nuclear installations."<sup>131</sup> And this was perhaps one of the reasons why although the international community and the Lebanese government (in particularly Siniora) were calling for a ceasefire, the US preferred not to advocate for it within the first few weeks of the war.<sup>132</sup> The Bush administration was trying to 'buy time' in the hopes that Israeli military strikes would severely weaken Hizbullah and its protector.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> "Bush slams Syria, Iran over Hezbollah," *CNN.com*, 22 July, 2006.

<sup>130</sup> "Bush slams Syria, Iran over Hezbollah," *CNN.com*, 22 July, 2006.

<sup>131</sup> Hersh, Seymour. "Watching Lebanon." *The New Yorker*. Issue of 2006-08-21.

[http://web.mac.com/magnant/Last\\_Transition/Does\\_Anyone\\_Really\\_Care\\_files/Hersh-Watching%20Lebanon.pdf](http://web.mac.com/magnant/Last_Transition/Does_Anyone_Really_Care_files/Hersh-Watching%20Lebanon.pdf)

<sup>132</sup> Welch, David, "U.S. Policy Toward Lebanon," New York City 17 October 2006

<http://merln.ndu.edu/archivepdf/NEA/State/74653.pdf>

<sup>133</sup> Hersh, Seymour. "Watching Lebanon." *The New Yorker*. Issue of 2006-08-21

## Saudi Arabia & Iran

Bush called on the moderate Sunni Arab States to dampen the crisis. They responded by charging Hizbullah with “dragging the region into adventures,”<sup>134</sup> with Saudi officials describing Hizbullah’s actions as “irresponsible adventurism” that exposed Arab nations to grave dangers.<sup>135</sup> The Arab League, with Saudi Arabia at its forefront, praised and supported Siniora’s seven points. Young argues that the Arab League supported Siniora’s plan as an attempt to target Hizbullah directly, and more particularly its sponsor, Iran, by limiting Hizbullah’s ability to maneuver.”<sup>136</sup> By doing so Saudi Arabia, and the other moderate Arab Sunni states, implicitly allied itself with Israel and the United States.<sup>137</sup> A likely explanation to this silent alliance was the general fear amongst the moderate Sunni Arab states towards non-state Arab-Islamic movements, which existed “largely beyond their control and champion issues holding great popular resonance” that pose a threat to their regime security.<sup>138</sup> In fact for Riyadh, as well as for many Sunni and Christians within Lebanon, Israel’s military superiority offered the possibility of a ‘swift victory’ against Hizbullah. If that were the case, the obliteration of Hizbullah would result in the weakening of Iran’s position in the Arab street and in the region leaving Saudi Arabia and Israel as the sole Middle Eastern axis of power; but these comments against Hizbullah rather than having influence over the militant Shi’a group (and its backers Iran and Syria) ended up widening the gap between the regime and its people.<sup>139</sup> The growing number of war casualties and Israel’s bombing of several civilian infrastructures within the Shi’a

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<sup>134</sup> Valbjorn Morten and Bank Andree, “Signs of a New Arab Cold War: The 2006 Lebanon War and the Sunni-Shi’I Divide.” *Middle East Report*, (Spring 2007), p 242.

<sup>135</sup> Valbjorn Morten and Bank Andree, “Signs of a New Arab Cold War: The 2006 Lebanon War and the Sunni-Shi’I Divide.” *Middle East Report*, (Spring 2007), p 242.

<sup>136</sup> Young, Michael. *The Ghost’s of Martyrs Square*. New York: Simon & Schuster. 2010

<sup>137</sup> Olmert later contended that Arab regimes had privately expressed their support for Israel’s response. Pakradouni, Karim, *Les Annes Resistance*, p 417.

<sup>138</sup> Valbjorn Morten and Bank Andree, p 10.

<sup>139</sup> Murphy, Dan and Sameh Naguib. “Hizbullah winning over Arab street.” *Christian Science Monitor*, 18 July 2006. <<http://www.csmonitor.com/2006/0718/p01s03-wome.html>>

community dampen Saudi Arabia rhetoric against Israel. Riyadh started distancing itself from the US and Israel while condemning the latter's actions. This reflects the regime's sensitivity to Arab public opinion and its need to compel to it. Hijab claims, "These events (of the 2006 war) put pressure on Arab governments to take action, and they haven't."<sup>140</sup> In fact part of Iran's growing popularity is a direct result of Arab leaders across the region to pay less attention on central problems in areas where extra social, political and economic attention is particularly needed. This passivity of the Arab world accounts for the rising popularity of Ahmadinejad and Nasrallah in South of Beirut and South of Lebanon and feeds into Iran's rhetoric and regional strategy to differentiate itself from countries like Saudi Arabia that appear to accommodate Israel.<sup>141</sup> At the end of the 2006 war, Nasrallah publicly denounced those Arab States that during the 2006 did not use "the weapon of oil and money" to break ties with Israel.<sup>142</sup> Nasrallah however, reassured all Arabs living in these 'traitor countries' as well as all Arabs across the region that "the era of defeats for the Arabs" was over, and that a new era that marked the beginning of Arab victories had just started.<sup>143</sup>

Iran's anti Israeli and anti western rhetoric nurtured its secondary role in the conflict. Some political analysts believe that Iran 'has used Hizbullah to expand its power in the Middle East while others believe that Iran's aspirations "are closely focused on its potential weapons of mass destruction capability."<sup>144</sup> Cordesman argues that these strikes against Israel "distract from its nuclear activities. They show the Arab and Muslim world that Iran is a government willing to strike at the Israeli enemy... [And] Israel's reprisals build Arab and Muslim anger against the

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<sup>140</sup> Murphy, Dan and Sameh Naguib. "Hizbullah winning over Arab street." *Christian Science Monitor*, 18 July, 2006. <<http://www.csmonitor.com/2006/0718/p01s03-wome.html>>

<sup>141</sup> Menashri, David. "Iran's Regional Policy: Between Radicalism and Pragmatism." *Journal of International Affairs*, (Spring/Summer 2007), p 162.

<sup>142</sup> Pakradouni, 435

<sup>143</sup> Pakradouni, 435

<sup>144</sup> Sharp, Jeremy M, et al. "Lebanon: The Israel-Hamas-Hezbollah Conflict." *Congressional Research Service*, 15 Sept 2006. P 1. <<http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL33566.pdf>>

US.”<sup>145</sup> In this light, the fighting in southern Lebanon was viewed as a race between two of the Middle East’s most powerful actors, Israel and Iran (via Hizbullah by proxy) as well as an ideological race between Arab and non Arab states. Tehran has viewed “the success of Hizbullah in the 2006 war) as a manifestation of the spread of its influence and evidence of Iran’s regional centrality and Islamic Leadership.”<sup>146</sup> Iran’s popularity within the Shi’a community grew after Tehran vowed to help reconstruct southern Beirut and parts of South of Lebanon.<sup>147</sup> Thus, having a proxy army in southern Lebanon allows Iran to maintain a strategic stronghold on the Israeli border as a vanguard of its influence beyond its own borders. It also permits Iran to counterbalance the US influence in the region and above all it reassures that in case of an Israeli strike on Iran’s nuclear facilities, it will be able to enter a multidimensional war through its proxies, Hizbullah and Hamas.

### *Theoretical Implications:*

The 2006 war between Hizbullah and Israel represents the playing out of the two-level game, as described by the Montréal School. In the wake of the Syrian withdrawal, Lebanon became a battleground between local and external actors seeking to redefine Lebanon’s position in the international system. The 2006 war was the ultimate fruition of these competing struggles.

The domestic political conflict in Lebanon over the state’s foreign policy orientation reflects Allison and Halperin’s bureaucratic politics model. In the years leading up to the 2006 war, Hizbullah was trying to reframe its *raison d’être* across sectarian lines, while March 14 vehemently criticized Hizbullah armaments. During the war the deep internal divisions led each coalition to reach out to external actors for protection and support in expanding their influence

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<sup>145</sup>Cordesman, Anthony H. “Iran’s Support of the Hezbollah in Lebanon.” *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, 15 July 2006, p10. <[http://www.csis.org/files/media/csis/pubs/060715\\_hezbollah.pdf](http://www.csis.org/files/media/csis/pubs/060715_hezbollah.pdf)>

<sup>146</sup> Menashri, David. “Iran’s Regional Policy: Between Radicalism and Pragmatism.” *Journal of International Affairs*, (Spring/Summer 2007), p 157.

<sup>147</sup> Interview with Timur Goksel on March 15, 2011.

inside Lebanon and out. In putting forth his Seven Points Plan, Siniora exposed a fundamental rift between the Christian president and the Sunni Prime Minister, which reflected the conflict between Hizbullah and its detractors. Siniora hoped that the 2006 war and its aftermath could limit Hizbullah's role as a resistance movement and eventually lead to the demilitarization of the movement. Contrastingly, Lahoud vehemently advocated for Hizbullah's continued presence within Lebanese political culture and praised the movement for its determination.<sup>148</sup>

Siniora's initiative to draw up a plan without receiving Lahoud's consensus is significant in understanding Lebanese foreign policy making and to illustrate how competing sectarian communities advance their own foreign policy agendas. Siniora attended the conference in Rome with the goal of advancing his agenda to weaken Hizbullah. Rather than adopting the role of the Lebanese state's prime minister, Siniora acted as the spokesperson for the critics of Hizbullah. By advancing his own agenda, Siniora was reaching out to external actors who had previously supported the demilitarization of the resistance movement. His stance gave external actors, such as the USA and Saudi Arabia, stronger grounds to shape their foreign policies toward Lebanon, through the formalization of ties with Siniora and his supporters.

The United States and Saudi Arabia found an opportunity in Siniora's Seven Point Plan to advance their interests in the region. In fact, Siniora's plan, supported by other Lebanese factions, echoed American and Saudi regional interests, primarily: the stabilization of Lebanon, preserving Israel's security and countering Iran's rising role in the region. Iran, however, saw Hizbullah's perceived victory against Israel as an opportunity to expand its influence in the region.

The deep sectarian divides within Lebanese domestic politics in 2006 illustrate the analytical framework of the Montréal School, through the prevalence of domestic conditions in

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<sup>148</sup> Pakradouni, Karim, *Les Annes Resistance*, p 427.

affecting foreign policymaking, coupled with external actors exerting their influence on a divided state. Further, the 2006 war shows that the Montréal School is not limited solely to weak and fractured states, but also militarily powerful states, such as Israel.

Israel's behavior in the 2006 war is best explained by looking at both domestic and international factors. Israel faced a security threat from Hizbullah before 2000 until they ultimately responded in 2006 with a large scale military response. Since its 2000 withdrawal from Lebanon until 2006, Israeli leaders preferred to limit their responses to assaults from Hizbullah. During this time, Israel was faced with the pressures of the second intifada, as well as a desire to ameliorate its image in the region. However, in July 2006, the Israeli security cabinet approved an expanded retaliation to establish a security zone free of Hizbullah militants.

In this case realist premises explain the external reasons why Israel went to war. Israel saw Hizbullah as a profound threat to its security, an organization conducting continued hostile activities on their northern border, with a military capability that had grown stronger due to the support of Iran and Syria since 2000. However, it could be argued that the nature of the threat that Hizbullah posed was similar to other menaces elicited in the past from the non-state actor. What differed in 2006 was Israel's domestic factors, particularly the newly Israeli elected government felt an apparent need to assert itself domestically and internationally. The combined security threats of Hamas and Hizbullah, and Israel's need not to appear weak in the eyes of regional menaces, contributed to the ultimate decision to break the six-year period of relative peace. As a result the combination of domestic factors as well as Israel's concern to secure its borders shows how one international theory is not sufficient to explain the underlying reasons that led Israel to attack Lebanon.

## **Conclusion**

Lebanese foreign policy and the states role in the Middle East can be demystified by conceptualizing its politics as a two-level game between domestic and regional environments, an approach embodied by the Montreal School of IR. The Lebanese political system is defined by the consociational distribution of finite political power—although, additional power can be gained by leveraging the capabilities of external allies. Thus, the Lebanese system invites both political and military intervention as domestic actors reach out to external patrons, who often seek to advance their own agendas. Lebanon’s domestic political balance, and the role of regional, or international actors hinder its ability to craft a unified foreign policy to achieve national objectives. In Lebanon, parochial interests take precedence over nation ones.

As our case studies illustrated, a theoretical analysis of Lebanon and its role in the international system can partially be informed by established IR theories such as Realism and Constructivism, as well as domestic theoretical frameworks like the Bureaucratic Politics model. However, while each has its utility, they are also limited in their explanatory power. A parsimonious way to reconcile these disparate theoretical approaches is by applying the Montreal School framework; a two-level game that examines variables on the domestic and regional levels of analysis.

## **Policy Implications**

Our conclusions not only add value to an academic understanding of Lebanon, but can have significance for US policy makers as well. Fundamentally, the US lacks coherent policy objectives in Lebanon. For example, there is disagreement between members of Congress and the Defense Department over the rationale for supporting the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF); some member of the former feel that support for the LAF is intended to prepare the army to

disarm Hizbullah, while others strengthen the LAF to prepare it to take responsibility for border security with Israel.<sup>149</sup> Furthermore, since the Lebanese government collapse in January 2011 after a parliamentary walkout by members of the March 8 coalition—that included members from Hizbullah—the US has chosen to await the formation and composition of a new government before reaching out to Prime Minister Designate Najib Miqati, who was nominated to the post by Hizbullah.<sup>150</sup> A ‘wait-and-see’ approach may be an acceptable policy in the short-term, especially give unlikelihood of American rapprochement with Hizbullah in the near-future, but in the long-term, the US needs to identify what its interests in Lebanon are.

When crafting its policy towards Lebanon, it is paramount that the US recognizes the two-level game being played in Lebanon. While the actors involved in this game will change over time, the two-level structure remains intact. A lesson can be learned from Syria’s policy in Lebanon, which during its occupation had been to maintain alliances with a broad contingent of domestic actors.

While we do not advocate the US adopt an occupation mentality in Lebanon, given the fluid nature of Lebanese politics, with incumbents rotating in and out of power, it would be advisable for the US to deepen its alliances in Lebanon. Member of the Departments of State and Defense who interact with Lebanese actors on a regular basis surely recognize the impact of the two-level game on Lebanese politics and its position in the Middle East, less frequent participants in Congress or other departments would behoove themselves to take note of this fundamental dynamic.

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<sup>149</sup> Interview with anonymous US Embassy Official, Beirut. 20 March 2011  
See also: Bakri, Nada. “Resignations Deepen Crisis in Lebanon” *The New York Times*, 12 January 2011 <<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/13/world/middleeast/13lebanon.html>>.

<sup>150</sup> Interview with anonymous US Embassy Official, Beirut. 16 March 2011.

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