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Strategic Choices Facing the Lebanese Armed Forces in the Twenty-first Century

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Table of Contents

Abstract	6
Introduction	7
Perceptions of Security in Lebanon	8
A Strengthened Hizballah Militia	12
From Independence to Revolution	13
Hizballah Conquests	15
The October 2019 Pseudo-Revolution	18
Rearming Lebanon’s Security Institutions	22
Politicization of the Army	25
Liberalism vs. Militarization	27
Conclusion: The Hizballah Conundrum	30
Appendix 1—US Security Cooperation With Lebanon	34
Appendix 2—LAF Commanders 1945 to the present	37
Appendix 3—Lebanese Armed Forces	38

Abstract

With a dubious mandate, the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) remained a political football in the hands of wily politicians anxious to preserve cherished sectarian prerogatives, even if such steps proved to be detrimental both to the LAF as a military institution as well as the country. Notwithstanding their denials this excessive politicization benefitted senior LAF leaders since most staff officers aspired to higher, and often lucrative, positions, all of which required that they maintain very close connections with political elites, especially those from their own religious communities. This study examines what were the various pressures that compelled the LAF to transform itself into a mere security force, and why its commanders have decided to foster very close ties with the Hizballah militia. The paper asks whether these changes were/are in the best interests of Lebanon and whether the LAF has weakened the mandate established by Fu'ad Shihab—its first commander who later served as head-of-state—to defend the country and consolidate sovereignty. The research paper evaluates some of the causes for the Lebanese army's implementation of Hizballah's strategic vision even if this presented a Gordian knot for the state. Ultimately, the paper posits, the LAF could not possibly function as an independent military entity if it remained beholden to the militia.

We, the signatories of this document, the officers of the Lebanese Corps, pledge ourselves on our honor that we will accept the service only for Lebanon and under its banner, which no relation will attach us to but to its national government and we will work for the realization of this aspiration indefinitely. Anyone of us who follows another path will be considered traitorous and defamed as well.⁽¹⁾

Introduction

The Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) practiced the strategic vision and interests of Hizballah, the predominantly Shi‘ah “Party of God” that, to put it mildly, was a Gordian knot given that the constitution specified various mechanisms and responsibilities to defend the country and its citizens. Although opinions differed as to whether the military was “completely under the influence and within the decision-making process” of Hizballah, it was critical to ask whether the army could exercise its independence to protect the Lebanese while serving Hizballah’s goals.⁽²⁾ Will Hizballah continue to control the country’s security institutions and will army brass reserve the LAF as an independent body with its own distinct strategy to defend the country? In other words, will the Lebanese Armed Forces be able to defend the republic while the militia ignores them? Equally important were the relationships that the LAF created with leading Western donors, led by the United States, the United Kingdom, and France, all three of which invested heavily in the service. Washington alone has granted the LAF more than \$2 billion since 2006, and while the Trump Administration voiced its opposition to the Hizballah militia, the assistance did not translate into a confrontation. Presumably, the American aid was meant to support Lebanon as a united political entity and to avoid, if possible, its becoming a failed state (see Appendix 1 for US security assistance to Lebanon).

To answer the central question that faced the LAF in the twenty-first century—namely whether the existing LAF-Hizballah condominium can endure—better, this paper proposes to briefly

(1) Declaration Issued on July 26, 1941, the day Lebanese officers serving under French Mandate were granted the authority to create the country’s army, which was delayed until 1 August 1945, nearly two years after Lebanon declared its independence on November 22, 1943. See Lebanese Army web page, April 3, 2016, <https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/document-26th-july-1941>.

(2) Khaled Abou Zahr, “Lebanese Look to the Army to Keep Country United,” *Arab News*, March 31, 2020, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1650616>.

discuss perceptions of security, assess recent civil-military ties between 1945 and 2020, evaluate security features in the aftermath of the October 17, 2019 uprisings, weigh the rearming of security institutions, and measure the politicization of the army.⁽³⁾ It closes with an evaluation of the Hezbollah conundrum that threatens Lebanon both in political as well as a military terms.

Perceptions of Security in Lebanon

In the aftermath of the August 4, 2020 explosions that killed 220, injured several thousand, levelled parts of Beirut harbor, and destroyed an estimated 8,000 homes in the capital, the LAF stood by as Hezbollah militiamen swept through the devastations.⁽⁴⁾ It was unclear why the party's secretary-general avowed that Hezbollah had nothing to do with the explosions as his incredible denials—that the party had no presence at the harbor—contradicted eyewitnesses who painstakingly described pre- and post-August 4, 2020 movements throughout the devastated area.⁽⁵⁾ Shocked citizens pleaded with the LAF to protect them, along with the harbor, though what actually occurred in the days that followed—when security forces assaulted protesters—added fuel to the fire. International assistance poured in but many wondered whether Beirut could rely on Western assistance if it pursued the pro-Iranian militia's strategies?⁽⁶⁾

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- (3) It is critical to note that the purpose of this paper is not to summarize all of Lebanon's post-independence history nor to discuss the genesis and evolution of the LAF, which has been addressed by several authors, including Oren Barak, Florence Gaub, and Aram Nerguizian, among others, but to raise key questions about the leadership's goals and their various decisions especially as they relate to Hezbollah.
- (4) For data on casualties, see International Medical Corps, *Beirut Explosion Situation Report Number 4*, August 25, 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Beirut%20Explosion%20Situation%20Report%204%2C%20August%2025%2C%202020.pdf>. Incredulous observers often raise doubts about the militia's behaviour—identifying Hezbollah as “a major paramilitary” force—and its deployment in the blast area on August 4, 2020. They further assume that while there certainly were Hezbollah members in the area, these were figures who belonged to the country's security services, which is a devastating conclusion. What that meant, if true, was that the LAF and ISF allowed militia members to wear official uniforms. Even if one were to be charitable and reach such an assessment because Hezbollah “does not need to deploy militiamen because its figures are already integrated into the security apparatus,” this is a major error with unspeakable consequences. In the event, on August 4, 2020, live television broadcasts filmed how the media were kept at a safe distance from the harbour area for about 10 hours as ambulances and trucks left the area unmolested by Internal Security Forces and the Lebanese Army (television cameras frequently zoomed on these movements from their locations on the flyovers near the port). These ambulances and trucks were not evacuating tourists who had just disembarked from cruise ships.
- (5) Liz Sly, Sarah Dadouch, Erin Cunningham, and Louisa Loveluck, “As Beirut's Fury Grows, Hezbollah Leader Warns Against Blaming Shiite Militia for Devastation,” *The Washington Post*, August 8, 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle-east/beirut-explosions-rescue-victims/2020/08/07/5c78297e-d819-11ea-a788-2ce86ce81129_story.html.
- (6) It was important to ask what the strategic choices that faced the LAF were and whether the defence of the nation was a valid objective. Can the LAF side with the Lebanese people, especially after the October 2019 uprisings, by restoring what was left of the country's sovereignty? As conceptualized by George Naccache in 1949, and contemplating a way out of the impasse that existed ever since the 1943 “National Accord” (*Mithaq Al-Watani*), was it possible for Lebanon to have two separate security systems? When indigenous Lebanese leaders discussed the Naccache “double negative” formula that justified Lebanon as a democracy based on consociationalism (the unwritten understanding that established a unique confessional system) in what he termed “two negations don't make a nation!,” few envisaged that the state would tolerate the power of a militia over legitimate

Caught between two ambitious neighbors who disparaged its sovereignty, Lebanon survived against all odds for nearly a century, even if Beirut failed to forge a united nation for its multi-religious and multi-ethnic population. Under Ottoman rule, Mount Lebanon lost half of its population of 400,000 souls between 1915 and 1918, which encouraged members of the indigenous establishment to accept French colonial protection. On September 1, 1920, the representative of the French Government in the Middle East and commander of the French Army of the Levant, General Henri Gouraud, reorganized the area's geography. He literally doubled the size of Mount Lebanon by incorporating the former Ottoman districts of Tripoli and Sidon as well as the Biqa' Valley, ostensibly to protect the local Christian population within what came to be known as "Le Grand Liban" [Greater Lebanon]. In reality, the influential Maronite [Catholic] Patriarch Elias Peter Huwayek persuaded the Sunni Muslim Grand Mufti of Beirut, Shaykh Mustafah Najah, that this was required for economic success, though neither religious figure understood what a dismemberment of Syria, which Gouraud favored, actually meant. In the event, the country was placed on relatively efficient colonial wheels until 1943, when nationalist penchants led to full independence.⁽⁷⁾

What Paris bequeathed to the Lebanese was a state caught between two powers with unabashed aims to influence its fate. Even if Syria and Israel gained their respective independences in 1946 and 1948, both perceived Lebanon as falling within their spheres of influence, while Beirut was unsuccessful in transforming itself into a buffer zone that could keep its neighbors at safe distances.⁽⁸⁾ The Lebanese relied on their economic acumen to create wealth but neglected to invest necessary resources in defending themselves from predators who routinely interfered in their internal affairs.

security institutions. It was, therefore, fair to ask whether the LAF preferred to avoid social unrest and violence by kowtowing to Hizballah. Conversely, were LAF leaders unable or unwilling to stand up to the militia to preserve and protect Lebanon's sovereignty? In the end, could the LAF emerge as the sole security arm of the century-old republic by finally defining its strategic goals, to irrevocably unite the country? See Georges Naccache, "Deux Négations Ne Font Pas Une Nation," *L'Orient*, March 10, 1949, and in *Un Rêve Libanais, 1943–1972* (Beirut: Éditions FMA, 1983), 52–58.

(7) For additional details on the history of Lebanon, see Kamal Salibi, *A House of Many Mansions: The History of Lebanon Reconsidered* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990).

(8) The question of neutrality was at the heart of the 1943 national pact, whose spirit was to distance the nascent republic from regional crises. See Fawwaz Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon*, 2nd ed. (London: Pluto Press, 2012); and Annie Laurent and Antoine Basbous, *Une Proie Pour Deux Fauves: Le Liban Entre le Lion de Juda et le Lion de Syrie* (Beirut: Ad-Da'irat, 1983).

Successive Lebanese government officials, backed by communal leaders, honed the survival art by enticing powerful antagonists in Damascus to respect Beirut's independence, though they could not prevent a symbolic participation in the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, even if the role that the LAF played in the latter was minor, since it engaged in a single battle, at Malikiyyah, which lasted just a single day.⁽⁹⁾ After this first and only direct confrontation with Israel the army remained on the side-lines. Over the years, however, neither the Lebanese nor most of their institutions could stay aloof from cataclysmic regional developments that further dragged the country into the abyss. As Palestinian guerrillas transformed Southern Lebanon into a battlefield, Beirut lost control over its own sovereignty, and reeled into a bloody and inconclusive civil war starting in 1975. The conflict stopped in 1990 after Rafiq Hariri, then a rising Sunni business leader with political ambitions, and Saudi Arabia's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Prince Sa'ud al-Faysal, successfully negotiated the Ta'if Accord, though the 1989 agreement became a reality only under a Syrian diktat. Hariri played a key role in the post-war period in part because he knew how to balance various Arab protagonists, including Syria and Saudi Arabia.⁽¹⁰⁾ In the event, and while most militias agreed to surrender their weapons to the Lebanese Army, Hizballah kept all of its arsenal. It resisted from 1982 to 2000, which forced an end to the Israeli occupation of the South, as the militia secured legitimacy through sheer endurance. In 2005, Damascus withdrew its occupation troops after nearly three decades in the country, even if its legacy was not erased. Close ties between the Lebanese and Syrian armies and, especially, amongst their respective intelligence services, persisted. Correspondingly, and while a direct military confrontation in 2006 between Israeli troops and Hizballah militiamen ended in a stalemate, the Israeli departure finally permitted the Lebanese Army to redeploy to those areas of the country from which it was literally banned by the militia. Although pyrrhic, the Hizballah victory emboldened the party's masters in Iran, which, in turn, engulfed Lebanon into its growing sphere of influence. Israel continued routine overflights that violated the country's sovereignty on an almost daily basis that further highlighted Lebanese shortcomings to secure the realm.

(9) Oren Barak, *The Lebanese Army: A National Institution in a Divided Society* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2010), 45–48.

(10) For two pertinent tomes on the period, see Reinoud Leenders, *Spoils of Truce: Corruption and State-Building in Postwar Lebanon* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2012); and Hannes Baumann, "The Causes, Nature, and Effect of the Current Crisis of Lebanese Capitalism," *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 25, no. 1 (January 2019): 61–77.

Against Hizballah’s expanding security presence, the army never confronted the party directly, assuming that its unity was preserved. Rather, its leaders—who aspired to the presidency of the republic—preferred neutrality, which they assumed would prevent a renewal of the civil war and, naturally, would indemnify them from future opposition as they positioned themselves for higher office (see Appendix 2—LAF Commanders). It seldom occurred to any of these aspirants that the interests of the state and those of the militia differed, though Hizballah kept a firm hold over its supporters. Even during the post October 17, 2019 protests that opposed a large segment of society against the establishment, the army did not venture into areas that were under the direct control of the party, preferring to deploy troops in Mount Lebanon and the North. On the contrary, military leaders stood by most of the time, intervening in predominantly Christian areas to maintain order and keep roads open, leaving to Hizballah the responsibility of dealing with areas under the latter’s control. According to a leading observer, the multi-confessional nature of the LAF could be behind its ineffectiveness as its dysfunctions relied on its confessional composition.⁽¹¹⁾ Indeed, such a composition responded to the political mechanism of power-sharing that distinguished Lebanon, where each confessional community was allocated a specific quota across the board in each national institution, including the Army and the Internal Security Forces. In 2014, for example, the LAF fielded a force of 64,592. Of this contingent, 71.17% was made up of Muslims, while 23.64% was made up of Christians. The Sunni community had the highest representation within the rank-and-file, with a total of 22,931 soldiers, which represented 35% of the army’s total manpower. In addition, combat troops, whose total strength stood at 33,546 units, were also predominantly drawn from Muslim communities (83.32%) while Christians composed 14.91%. However, this demographic dynamic changed in terms of the percentage of officers, as the Maronite community comprised 29%, while the Sunni and Shi‘ah communities each had 22% of the officer corps. These figures showed an important disparity concerning the representation of confessional communities, which begged the questions: did this anomaly represent another factor behind the constant failure of the LAF regarding its basic missions and

(11) Aram Nerguizian, “Between Sectarianism and Military Development: The Paradox of the Lebanese Armed Forces,” in Bassel Salloukh, Rabie Barakat, Jinan S. Al-Habbal, Lara W. Khattab, and Shoghig Mikaelian, *The Politics of Sectarianism in Postwar Lebanon* (London: Pluto Press, 2015), 120–21.

did the inequality in representation affect its cohesion? Could loyalty and obedience within the army be questioned when force was applied against protestors from one's own confession and, likewise, was disproportionate brutality acceptable when such force targeted the "opposing" denomination or confession?⁽¹²⁾

A Strengthened Hizballah Militia

This was not a surprise because the fact that the army merely watched Hizballah invade parts of Beirut in May 2008 was, to say the least, shocking. The speed with which the militia deployed its men to take over largely Sunni areas of Beirut highlighted its own prowess—mimicking Iranian paramilitary *basij* [militia] scooter riders who terrorized protestors in Iran—as well as the Lebanese Army's nonchalance. At the time, the heads of the Progressive Socialist Party, Walid Jumblatt, and the leader of the Future Movement, Prime Minister Sa'ad Hariri, committed the fatal mistake of *threatening* Hizballah. They declared the supremacy of the state over the militia's separate telecommunications network, which they wished to shut down, as well as replacing Beirut airport's security chief, who was beholden to the "Party of God." The militia won and the army capitulated.

More recently, and in the aftermath of the October 2019 uprising along with the arrival of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic in February 2020, Hizballah revealed how it operated in Lebanon and where its real center of power lay. Although state authorities waded through the country's unparalleled confessional maze that even politicized the corona disease, the only state institution that was still standing was the army. Remarkably, and despite its poor performance after October 2019, most citizens continued to believe that the LAF could potentially force a complete overhaul of the political system. Whether citizens would tolerate the army's neutrality as Hizballah oppressed the Lebanese was a pending question that deserved scrutiny. In fact, many watched the post-October 2019 revolution on their television screens in horror, as army units beat

(12) An additional point could be made that the budget of the army and the top-heavy nature of its officer corps—as there is an extraordinary number of generals within its ranks—point to how the army has been used as a source of patronage by the country's political leaders, and portend as to how the institution is suffering from severe financial strain at the time of writing. Regrettably, detailed budgetary data are hard to come by, though an effort was made to unravel some of these concerns in a previous publication. See Joseph A. Kéchichian, "A Strong Army for a Stable Lebanon," Middle East Institute *Policy Brief*, No. 19, September 2008, https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/94778/No_19_A_Strong_Army_for_a_Stable_Lebanon.pdf. For more recent budgetary estimates, see Appendix 3.

up protestors blocking major highways and injured unarmed demonstrators.⁽¹³⁾ Many more were livid when airport authorities were unable to prevent Iranian civilian planes from landing in mid-to late February 2020 after the pandemic reached Iran and from where it quickly spread to several other spots. Not only was the damage real, but the act illustrated how Lebanon as a “state” could be humiliated on its own soil, as it could not shut down its sole international airport and thereby protect its population without the militia’s approval. It was only when the number of cases increased dramatically that health officials warned the compromised head of state of an impending epidemic. Elite members of society called for a state of emergency. Some even requested that the military protect the country, though Hizballah opposed any such steps. In fact, the refusal of the newly selected pro-Hizballah Prime Minister, Hassan Diab, and President Michel Aoun, to declare a state of emergency confirmed that both tailored their policies to satisfy the powerful militia. Simply stated, Hizballah was not at ease with the army taking greater and even sovereign responsibilities.⁽¹⁴⁾

From Independence to Revolution

Because the LAF adopted the country’s sectarian system, it was critical to discuss briefly the creation of security institutions in Lebanon, precisely to elucidate the trap into which military leaders walked. The LAF was created on August 1, 1945, two years after Lebanon’s independence, as indigenous officers and enlisted men replaced French counterparts.⁽¹⁵⁾ Its initial strategic vision focused on border defenses as a priority, though the political leadership incorporated internal security missions, which burdened it with impossible tasks.⁽¹⁶⁾ A hurried

(13) For the latest performances, see Amnesty International, “Lebanon: Military and Security Forces Attack Unarmed Protesters Following Explosions—New Testimony,” August 11, 2020, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/08/lebanon-military-and-security-forces-attack-unarmed-protesters-following-explosions-new-testimony/>. See also Daniel A. Medina and Kareem Chehayeb, “As the Lebanon Uprising Hits 100-day Mark, Protesters Allege Torture by Security Forces,” *The Intercept*, January 25, 2020, <https://theintercept.com/2020/01/25/lebanon-protests-torture/>.

(14) Eric Knecht, “Hezbollah Asserts Role in Lebanon’s Coronavirus Fight,” *Reuters*, April 1, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-lebanon-hezbollah/hezbollah-asserts-role-in-lebanons-coronavirus-fight-idUSKBN21J537>.

(15) See Barak, *The Lebanese Army*, and Adel A. Freiha, *L’Armée et L’État au Liban (1945–1980)* (Paris: Librairie Générale de Droit et de Jurisprudence, 1980, 166–72.

(16) The main missions of the LAF are the following: 1) facing Israeli occupation and its recurrent breaches of Lebanese sovereignty in South Lebanon and Biqa’ Valley and ensuring its complete withdrawal to the internationally recognized borders; 2) confronting external and internal threats to vital national interests and security, and to the fullest extent possible, remaining neutral vis-à-vis regional and international politics by systematically adopting a defensive stance; 3) coordinating with Arab armies in accordance with ratified treaties and agreements; 4) engaging, in accordance with national interests, in social and development activities; 5) undertaking relief operations in coordination with other public and humanitarian institutions; and 6) being a neutral actor in the face of confessionalism and political dissensions in the country. See, “Mission,” Official Website of the Lebanese Army, http://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/army/?500#.VHXDY_mUcxo.

search for adequate capabilities to handle potential threats, at a time when civilian leaders were searching for legitimacy, came to naught. Importantly, and as most officers were insecure in their posts and beholden to the national accord that maintained a balance of power among various communities, the confessional bug was placed within the country's security establishment. The LAF command was entrusted to a Maronite officer (like the head of state) while that of Chief of Staff was assigned to a Druze. Several other senior officers were drawn from various religious communities, which further embedded sectarianism within the ranks.⁽¹⁷⁾

General Fu'ad Shihab [local sources used the French spelling of the name as Fouad Chéhab], the first LAF commander, raced to build a true army with full French cooperation. At the time, and until the end of the 1950s, Paris exerted significant influence on the army, particularly through Jean Lay, a key figure in the restructuring process. At Shihab's request, Lay was sent to Beirut to reorganize the administrative services of the army, a task he pursued with aplomb until 1958 before the Commander of the LAF was elected President of the Republic. In 1959, as bonds of friendship united the two men, Lay was assigned to the presidency, where his organizational skills were put to good use as well. Notwithstanding gradual progress, and despite limited financial resources, the assistance extended by France improved intrinsic capabilities even if, simultaneously, it created a major challenge for French diplomacy. Indeed, Western red lines aimed to protect Israel's strategic interests first, which meant that the LAF saw its hands tied on its most significant strategic mission. Instead, the LAF turned its attention to internal political matters, which highlighted existing inadequacies.

The army had few chances to meet these requirements since doing so essentially meant that it would be tossed like a football in the hands of politicians anxious to muzzle the institution. In the aftermath of the sole offensive battle in which the LAF ever engaged against Israel—that at al-Malikiyyah, where victory did not translate into any gains—Lebanon confronted far more serious threats that, over time, became harder to address. Moreover, the lack of financial support affected the procurement of necessary weapons that translated, until the late 2010s, into standardized insufficiencies. Several Western countries and their pro-Western regional allies

(17) Joseph A. Kéchichian, "The Lebanese Army: Capabilities and Challenges in the 1980s," *Conflict Quarterly* 5, no. 1 (Winter 1985): 15–39.

prevented the LAF from obtaining numerous types of weapons, including anti-aircraft battery units or offensive missiles, for fear that these might be used against Israel. A limited air force became quickly obsolete when politicians traded its inadequate assets as if they were mere toys. Of course, the absence of such weapons allowed Israel to retaliate against Palestinian guerrilla attacks from South Lebanon, which the LAF could not possibly prevent. Again, and largely for political reasons, the LAF was not entrusted with the task of sealing Lebanon's borders with Israel and defending the country, since confrontational states perceived the small country as a useful arena in which to engage Israel, away from their own lands. What this meant was that the LAF was forced to adapt to new types of warfare not of its choosing, essentially monitoring horizontal guerrilla battles, while gradually losing control over its strategic mission. The contemporary history of Lebanon was thus marked by a series of wars, battles, and clashes between Palestinians and Israel and, after 1982, between the Hizballah militia and Israel, which destabilized the country and which Beirut could not adequately surmount. In fact, the strategic position of Lebanon, on both geopolitical and economic levels, made it impossible to concentrate on nation-building as neighboring militaries embarked on low-intensity conflicts.⁽¹⁸⁾

Hizballah Conquests

When Israel invaded Lebanon in 1982 and occupied the western part of the capital city of Beirut, this “first Lebanon war” took advantage of political divisions amongst Lebanese communities, and highlighted the military weaknesses of the opposition.⁽¹⁹⁾ To be sure, while the tactical goals of the invasion rapidly fell into place, the Palestine Liberation Organization retreated from South Lebanon and, following a Franco-American-Italian disengagement agreement, evacuated leaders as well as some fighters to other Arab countries. For its part, Syria kept military forces in Lebanon but was no longer a major threat to Israel. As a direct consequence of the 1982 invasion and occupation of Southern Lebanon, the LAF disintegrated along confessional lines, especially after the Shuf mountain battles of 1983 and 1984. Remarkably,

(18) Laurent and Basbous, *Une Proie Pour Deux Fauves*, 65–161.

(19) The “First Lebanon War” terminology, also known as “Operation Peace to Galilee,” is best discussed by Itamar Rabinovich, *The War for Lebanon: 1970–1983* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1984); and Jacobo Timerman, *The Longest War: Israel in Lebanon* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982).

and until the end of the civil war, the LAF witnessed a steady erosion of personnel as entire units abandoned the national institution to pledge allegiance to communal and sectarian militias. Elizabeth Picard argued that the national military institution illustrated the “state of destruction” of the Lebanese State as the LAF displayed intrinsic shortcomings throughout the painful civil war.⁽²⁰⁾

Notwithstanding Israeli strategic plans in Lebanon, the most critical consequence of the 1982 invasion was the formal establishment of the Hizballah militia, which touted itself as the Lebanese resistance movement. The militia launched a series of counter-operations that drew the ire of the Israeli Defense Forces but, equally relevant, further weakened the LAF, which was prevented from deploying in the south of the country by Syria and its acolytes within Lebanon. With the cessation of hostilities and the painstakingly negotiated 1990 Ta’if Agreement that pretended to amend the country’s constitution, the LAF embarked on a recovery and restructuring mission under the leadership of General Emile Lahoud, who became head of state in 1998. Theoretically, at least, the LAF remodeled itself into a liberation army that would be empowered to fulfil its strategic defense mission, though Damascus retained its tight leash on Beirut. It was critical to note that the key development at this time was the Franco-American backing to Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri, who succeeded in obtaining Security Council Resolution 1559, which called upon Lebanon to establish its sovereignty over all of its territories and called on “foreign forces,” meaning Syria, to withdraw. The resolution further called on all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias to disband, which application the LAF skirted by claiming that the only foreign forces in Lebanon were Israeli troops that occupied the Shiba‘ah farms along with the Kfarshubah Hills, and that a redeployment of Syrian troops could only be carried out in cooperation between Damascus and Beirut once the joint high military committee established necessary protocols. Moreover, the LAF formally defined Hizballah as the “national resistance” movement and rejected the label of guerrilla or militia, insisting that the resistance group constituted a Lebanese strategic interest. Despite lofty declarations, which hinted at the close relationships that existed between the LAF and the militia in the early 2000s, the LAF was clearly sacrificed on the confessional altar, because

(20) Elizabeth Picard, *Lebanon: A Shattered Country* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 2002), 155–74.

Lebanese politicians could not separate their cherished sectarianism from cataclysmic regional preferences that, eventually, transformed the LAF into an internal security force.⁽²¹⁾ In fact, this development satisfied Syrian authorities as well, their leaders dismissing any semblance of independence for their neighbor. Damascus treated Beirut as a vassal state and the LAF as a satrap force.⁽²²⁾ It was not until 2005, when Rafiq Hariri was assassinated and the Syrians were forced to end their 30-years-long occupation, that the LAF reverted back to its strategic mission. This was a gradual process that was still a work in progress two decades later, though the institution could, finally, professionalize.

Regrettably, the process was interrupted in 2006 when Israel launched a full-scale 33-day war that turned out to be a massive turning point in Levantine affairs. Although a series of Israeli attacks and important changes, including large scale clashes, marked the 1990s, the 2006 attacks placed the LAF in front of a *fait accompli*, as the army engaged in unprecedented coordination with the militia. A cease-fire was negotiated under the auspices of the Security Council, whose resolution 1701 redefined internal as well as regional priorities. Under this epochal resolution, the United Nations Interim Forces in Lebanon (UNIFIL) was substantially strengthened—with the addition of infantry units—ushering in a period of stability for Southern Lebanon. Still, 1701 failed to guarantee that the LAF would not be politicized as it confronted fresh internal challenges, led by the famous Nahr al-Barid battles in 2007 that pitted the army against extremist forces.⁽²³⁾

In the aftermath of the 2011 uprisings in Syria and the ongoing civil war in that hapless country, which recorded the emergence of new actors—ranging from various extremist Syrian groups to the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS)—the geopolitical map of the entire region changed. The major challenge that confronted the LAF at this time was how to respond to a palpable and growing terrorist presence in certain parts of the country. Could the LAF tolerate ISIS-type terrorists in Aarsal (North Lebanon), for example, or endure Hizballah's

(21) Barak, *The Lebanese Army*, 151–69.

(22) Laurent and Basbous, *Une Proie Pour Deux Fauves*, 11.

(23) Naomi Joy Weinberger, *Syrian Intervention in Lebanon: The 1975–76 Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 241–68. See also Gilbert Achcar and Michel Warschawski, *33 Day War: Israel's War on Hezbollah in Lebanon and Its Consequences* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015); and Joseph Bayeh, *A History of Stability and Change in Lebanon: Foreign Interventions and International Relations* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2017), 160–97.

decision to fight alongside the Syrian regime irrespective of any Lebanese consensus on the matter? How could the LAF preserve national cohesion if regional preferences—that were not necessarily in Beirut’s interests—spilled over and, even indirectly, reawakened dormant sectarian demons? In the event, the LAF launched various assaults on terrorist groups, and paid a heavy price for its bravura. The LAF fought in Arsal [Operation *Fajr al-Jurud*] as the border region of the Qalamun along the Syrian border recorded Hizballah and Syrian Arab Army deployments to fight Tahrir al-Sham, ISIS, and other groups between 2014 and 2017. It denied that it cooperated with any other entity, which was hard to believe, though few could challenge official versions because of a near-complete news blackout. Scores were wounded, at least 20 soldiers were killed, and 49 were captured (36 were eventually released alive though 13 were apparently executed).⁽²⁴⁾ In this operation, the LAF displayed the latest hardware it had acquired from the United States, which certainly allowed it to prevail, though its cooperation with the Hizballah militia hung like a Sword of Damocles over its head.⁽²⁵⁾ Importantly, and like most civilian leaders, LAF commanders were caught by surprise as the decade closed.

The October 2019 Pseudo-Revolution

Reeling under an acute economic crisis that was topped by unprecedented political stagnation even by Lebanese standards, nearly 2 million Lebanese poured into the capital’s streets on October 17, 2019, though opposition media outlets pretended not to see them. A revolution [*thawrah*] was under way though the movement dissolved with the onset of winter and Lebanon’s heavy rains, which was why the revolution fizzled out before the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020. Whether impromptu demonstrations, blocking of highways and streets, or even the erection of a semi-permanent tent city in Martyr’s Square—the heart of

(24) “Kahwagi: Army Will Do Utmost to Free Hostages,” *The Daily Star* (Beirut), August 12, 2014, <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2014/Aug-12/266928-army-removes-militants-bodies-from-arsal.ashx#axzz3ABS02nte>. See also *The Associated Press*, “Syria’s al-Qaeda Branch Nusra Front to Swap Lebanese Soldiers for Prisoners,” December 1, 2015, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/world/lebanon-prisoner-release-1.3344823>; and Sarah Dadouch, “Lebanon Identifies Soldiers Killed in Islamic State Captivity,” *Reuters*, September 6, 2017, <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-mideast-crisis-lebanon/lebanon-identifies-bodies-of-soldiers-killed-while-in-is-hands-idUKKCN1BH11M>.

(25) The US government provided more than \$2 billion in military assistance—including some \$800 million in Defence Department funding—to Lebanon between 2005–2019. See Aram Nerguizian, “There Are Reports That the United States Will Withhold Military Aid to Lebanon,” Beirut: Carnegie Middle East Centre, November 1, 2019, <https://carnegie-mec.org/diwan/80253>.

the capital—constituted the rise of the Second Lebanese Republic is difficult to determine. Undeniably, the Lebanese realized that the socio-political and economic systems in place were not favorable to their interests, which was why calls for a new social contract became a cornerstone of all demands. Leaders denied responsibility for each and every problem, practiced corruption, and otherwise rejected all notions of accountability. Prime Minister Sa'ad Hariri and his government tendered their resignations on October 29, 2019, though the establishment that held power remained in place, benefiting from the paralysis that condemned the population to unending crises.⁽²⁶⁾

Caught by surprise, Hizballah dispatched armed militiamen to confront unarmed demonstrators who flew the national flag, to distinguish themselves from those brandishing partisan standards. Attacks by militia elements against citizens demanding reforms led to substantial security deployments that, naturally, exacerbated conditions. Still popular with the vast majority, the behavior of the LAF nevertheless shocked many, surprised that the cherished institution would turn against unarmed civilians. As Internal Security Forces (ISF) were overwhelmed, civilian authorities deployed the LAF to re-open blocked highways, though only in predominantly Christian areas. In fact, the LAF was nearly absent from areas controlled by the Hizballah militia, which raised the ire of a large segment of the population. Through these steps, the LAF harkened to calls from the militia and the latter's Christian allies within President Michel Aoun's Free Patriotic Movement (FPM), which further split public opinion. While it was too soon to know whether citizens would perceive this attachment as a permanent fissure or whether they would demand that the LAF refrain from such blatant support, few doubted that assessments would change. In fact, those fears were confirmed in the week that followed the August 4, 2020 explosions, as militia units used live ammunition against civilians in front of unresponsive LAF soldiers.⁽²⁷⁾ Most citizens were unlikely to forgive the LAF's excessive use

(26) Lynn Maalouf, "Lebanese Protests Explained," *Amnesty International*, January 17, 2020, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/11/lebanon-protests-explained/>.

(27) On August 13, 2020, several physicians who treated war wounds at local hospitals held a press conference at the Lebanon Press Club, to document the horrible injuries inflicted by the use of live ammunition. Although the conference was broadcast live on the local MTV, LBC, and al-Jadid television networks, very few newspapers reported the event in their following day deliveries. There was nearly no reportage in English or French language papers. Remarkably, *Al-Nahar*—the country's flagship daily—offered front page coverage with several photographs of the injuries. See "al-Dawlah al-Qatilah Man Yuhasibuhah" [Who Will Hold Accountable the Murdering State?], *Al-Nahar*, August 14, 2020, <https://newspaper.annahar.com/article/1256986-الدولة-القاتلة-من-يحاسبها>.

of force against unarmed civilians, which underscored how weak the state was and how fragile the government turned out to be as the establishment tolerated the existence of two armies (the LAF and the armed wing of Hizballah), two currencies, 18 officially-sanctioned confessional communities, and plenty of conspiracy theories.⁽²⁸⁾ Equally devastating was the undeniable LAF/ISF torture of detainees, often held incommunicado and tried in front of military courts without the presence of an attorney, along with the security forces' refusal to halt attacks on the demonstrators by Hizballah and its allies (notably Amal Party and Syrian Social Nationalist Party militiamen), which illustrated how the violence meted out by the LAF evolved and created alternative narratives that betrayed the country's social contracts. Indeed, the lack of a national consensus over the country's destiny, its strategic goals, and even a common national identity, undermined all efforts to rescue the state from inevitable collapse.

Yet the Lebanese continued to hold that the sole remaining institution that could prevent a full disintegration of the country was the army, even if its role was primarily that of preserving internal security. Of course, rhetorical declarations about Israel and the need to defend the land were routinely uttered, but those were of the chimerical variety. Herein lay an existential dilemma, as the LAF held a prominent role in internal Lebanese dynamics, though its regional engagements have largely remained peripheral since 1948. On the domestic front, the LAF acted as a nationalizing force, an institution with a strong capacity for social organization, an entity meant to rise above inter-sectarian tensions and, at least on a practical level, one that attempted to separate the wheat from the chaff by fielding what appeared to be a non-sectarian body. However, none of these attributes fulfilled the LAF's strategic *raison d'être*, now burdened with a public disavowal of its behavior during the latest uprisings. Indeed, the LAF was increasingly perceived in negative terms because it had shed its traditional neutrality on internal political disputes after its officers used excessive force on selected unarmed civilians.⁽²⁹⁾

(28) Roger Cohen, "Lebanon Battles to Be Born at Last," *The New York Times*, October 25, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/25/opinion/lebanon-protests.html>. On August 12, 2020, the *New York Times* editorialized that Lebanon had a last chance to manage its affairs, wondering whether officials were capable of addressing various challenges. See "Could the Beirut Explosion Be a Turning Point for Lebanon?," *The New York Times* (editorial), August 12, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/12/opinion/lebanon-corruption-beirut-explosion.html>.

(29) Eduardo Aboultaif, "The Lebanese Army: Saviour of the Republic?," *The RUSI Journal* 161, no. 1 (2016): 70–78.

Amazingly, Lebanon was the perfect case study to highlight this process of dissolving state authority, which placed significant challenges in front of the security establishment. In reality, it was not possible for the LAF to perform its functions adequately when it was constantly subjected to socio-political paradigms that politicians manipulated to advance sectarianism. Moreover, the LAF could not escape the clutches of political sectarianism and avoid manipulation, lingering as a tool in the hands of so-called leaders (*zu'amah*, plural of *za'im*), whose primary goals skirted national unity. If one were to take into consideration the definition of national security as the “responsibility of a nation to protect the values, principles, citizens, institutions, freedoms and integrity of a state against external and internal threats,” and apply it to the LAF, it then became clear that the LAF confronted a Herculean task.⁽³⁰⁾ Even if one were to take into account the multi-confessional nature of this specific martial law, the political manipulation or connivance between the LAF and certain political forces and confessional communities made it almost impossible to achieve the minimum standards of national security. The reasons for such realities were found in the norms and principles of the Lebanese, even when they seldom acknowledged them. In the absence of a consensus among citizens, therefore, the LAF was in no position to articulate unifying strategies that protected the entire country. Additionally, as every institution in Lebanon experienced unprecedented levels of sectarian influences, it was evident that the LAF could not overcome such negative forces within the ranks. What was demanded from the LAF was Gargantuan: to please different sectarian agendas operating in the country. How could the LAF defend the nation when there existed a duopoly on the legitimate use of force that, every observer agreed, wily political leaders imposed on the army? Under the circumstances, and beyond the humiliation of sharing defense responsibilities with a militia, it was imprudent for LAF officials to tolerate such imposed duties, precisely to enforce effective control over the whole territory and ensure its defenses.⁽³¹⁾ This was and remained the core concern of any analysis of the Lebanese military that, regrettably, LAF commanders allowed to fester and reach unprecedented levels that weakened the national institution and threatened to make it irrelevant in the one and true arena of national security.

(30) Narender Kumar, “Defense Planning: A Review,” in *Defense Reforms: A National Imperative*, eds. Gurmeet Kanwal and Neha Kohli (New Delhi: Pentagon Press in association with the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, 2018), 75–98.

(31) Emma Soubrier, “Re-construire une Armée Nationale: l’exemple du Liban depuis 1958,” *Cahier du Retex* (February 2013), https://www.researchgate.net/publication/272181917_Re-construire_une_armee_nationale_L%27exemple_du_Liban_depuis_1958, esp. 108–16.

Rearming Lebanon's Security Institutions

Because the Hizballah secretary-general and his lieutenants insisted that the LAF was not adequately equipped to defend the country from Israeli incursions, Beirut sought to upgrade its capabilities, largely through donations from key Western sponsors (see Appendix 3 for a synopsis of the Lebanese Armed Forces). Towards that end, and confronted by a well-armed militia with which LAF commanders established a *modus vivendi*, Beirut accepted a United Nations invitation to attend the March 15, 2018 Rome conference to support Lebanon's security institutions. Remarkably, the United States of America, which remained the international actor most committed to the strengthening of the Lebanese Armed Forces and the Internal Security Forces, assumed a rather secondary role at this UN-convened gathering, though it quietly invested more than \$2 billion in the LAF between 2006 and 2020.⁽³²⁾ Whether the decision to keep a lower profile was intended to give other countries the opportunity to step up to the plate was difficult to know. In the end, and as expected, countries that regularly invested in Lebanese security institutions contributed the most. France offered Lebanon a credit line of €400 million to buy sorely needed equipment. For its part, the United Kingdom announced extra aid of \$13 million in materials and training for both the Army and the ISF. Furthermore, London pledged to help with a commitment of a total of \$110 million with the time horizon of the year 2019. The European Union promised €50 million, although most of these pledges were conditional on purchasing hardware and equipment in donor states.

Despite various assurances, the Rome Conference highlighted existing shortcomings in Lebanon's security sectors, as critics concluded that the LAF was both dysfunctional as well as useless because of its leaders' inability to prevent Hizballah from influencing it. In February 2019, for example, Saudi Arabia halted a US\$ 3 billion pledge to strengthen the Lebanese defense apparatus, a surprise announcement that struck a direct blow to Beirut, after the latter failed to condemn attacks on Saudi diplomatic missions in Iran. What Riyadh would not tolerate was blatant and excessive Hizballah interference in Lebanese diplomacy, whose lackluster behavior with the League of Arab States—which condemned Iran for destroying

(32) United Nations, "Security Council Press Statement on Rome Conference," New York: SC/13267, March 15, 2018, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2018/sc13267.doc.htm>. See also Georgi Azar, "Rome Conference to Boost Lebanese Army Kicks Off," *Al-Nahar*, March 14, 2018, <https://en.annahar.com/article/774195-rome-conference-to-boost-lebanese-army-kicks-off>.

Arab diplomatic posts in Tehran and Mashhad—stood out. At the time, Prime Minister Sa‘ad Hariri declared that the Saudi hesitation was due to the “use of the Lebanese state’s foreign policy in the service of regional axes,” which was a polite but entirely inadequate rebuke of his foreign minister’s uncoordinated decisions.⁽³³⁾ Consequently, Lebanon was played as a proxy element between Saudi Arabia and Iran as the two regional powers jostled in a geopolitical struggle. Therefore, the bandwagon strategy implemented by Lebanon chose the Iranian pole instead of the Saudi Arabian, which placed the country at a sort of crossroads that reflected internal imbalances. Surprisingly, at no time did Iran offer to grant Lebanon such a generous military aid package, though it disbursed large quantities of arms, including short- and medium-range surface-to-surface rockets to Hizballah. Shocked at this substantial financial loss that would have added muscle where it was needed, LAF leaders muted their reactions not only because they lost a golden opportunity to acquire advanced equipment but also because they understood that weak civilian leaders further isolated Lebanon from the international community as well as the Arab regional set-up to which the country presumably belonged. Still, it was unclear whether the withering international support to Lebanon raised the risk factors between the Lebanese Army and the Hizballah militia, especially as the latter boasted over 100,000 rockets that could presumably destroy Israel even if the 2006 war stood as a paradigm of inconclusive exchanges.⁽³⁴⁾

This setback was not the only episode that clipped the LAF’s wings, an albatross routinely denied clearance to fly under its own power. Under Hariri, Beirut flirted with the Russian Federation to acquire a few fighters, and actually welcomed Vladimir Putin’s offer of 10 free second-hand Mig-29s, in 2008.⁽³⁵⁾ When that offer fell by the wayside, President Dmitry Medvedev offered “six Mi-24 attack helicopters, 31 T-72 tanks, 36 130-mm artillery pieces and 500,000 shells to

(33) “Saudi Arabia Halts \$3 billion Package to Lebanese Army, Security Aid,” *Reuters*, 19 February 2016, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-saudi-lebanon/saudi-arabia-halts-3-billion-package-to-lebanese-army-security-aid-idUSKCN0VS1KK>.

(34) For three interesting reports on the war, see Jonathan Schanzer, Tony Badran, and David Daoud, *The Third Lebanon War: The Coming Clash Between Hezbollah and Israel in the Shadow of the Iran Nuclear Deal* (Washington, DC: Foundation for Defense of Democracies, July 2016); Amos Harel, “Israel’s Second Lebanon War Remains a Resounding Failure,” *Haaretz*, July 12, 2016, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium.MAGAZINE-israels-second-lebanon-war-remains-a-resounding-failure-1.5407519>; and V. Krishnappa, “Who Won the Second Israel–Lebanon War?,” *Strategic Analysis* 37, no. 1 (2007), 49–71.

(35) Luke Harding and Hugh Macleod, “Russia Offers Fighter Jets to Lebanon as Gifts,” *The Guardian*, December 18, 2008, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/dec/18/russia-lebanon-jets-arms-supply>.

be used by existing Lebanese artillery,” all free of charge, in 2010.⁽³⁶⁾ Russia did not deliver any of these recommended gifts, though Moscow and Beirut signed a military cooperation agreement on February 3, 2018, which raised serious misgivings among traditional donors. Hopelessly divided at the political level, the Lebanese government was tempted by Moscow’s enticements that would have pleased the dominant militia—which also secured military assistance pledges from Tehran to Beirut that, however, never materialized either—though, in the end, incompatibility prevented any of the Russian gear being donated. Lebanon fielded selected Russian equipment, mostly trucks and a few armored personnel carriers courtesy of Syria during the latter’s three-decades-long occupation, even if the bulk of its materials were Western-made. What was left unsaid regarding Hariri’s modest breach with Russia was the probable veto exercised by Israel, still Moscow’s preferred regional ally.⁽³⁷⁾

Notwithstanding these unfulfilled Russian pledges, several European Union projects focused on Lebanon’s un-demarcated borders with Syria, both to deny arms smuggling as well as assist Beirut recover its territorial sovereignty. The EU’s Integrated Border Management (IBM) for Lebanon initiated a program to stem the flow of illegal weapons into the country because Beirut lacked the capacity as well as the will to control its borders. Valiant efforts were made to increase Lebanon’s border-monitoring capacity and secure the 320 km frontiers with Syria. IBM efforts, along with those of the UN’s Lebanon Independent Border Assessment Team (LIBAT), concluded that the level of cooperation and coordination between Beirut and Damascus was low, presumably because officials in both countries concentrated on territorial defense rather than the establishment of border surveillance to prevent smuggling. Importantly, Hizballah

(36) Zvi Bar’el, “Russia to Gift Lebanon with Arms, Military Supplies to Bolster Army,” *Haaretz*, November 17, 2010, <https://www.haaretz.com/1.5140463>.

(37) The February 3, 2018 agreement included, among others, the following items: use of Lebanese facilities by the Russian Army; a greater exchange of military information; a deepening of bilateral cooperation in international security affairs; a fight against terrorism and piracy; the joint training of troops; and, finally, improvements through a series of proposals concerning certain areas such as engineering, military education, medicine, topography, hydrography, and search and rescue on the high seas. See John C. K. Daly, “Russia and Lebanon Drafting Agreement for Increased Military Cooperation,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 1, no. 29 (February 26, 2018), at <https://jamestown.org/program/russia-lebanon-drafting-agreement-increased-military-cooperation/>. On close Russian-Israeli ties, see Yosef Govrin, *Israeli-Soviet Relations, 1953–1967: From Confrontation to Disruption* (New York: Routledge, 2013). See also Majid Ibrahim Al-Haj, *The Russians in Israel: A New Ethnic Group in a Tribal Society* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019), especially 29–123; Robert O. Freedman, “Israeli-Russian Relations since the Collapse of the Soviet Union,” *The Middle East Journal* 49, no. 2 (Spring 1995): 233–47; and Eugene Rumer, *Russia in the Middle East: Jack of All Trades, Master of None*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, October 31, 2019, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2019/10/31/russia-in-middle-east-jack-of-all-trades-master-of-none-pub-80233>.

continued to smuggle arms and many of its other material needs through numerous border crossings, which Beirut pretended not to see.⁽³⁸⁾

Politicization of the Army

As various procurement projects, including the EU-sponsored IBM initiatives, illustrated, what ailed the LAF was its incapacity to retain exclusivity on the possession of weapons, the result of the institution's politicization. As discussed above, these modifications significantly reduced the LAF's capacity to fulfil its strategic goals, with severe consequences. Given the establishment's proclivity for interfering in every military decision, running the gamut from appointments to deployments, and banking on the LAF's relatively positive image within society at large—at least until the October 2019 protests—few pretended that the LAF was a truly independent institution.⁽³⁹⁾ With a gradual leaning of what passed for Lebanese foreign policy toward Iran and the latter's Levantine sphere of influence, the LAF confronted extraordinary, even traumatic, choices. Indeed, the politicization of the Lebanese Armed Forces during the past few decades was an undeniable fact long before the most recent revolutionary uprisings. After October 2019, the LAF did not stand with protestors, who represented the citizenry, and that illuminated its leaders' preferences. It is worth repeating that the army displayed inconsistencies, applying the stick in certain parts of the country and the carrot elsewhere. This irregularity highlighted the LAF's preferences to please the demands of a compromised political class, which meant that the opportunity to remain impartial was lost.⁽⁴⁰⁾ Indeed, this behavior demonstrated that the LAF defended the multi-confessional regime, instead of citizens who clamored for genuine change.⁽⁴¹⁾ Moreover, by accepting anti-protestor terms, the LAF displayed its subjectivity. Regrettably, and while civilian control was crucial, the LAF jeopardized its patriotic duties in early 2020 because President Michel Aoun and

(38) For additional details, see Alistair Harris, "Bordering on the Impossible: Securing Lebanon's Borders with Syria," *RUSI Journal*, 152, no. 5 (October 2007): p40–44. For a sample of various IBM projects, including those sponsored by Denmark, Germany, The Netherlands, and Switzerland, among others, see the dedicated page of the International Centre for Migration Policy Development, <https://www.icmpd.org/our-work/capacity-building/regions/mediterranean/ongoing-projects/>.

(39) Florence Gaub, *Guardians of the Arab State: When Militaries Intervene in Politics, from Iraq to Mauritania* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 1–6.

(40) Aram Nerguizian, "Moral Leadership and the Lebanese Military," Carnegie Middle East Centre, November 26, 2019, <https://carnegie-mec.org/diwan/80433>.

(41) For a discussion of these points, see Florence Gaub, "Arab Spring and Arab Armies: A New Framework for Analysis," International Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT), Herzliya Working Paper Number 8 (2013), 10, and "Arab Armies: Agents of Change? Before and after 2011," European Union Institute of Security Studies, Chaillot Paper Number 131, March 2014, https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/Chaillot_Paper_131_Arab_armies.pdf.

Prime Minister Hassan Diab—presumably at the head of a technocratic government—perceived the LAF as a mere instrument of power whose allegiance was secure.⁽⁴²⁾

Interestingly, the Lebanese Army was not always reluctant to stand up to those who wished to manipulate the institution, precisely to protect it from sectarian predators anxious to compromise its neutrality. In 2005, for example, the LAF refused to carry on repressive actions ordered by the then Prime Minister Omar Karami. Coming in the immediate aftermath of the February 14, 2005 assassination of the former Prime Minister, Rafiq Hariri, the LAF was commanded to suppress large demonstrations against Karami and his pro-Syrian government. The then Commander of the Army, Michel Suleiman, stood the LAF down, which quickly led to the Cedar Revolution, and that highlighted socio-political divisions between March 8 and March 14 movements, the former backing Hizballah and the Syrian regime while the latter articulated nationalist sentiments. This non-intervention raised many questions but strengthened the army's ethical credentials. Its legitimacy was restored even if the LAF still could not defend the country nor most of its strategic objectives.

In 2020, civil-military relations in Lebanon remained uncertain because LAF Commander Joseph Aoun ordered his troops to back Internal Security Forces in suppressing unarmed protesters, while the Hizballah militia and its March 8 Movement allies insisted in a stale trifecta to defend the country. Oft-repeated, the formula consisted of a slogan—Army, People, Resistance (*al-Sha'ib, al-Jaysh, wal Muqawamah*)—that was rejected by the majority of the Lebanese. For the militia, the tryptic represented the basis for Lebanon's defense strategy, which March 14 Movement adherents wished to update with another trilogy, namely "People, State, Army" (*al-Sha'ib, al-Dawlah, wal-Jaysh*). Naturally, this trio "represent[ed] an opportunity to dissociate the LAF once and for all from the sectarian network and corrupted political class," and while the updated trifecta guaranteed the LAF's independence and neutral role, confessional and sectarian political preferences practiced communitocracy customs that favored the sitting regime.⁽⁴³⁾

(42) Florence Gaub, "Civil-Military Relations in the MENA: Between Fragility and Resilience," European Union Institute of Security Studies, Chaillot Paper Number 139 (October 2016): 32, https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/CP_139_Arab_civil_military_relations.pdf. The Diab government resigned on 10 August 2020 in the aftermath of the 4 August explosions that shattered public trust in the political and security establishments.

(43) "Geagea Calls for 'Army-People-State Equation,'" *Naharnet*, August 20, 2017, <http://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/234365-geagea-calls-for-army-people-state-equation>.

Liberalism vs. Militarization

For decades, Lebanon represented a liberal autocracy where all institutions submitted to largely outdated norms, even if officials pretended that the republic was protected by clearly defined constitutional statutes. In fact, it would be safe to state that existing rules presented important challenges to elites wishing to limit democratization, most of which drew succor from efforts expanded by non-governmental organizations anxious to move forward. Moreover, and because the small Levantine state exemplified a hybrid political order where political and economic powers were divided among “diverse and competing authority structures, sets of rules, logics of order, and claims to power that co-exist, overlap, and intertwine, combining elements of introduced Western models of governance and elements stemming from local indigenous traditions of governance,” those seeking reforms faced gigantic challenges.⁽⁴⁴⁾ Lebanon thus presented a real fusion of liberal democratic and confessional/neo-patrimonial elements, which generated a new form of governance where communities, or confessional groups, exerted power instead of state officials. Strangely, the LAF was the only institution capable to contribute to the state-building process despite the dissolution of effective state authority, but it never acquired the will power to get rid of negative factors imposed by those in the state who tolerated a hybrid power-sharing authority with a militia.

It was this “communitocracy” that stood behind the failure of the LAF as a protector of the nation, a form of governance that served more than the interests of the people, as it catered to the whims of confessional communities that made up the Lebanese mosaic.⁽⁴⁵⁾ Indeed, the LAF did not serve an executive civil authority, but operated within the required consensus of rival political forces and sectarian groups. Unfortunately, such choices meant that the LAF could not challenge confessional interests to impose universal norms that served the entire nation-state.⁽⁴⁶⁾ In other words, the LAF tolerated a Hizballah that imposed narrow options for the country’s security agenda without national consensus, which further weakened Beirut.

(44) Kéchichian, “A Strong Army for a Stable Lebanon,” 2.

(45) Imad Salamey, *The Decline of Nation-States after the Arab Spring: The Rise of Communitocracy* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), esp. 81–112.

(46) Waleed Hazbun, “Assembling Security in a ‘Weak State’: The Contentious Politics of Plural Governance in Lebanon since 2005,” *Third World Quarterly* 37, no. 6 (2016): 1053–70.

Thus, the confessional composition of the LAF was a critical dimension that left an impact, as this inevitable politicization emphasized the country's sectarian framework. Indeed, during the first week of August 2017, the Hizballah militia launched an offensive in the vicinity of the city of Arsal in northeast Lebanon intending to clear the area of what it labelled as "radical jihadist groups such as Jabhat Fatah Al-Sham," a predominantly Sunni Syrian group. The Lebanese Army, which fought alongside the militia, allowed Hizballah to assume the defensive task that was supposedly the army's responsibility for fear that Sunni units within LAF would demur. The resounding success of the Shi'ah militia enhanced its credibility, which Shi'ah politicians and their Christian allies tapped to their advantages.⁽⁴⁷⁾

Yet this case illustrated how the LAF marginalized itself, essentially by surrendering to the militia the fight against so-called terrorist elements that, supposedly, became the very *raison d'être* of the institution and its presumed national defense strategy. Strangely, and again for purely indigenous political reasons, the LAF seldom launched any assaults against Shi'ah terrorist groups, as if none existed. How could this possibly be at a time when Hizballah deployed its own forces inside Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and Bahrain, among others, and denied the LAF access to certain areas under its control in Lebanon itself? Why was Beirut, and especially senior LAF leaders, so cavalier about Hizballah's attack on a LAF helicopter on August 28, 2008, which killed pilot Samer Hanna whose presumed assassin was freed on June 17, 2009, allegedly because the Lebanese helicopter was mistaken for an Israeli aircraft?⁽⁴⁸⁾ Did the military tribunal that released the militiaman less than a year after his arrest not raise troubling questions about the LAF's commitments to its own warriors?

Similarly, the even-handedness of the LAF was questioned on other occasions too, best illustrated by the May 7, 2008 attacks by Hizballah against parts of Beirut, after Prime Minister Fu'ad Siniora ordered the dismantling of the militia's alternative communications system. This was an ugly

(47) "Army Capable of Liberating Outskirts: Berri," *The Daily Star*, August 4, 2017, http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2017/Aug-04/414998-berri-to-congratulate-rouhani-in-tehran.ashx?utm_source=Magnet&utm_medium=Entity%20page&utm_campaign=Magnet%20tools.

(48) "Court Releases Hizballah Fighter who Killed LAF Pilot," *The Daily Star*, June 18, 2009, <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2009/Jun-18/53461-court-releases-hizballah-fighter-who-killed-laf-pilot.ashx>. It was important to note that the area where the helicopter was shot at was south-east of the city of Sidon in the Nabatiyyah Governorate (near Jabal al-Sujud), considered to be a Hizballah stronghold, albeit at a distance about 30 km from the Israeli border.

affair, as street battles over several days left scores of dead and wounded (65 combatants, 18 LAF and ISF soldiers, and 24 civilians were killed, including an Australian national).⁽⁴⁹⁾ Within days, Hizballah handed over its position to the LAF, which pledged to resolve the dispute, but reversed the government's decisions. Incredibly, the LAF allowed the militia to preserve its telecoms network and even reinstated the airport's security chief, whose departure was a state-sanctioned decision.⁽⁵⁰⁾ Naturally, these poor judgements caused a major uproar within the army, as Sunni officers perceived what had happened as a lost occasion to mark the LAF's authority over the militia. According to a leading expert on the Lebanese Army, "there were conflicting reports that some 40 LAF officers—most of them Sunni—submitted their resignation protesting the LAF's non-intervention in West Beirut," though "the LAF Command stated that no resignations had taken place, adding that the Lebanese media should not get involved in internal LAF matters."⁽⁵¹⁾

In the aftermath of the ongoing Syrian wars, which fostered inter-sectoral competition that further encouraged political-sectarian elites to challenge the Lebanese Army's putative neutrality, what the Sunni community confronted was nothing if not egregious. Although the bulk of the LAF was composed of Sunni troops, officers "interpreted" who would be targeted as foes and who would receive passes. The unequal treatment of groups such as the extremists in the north, the number of arrests of important figures in Salafist movements, the imprisonment of alleged terrorists for long periods of time without trial, and the arbitrary arrests of young Sunni men, raised tensions and added to the country's woes. In fact, the unequal treatment by the LAF of Sunni Lebanese, especially vis-à-vis the treatment of Hizballah militiamen, drew various complaints that, to say the least, created a climate of national disaffection that was bound to have severe repercussions on the army. A fear of fragmentation could not be excluded within the only institution that represented national unity as civilian—as well as military—officials slumbered.⁽⁵²⁾

(49) Democracy Now, "81 Dead in Lebanon as Hezbollah Clashes with US-Backed Pro-Government Forces," May 12, 2008, http://www.democracynow.org/2008/5/12/81_dead_in_lebanon_as_hezbollah. See also Robert F. Worth and Nada Bakri, "Hezbollah Begins to Withdraw Gunmen in Beirut," *The New York Times*, May 11, 2008, <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/11/world/middleeast/11lebanon.html?hp>.

(50) Worth and Bakri, "Hezbollah Begins to Withdraw Gunmen in Beirut."

(51) Aram Nerguizian, *The Lebanese Armed Forces: Challenges and Opportunities in Post-Syria Lebanon*, Centre for Strategic and International Studies, February 10, 2009, 20, https://carnegieendowment.org/files/090210_lafsecurity3.pdf.

(52) Basem Shabb, "The Syrian Conflict and the Ascendancy of the Lebanese Armed Forces," The Middle East Institute, 25 November 2014, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/syrian-conflict-and-ascendancy-lebanese-armed-forces>.

Conclusion: The Hizballah Conundrum

As discussed in previous sections, the LAF's excessive tolerance of the Hizballah militia prevented Lebanon from adopting a defense strategy to serve the state, and explains why successive governments literally surrendered their basic decision-making privileges to Shi'ah guerrillas. Unfortunately, Lebanon was a weak state where governance over security matters defined contacts between various actors, and where the state was held hostage by a paramilitary force that acted with impunity. Moreover, and while public opinion backed the army, the LAF's post-October 2019 behavior created a break in popular perceptions, a rupture that was difficult to ignore. LAF-Hizballah ties routinely displayed the superiority of the militia in terms of military capabilities, which somehow explained why and how the Lebanese state was incapable of disarming this pro-Iranian force according to the UNSC 1701 resolution. Whether Beirut could tolerate this unresolved enmity over the medium- and long-terms might well explain why the institutions operated in unison, even if dynamic contacts amongst them did not serve the legitimate armed forces.⁽⁵³⁾

Indeed, one of the main factors behind the failure of the LAF to stand alone on security matters was based on the inadequate application of the notion of security assemblage, which was used to refer to a set of heterogeneous elements in relationship with one another with no specific center, and that fixed rules or hierarchical orderings that were necessary for the welfare of the institution as well as the state.⁽⁵⁴⁾ In this case, the security and defense balance of the country transcended traditional boundaries presented by nation-states, given that the relationship played out in favor of the militia. The LAF was thus beholden to various constituents while Hizballah answered to Iran and, more specifically, to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.⁽⁵⁵⁾ Consequently, the competitive or subsidiary relationship between the LAF and Hizballah would best be understood by taking into account the *motu proprio* assumptions of defensive functions displayed by the militia, which negatively affected the security dilemma as understood by different confessional communities still reeling from post-Civil War symptoms of power politics.

(53) Hazbun, "Assembling Security in a 'Weak State'," 1054.

(54) Rita Abrahamsen and Michael C. Williams, "Security Beyond the State: Global Security Assemblages," *International Political Sociology* 3, no. 1 (March 2009): 1–17.

(55) Boaz Atzili, "State Weakness and 'Vacuum of Power' in Lebanon," *Journal of Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 33, no. 8 (June 2010): 757–82. See also Hanin Ghaddar, "Hezbollah-Iran Dynamics: A Proxy, Not a Partner," Policy Watch 3104, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, April 12, 2019, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/hezbollah-iran-dynamics-a-proxy-not-a-partner>.

It was hence accurate to state that Hizballah's self-appointed defense role undermined not only the viability of the LAF but its reputation too. Differences concerning perceptions of threats, together with the high autonomy enjoyed by the militia within the Shi'ah community, placed Lebanon's domestic cohesion and stability at risk, which was a serious matter for the Lebanese to face. Equally important, Hizballah's disproportionate power hindered the existing coordination and cooperation dynamics between the LAF and the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). If truth be told, United Nations Security Council resolution 1701 was breached because the presence of the Lebanese Armed Forces throughout the southern part of the country was called into question whenever the militia prevented the army from exercising its full authority across the area.⁽⁵⁶⁾ Such denial of LAF's freedoms impeded the correct exercise in relation to the control of arms trafficking related to any type of military capability coming from Iran via Syria. Unfortunately, the LAF was not in a position to control parts of the porous border with Syria despite the EU's Gargantuan IBM efforts, since Hizballah needed and relied on illegal crossings to smuggle in military materials at will. This point has often been used to justify an assumed collusion between the LAF and Hizballah that surfaced during the 2017 *Fajr al-Jurud* operations in Aarsal (North Lebanon). Finally, the LAF's cooperation and coordination with the rest of the Arab armed forces were jeopardized too, since the modernizing of the LAF was paralyzed after leading Arab states refused to accept any parity between the legitimate Lebanese Army and the militia.

What this meant was that the triumph of "communitocracy," combined with the hybrid security governance mechanisms in place, the excessive influence of sectarianism, the multi-confessional nature of the LAF, the failure of the Security assemblages, and the increased politicization process, all placed the LAF in a spiral of domestic and external influences that jeopardized sorely needed reforms that would revitalize the force and ensure its viability.

With a dubious mandate, the Lebanese Armed Forces remained a political football in the hands of wily politicians anxious to preserve cherished prerogatives, even if such steps proved to be

(56) In this regard, the deployment of a model regiment and a patrol vessel on the high seas by the Lebanese Armed Forces in the UNIFIL area of operations—as established by Security Council Resolution 2337 (August 30, 2017)—will indicate whether LAF-Hizballah ties may change in the future.

detrimental both to the LAF as well as the country.⁽⁵⁷⁾ Notwithstanding denials to the contrary by military officers, this excessive politicization benefitted the latter too, since most senior staff officers maintained very close connections with civilian elites, especially those from their own religious communities. Moreover, and as the army's internal system of promotions functioned according to prevalent sectarian norms, the LAF seldom developed supra-national credentials that created a cohesive and merit-based force. Lebanon was thus a weak state that suffered from unconsolidated sovereignty and lacked the resources to become a genuinely sovereign entity, partly because the army evaded its responsibilities or, just as likely, was unable to instill nationalist sentiments within its own ranks.⁽⁵⁸⁾ Of course, while the power-sharing mechanisms increased the influence of the most prominent political figures responsible for various promotions, it was equally fair to state that LAF leaders played along, since most benefitted from said permutations.

In light of devastating economic conditions that condemned Lebanon to its current failed state status, the LAF was caught between its duty to maintain security and sorely needed reforms that could, potentially, allow it to literally save the country. Granted, LAF officers enjoyed undeniable privileges but these depended on a functioning economy that came under duress. Posting regular budget deficits and living on huge debts that reached around \$90 billion (or 150% of GDP) before the October 2019 protests, Lebanon was no longer in a position to practice its pernicious sectarianism. Of course, this dilemma was further exacerbated by the consequences of the 2020 coronavirus pandemic, which added significant pressure on compromised and largely corrupt elites.⁽⁵⁹⁾ Simply stated, the dynamics of “communitocracy” were no longer applicable, nor even valid. Had Beirut heeded the recommendations first proposed by Fu'ad Shihab, who served both as LAF Commander and President of the Republic, Lebanon would have been an entirely different country today and its security establishment could well have matured to become an effective force. General Shihab installed “Shihabism,” [Chéhabism in

(57) Florence Gaub, “After the Spring: Reforming Arab Armies,” US Army War College, September 11, 2014, https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/2014/ssi_gaub_140911.pdf.

(58) Gaub, “After the Spring: Reforming Arab Armies,” 8.

(59) Francisco Salvador Barroso Cortés and Joseph A. Kéchichian, *Does Corruption Benefit Compromised Societies? The Case of Lebanon*, Middle East Institute (New Delhi, India), [Monograph Number 5], November 1, 2019, <http://www.mei.org.in/does-corruption-benefit-compromised-societies-the-case-of-lebanon>.

French] but surrendered to wily politicians whom he called *fromagistes* [cheese eaters] on account of their corrupt practices.⁽⁶⁰⁾

Shihab understood that the army as an institution could not possibly reform unless this was accompanied by profound changes in indigenous customs and norms. He proposed the consolidation of the institution, and ushered in a process of partnerships within the political establishment, both of which fell by the wayside. Since none of his successors managed to promote patriotism, inculcate a national identity, and articulate what were the country's national interests, particularistic preferences favored by political sectarianism gained the upper hand. That sealed the LAF's destiny as a mere internal security force. Yet, by allowing their negligence to transform an army into a mere constabulary force, Shihab's successors allowed sectarianism to flourish within the military, whose officers failed to guard the state and its citizens from militias—especially Hizballah after the Israeli withdrawal in 2000. Beirut boasted that its consociationalism paradigm protected it adequately but, in reality, all it did was to transform the LAF into a Hizballah hostage both by necessity as well as choice. In the process, Lebanon averted sorely needed political and military reforms, which weakened its sovereignty as successive governments compromised with an increasingly powerful militia, unwilling to recognize that only state institutions ensured legitimacy that, over time, withered at the proverbial vine.

(60) Marwan Harb, *Le Chéhabisme ou les Limites d'une Expérience de Modernisation Politique au Liban*, Institut des Sciences Politiques, Université Saint-Joseph, Mémoire, 2007, https://www.memoireonline.com/05/09/2062/m_Le-chehabisme-ou-les-limites-d-une-experience-de-modernisation-politique-liban0.html.

Appendix 1—US Security Cooperation With Lebanon

“U.S. security assistance for the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) is a key component of U.S. policy in Lebanon and aims to strengthen Lebanon’s sovereignty, secure its borders, counter internal threats, disrupt terrorist facilitation, and build up the country’s legitimate state institutions. Key areas of cooperation include border security, maritime security, defense institution building, arms transfers, and counterterrorism.

“The LAF has historically served as a pillar of stability in a country facing extraordinary challenges, including the presence of the terrorist group Hizballah. The U.S.-LAF partnership builds the LAF’s capacity as the sole legitimate defender of Lebanon’s sovereignty. Since 2006, U.S. investments of more than \$2 billion in the LAF enabled the Lebanese military to defeat the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in Lebanon and carry out operations against Al Qaeda and reassert control over Lebanese territory along its border with Syria. It has also allowed the force to increase its presence in southern Lebanon to coordinate with the UN Interim Forces in Lebanon (UNIFIL) and support the implementation of UN Security Council Resolutions 1559, 1680, and 1701.

“In FY 2019, the United States provided \$218 million in combined Department of State and Department of Defense (DoD) military grant assistance. This includes \$105 million in Foreign Military Financing, \$3 million in International Military Education and Training (IMET), and \$110 million in DoD-authorized funding.

“Since 2014, the U.S. Department of State provided Lebanon with \$12.86 million for IMET. Over 6,039 members of the LAF received training in the United States since 1970, including 310 members in FY 2019. IMET provides professional military education and training to military students and is key to establishing lasting relationships with future leaders. IMET courses increase military professionalization, enhance interoperability with U.S. forces, offer instruction on the law of armed conflict and human rights, provide technical and operational training, and create a deeper understanding of the United States.

“Since the August 2014 attack in Arsal by ISIS and the Al Nusra Front, the United States has provided the LAF with aircraft, vehicles, weapons, and other equipment to help keep the

country's borders secure and conduct counterterrorism operations. In December 2017, the Department of Defense announced a \$120 million assistance package to provide the LAF with six MD-530G light attack helicopters valued at \$94 million, six Scan Eagle unmanned aerial vehicles valued at \$11 million, and communications, electronics, night vision devices to enable joint fire support, and close air support valued at more than \$16 million.

“The U.S. government has \$1.4 billion in active government-to-government sales cases with Lebanon under the Foreign Military Sales (FMS) system. FMS sales notified to Congress are listed here, and recent and significant prior sales include: A-29 Super Tucano light attack aircraft, Huey II helicopters, and AGM-114 Hellfire and TOW 2A missiles. The full complement of six A-29s was delivered in June 2018.

“Since 2014, the United States also authorized the permanent export of over \$139 million in defense articles to Lebanon via the Direct Commercial Sales (DCS) process. The top categories of DCS to Lebanon include: military electronics, fire control/night vision, and aircraft. In addition, Lebanon has been a reliable recipient of DCS as evidenced by their 100 percent favorable rate on Blue Lantern end use monitoring checks, well above the global average of 75 percent.

“With Lebanon, as with other allies and partners around the world, the United States conducts end-use monitoring (EUM) to mitigate the risk of unauthorized transfer or use of U.S. technology and equipment. EUM is used to verify the end-use, accountability, and security of defense articles, services, and training provided under grant-based assistance and FMS sales programs, from delivery through their use and eventual disposal. The LAF continues to comply fully with all of its EUM reporting and security requirements.

“The United States is the largest donor to conventional weapons destruction (CWD) programs in Lebanon, providing more than \$20 million since 2014 to enable the clearance of landmines and other explosive remnants of war across the country, including explosive hazards laid by ISIS and other violent extremist groups in northeast Lebanon. This support continues to play a vital role enabling economic development activity in previously inaccessible land and increasing civilian security. CWD assistance also bolsters the LAF's capacity to

manage munitions, preventing diversion while maximizing the LAF's battlefield readiness and combat effectiveness.

“The United States conducts the annual bilateral military exercise Resolute Response with the LAF. Through this and other engagements the United States has trained over 32,000 Lebanese troops.”

Source: Bureau of Political-Military Affairs, United States Department of State, Washington, DC, May 1, 2020, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-security-cooperation-with-lebanon/>.

Appendix 2—LAF Commanders 1945 to the present

Name	LAF Commander	President of Republic
Fu'ad Shihab [Fouad Chéhab]	1945–1958	1958–1964
Toufiq Salem	1958–1959	-
‘Adil Shihab	1959–1965	-
Emile Boustany	1965–1970	-
Jean Njeim	1970–1971	-
Iskandar Ghanem	1971–1975	-
Hanna Sa‘id	1975–1977	-
Victor Khoury	1977–1982	-
Ibrahim Tannous	1982–1984	-
Michel Aoun	1984–1989	1988–1990; 2016–present
Emile Lahoud	1989–1998	1998–2007
Michel Suleiman	1998–2008	2008–2014
Jean Kahwaji	2008–2017	-
Joseph Aoun	2017-present	-

Source: Lebanese Armed Forces, <https://web.archive.org/web/20090125230714/http://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/English/Commanders.asp>.

Appendix 3—Lebanese Armed Forces

		2018	2019
GDP	Lebanese Pound	85.0tr	88.3tr
	US\$	56.4bn	58.6bn
GDP per capita	US\$	9,251	9,655
Growth	%	0.3	0.2
Inflation	%	6.1	3.1
Defense budget	LP	3.20tr	2.91tr
	US\$	2.12bn	1.93bn
FMA (US)	US\$	105m	50m
US\$1=LP [official rate]		1507.51	1507.51
Black market rate on December 1, 2020			8,200.00

Capabilities

The Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) are focused on internal and border security. However, the LAF's ability to fulfil its missions remains under strain from Hizballah's position in national politics and from the spillover effects of the Syrian conflict. Publication of a new National Defense Strategy continues to be delayed by political divisions. Training and material support are received from the US, as well as from France, Italy and the UK.

ACTIVE 60,000 (Army 56,600 Navy 1,800 Air Force 1,600) Paramilitary 20,000

ORGANISATIONS BY SERVICE

Army 56,600

EQUIPMENT BY TYPE

MBT 334: 92 M48A1/A5; 10 M60A2; 185 T-54; 47 T-55

RECCE 55 AML

IFV 48: 16 AIFV-B-C25; 32 M2A2 *Bradley*

APC 1,378

APC (T) 1,274 M113A1/A2 (incl variants)

APC (W) 96: 86 VAB VCT; 10 VBPT-MR *Guarani*

PPV 8 *Maxxpro*

ENGINEERING & MAINTENANCE VEHICLES

ARV 3 M88A1; M113 ARV; T-54/55 ARV (reported)

VLB MTU-72 reported

MW *Bozena*

ARTILLERY 641

SP 155mm 12 M109A2

TOWED 313: **105mm** 13 M101A1; **122mm** 35: 9 D-30; 26 M-30; **130mm** 15 M-46;

155mm 250: 18 M114A1; 218 M198; 14 Model-50

MRL 122mm 11 BM-21

MOR 305: **81mm** 134; **82mm** 112; **120mm** 59: 29 Brandt; 30 M120

ANTI-TANK/ANTI-INFRASTRUCTURE

MSL

SP 35 VAB with HOT

MANPATS *Milan*; TOW

RCL 106mm 113 M40A1

UNMANNED AERIAL VEHICLES

ISR • Medium 8 *Mohajer* 4

AIR DEFENCE

SAM • Point-defense 9K32 *Strela-2M* (SA-7B *Grail*)‡

GUNS • TOWED 77: **20mm** 20; **23mm** 57 ZU-23-2

Navy 1,800

EQUIPMENT BY TYPE

PATROL AND COASTAL COMBATANTS 13

PCC 1 *Trablous*

PB 11: 1 *Aamchit* (ex-GER *Bremen*); 1 *Al Kalamoun* (ex-FRA *Avel Gwarlarn*); 7 *Tripoli* (ex-UK *Attacker/Tracker* Mk 2); 1 *Naquora* (ex-GER *Bremen*); 1 *Tabarja* (ex-GER *Bergen*)

PBF 1

AMPHIBIOUS

LANDING CRAFT • LCT 2 *Sour* (ex-FRA EDIC – capacity 8 APC; 96 troops)

Air Force 1,600

FORCES BY ROLE

GROUND ATTACK

1 sqn with Cessna AC-208 *Combat Caravan**

1 sqn with EMB-314 *Super Tucano**

ATTACK HELICOPTER

1 sqn with SA342L *Gazelle*

TRANSPORT HELICOPTER

4 sqn with Bell 205 (UH-1H)

1 sqn with SA330/IAR330SM *Puma*

1 trg sqn with R-44 *Raven II*

EQUIPMENT BY TYPE

AIRCRAFT 9 combat capable

ISR 3 Cessna AC-208 *Combat Caravan**

TRG 9: 3 *Bulldog*; 6 EMB-314 *Super Tucano**

HELICOPTERS

MRH 9: 1 AW139; 8 SA342L *Gazelle* (5 SA342L *Gazelle*; 5 SA316 *Alouette III*; 1 SA318 *Alouette II* all non-operational)

TPT 38: **Medium** 13: 3 S-61N (fire fighting); 10 SA330/IAR330 *Puma*; **Light** 25: 18 Bell 205 (UH-1H *Huey*); 3 Bell 205 (UH-1H *Huey II*); 4 R-44 *Raven II* (basic trg) (11 Bell 205; 7 Bell 212 all non-operational)

AIR LAUNCHED MISSILES

ASM AGM-114 *Hellfire*

Internal Security Force €20,000

FORCES BY ROLE

Other Combat Forces

1 (police) judicial unit

1 regional sy coy

1 (Beirut Gendarmerie) sy coy

EQUIPMENT BY TYPE

ARMoured FIGHTING VEHICLES

APC • APC (W) 60 V-200 *Chaimite*

Customs

EQUIPMENT BY TYPE

PATROL AND COASTAL COMBATANTS 7

PB 7: 5 *Aztec*; 2 *Tracker*

FOREIGN FORCES

Unless specified, figures refer to UNTSO and represent total numbers for the mission

Argentina 3

Armenia UNIFIL 33

Australia 13

Austria 5 • UNIFIL 185: 1 log coy

Bangladesh UNIFIL 117: 1 FSG

Belarus UNIFIL 5

Belgium 1

Bhutan 4

Brazil UNIFIL 198: 1 FFGHM

Brunei UNIFIL 29

Cambodia UNIFIL 184: 1 EOD coy

Canada 4 (*Operation Jade*)

Chile 3

China, People's Republic of 5 • UNIFIL 419: 2 engr coy; 1 med coy

Colombia UNIFIL 1

Croatia UNIFIL 1

Cyprus UNIFIL 2

Denmark 11

El Salvador UNIFIL 52: 1 inf pl

Estonia 3 • UNIFIL 1

Fiji 2 • UNIFIL 1

Finland 15 • UNIFIL 198; 1 maint coy

France UNIFIL 670: 1 mech inf bn(-); VBL; VBCI; VAB; *Mistral*

Germany UNIFIL 182: 1 FFGM

Ghana UNIFIL 870: 1 mech inf bn

Greece UNIFIL 146: 1 FFGHM

Guatemala UNIFIL 1

Hungary UNIFIL 2

India 3 • UNIFIL 781: 1 inf bn; 1 med coy

Indonesia UNIFIL 1,309: 1 inf bn; 1 MP coy; 1 FFGM

Ireland 12 • UNIFIL 461: 1 mech inf bn(-)

Italy UNIFIL 1,066: 1 mech bde HQ; 1 mech inf bn; 1 engr coy; 1 sigs coy; 1 hel bn

Kazakhstan UNIFIL 123; 1 inf coy

Kenya UNIFIL 2

Korea, Republic of UNIFIL 331: 1 mech inf coy; 1 engr coy; 1 sigs coy; 1 maint coy

Macedonia, North UNIFIL 2

Malaysia UNIFIL 813: 1 mech inf bn

Malta UNIFIL 11

Nepal 3 • UNIFIL 873: 1 mech inf bn

Netherlands 12 • UNIFIL 1

New Zealand 8
Nigeria UNIFIL 1
Norway 13
Peru UNIFIL 1
Qatar UNIFIL 2
Russia 4
Serbia 2 • UNIFIL 177; 1 mech inf coy
Sierra Leone UNIFIL 3
Slovakia 2
Slovenia 3 • UNIFIL 15
Spain UNIFIL 635: 1 mech bde HQ; 1 mech inf bn(-); 1 engr coy; 1 sigs coy
Sri Lanka UNIFIL 149: 1 inf coy
Sweden 5
Switzerland 12
Tanzania UNIFIL 159: 1 MP coy
Turkey UNIFIL 85: 1 PCFG
United States 2
Uruguay UNIFIL 1

Source: Selected data from *The Military Balance 2020*, London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, February 2020, 361–363 [abbreviations on pp. 527–528].

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