Lebanon after the 1984-1990 civil war

Origins of Conflict

The state of Lebanon was born in 1943 on the heels of the reconquest of France by the allies in World War II, ending a 25 year French occupation that had followed five centuries of Ottoman rule from the late 1500s to latter days of the first World War. During the period of French occupation, the country had seen decades of religious turmoil largely subside while notable improvements and projects were undertaken and completed. The modernization of Beirut, coupled with vast improvements in the education, civil society, health, and infrastructure sectors, had led many to consider the country among the most modern in the Middle East. Despite this, the cost of both colonialism and the Second World War, coupled with inner resistance movements by Lebanese groups, had succeeded in sapping the French resolve for its protectorate and by 1946 the last troops had left.

The country that the French left behind was diverse and divided, defined by ethnic and religious divides with roots tracing, in some circumstances, back to ancient times. At the heart of this fragile society were the Lebanese Confessional Communities, including the Maronite Christians, Sunni Muslims, and Imami Shias. Among these groups, great disagreement existed regarding the future of identity of the new State. Among the Muslims, closer association with fellow Arab States, Syria in particular, along with the adoption of a strong Arabic identity, were high priorities. The Maronite domination of most civil sector jobs along with consolidation of wealth in the country frustrated many Muslims, and in the 1950s growing call for a reassertion of power by the Arab groups resonated among many Islamic groups. Led on by General Abdul Gamel Nassar’s calls for Pan-Arabism, or the unification of the Arab States of the World, many Lebanese Muslims sought to over-turn the Western Lebanon that they
perceived the French and Maronites had concocted. On the other hand, for the Maronites, continued linkage with the Western Powers, along with the maintenance of a independent, non-Arabic, remained chief concerns. The rise of Pan-Arabism was perceived as a threat and led to the mobilization of important political groups like the Phalange, which provided a heavy weight towards the Islamist and pro-Arab groups that formed. Without a clear civil code drafted, each Confessional Community enjoyed near complete control over the laws its adherents followed, further entrenching the deep divisions within the land. Furthermore, the agglomeration of power within certain communities, along with the clear pro-Sunni/anti-Shia structure, set the groundwork for much of the tensions that would arise in later decades.

Religious & Ethnic Groups

"Religion in Lebanon is not merely a function of individual preference reflected in ceremonial practice of worship. Rather, religion is a phenomenon that often determines social and political identification. Hence, religion is politicized by the confessional quota system in distributing power, benefits, and posts." Thomas Collelo, ed. Lebanon: A Country Study, 1987.

At the basis of much of the conflict between the various groups in Lebanon lies religion, and, within certain faiths, sectarian divergences that have played profound roles in the histories of their followers. The histories of the Maronites, Sunni, and Shias all offer important clues into understanding the conflict that tore apart the country and why reconciliation took so long to achieve. In addition, Lebanon's unique proximity to Israel throughout its formation and maturation introduced Palestinians into the national makeup, profoundly changing demographics and giving rise to new power structures that would ultimately crumble during the War.

Maronites

Maronite history in Lebanon draws back to the seventh century, when followers fled to the mountains of Mount Lebanon to flee persecutions from other Christian sects. (Collelo, 1987). A mostly agricultural and rural people at the time, the Maronites largely lived in seclusion during the Ottoman rule until the 1860 Civil War between the Maronites and the Druze as a result of an Ottoman plan to divide Lebanon into two separate Druze and Maronite regions. In the resulting war, thousands from both side died until France, sensitive towards the slaughter of Christians, invaded seeking to restore order and protect the Christian groups from slaughter. This initial intervention, and subsequent positive relations with France, laid the groundwork for the pro-Western mentality that the Maronites would eventually take at the turn of the 20th century and that would conflict greatly with the Muslim populations in the land. (Collelo, 1987)

Within Lebanon, the Maronites' major political arm was the Phalange Party, a right wing authoritarian group with pro-West, anti-Arab leanings. By effectively building up strong militias, the Phalange was able to quickly rise in prominence in both the Lebanese political and security settings. (Collelo, 1987) With the onset of the Civil War, the Phalange quickly became the fighting arm of the Maronites' side, utilizing its ties to Western countries (Germany, Israel) and large membership (estimated over 50,000) to successfully arm and control a massive fighting block. Along with other Maronite splinter groups, the Phalanges eventually would form the Lebanese Front (LF).

Sunnis & Shias & Druzes

The Sunni population in Lebanon largely derives from the Ottoman occupation of the land for over four centuries. During this time, Sunnis ruled across the area and, along with the Druzes, actively persecuted Shia and Maronite groups in the region. (Wu) During the period of the French mandate, Sunnis were treated as the only Islamic nation in the country, and Shia groups had to go through Sunni Courts in order to be defend their rights or appeal to religious violations. (Collelo, 1987). This subservience of religions would continue in the period after independence, as Sunni and Maronite groups vied for much of the political power while Shia groups remained marginalized and left out of development. This, in turn, led to mass emigration by many Shias to other states in search for more equitable distribution of public goods and opportunities. (Wu) In the period of the war, Shia groups were torn between siding with either the Sunnis or the Maronites due to both of the latter parties relatively hostile relations with them, indicated by the numerous alliance shifts that Shia groups made repeatedly throughout the conflict. (Hassan)

During the Civil War, the Druzes were largely represented by the Lebanese National Movement (LNM) which worked with the PLO in their attacks against the Phalange, Israelis, and ultimately Amal and Hezbollah. Although the LNM claimed to have secular origins, its background was a mix of the Pan-Arab Islamism and was guided by Kamal Jumblatt, a popular Druze leader who worked extensively to help equip the PLO during its battle against the Maronite groups.

In response to the growing conflict, two major Shia groups were created that would have long lasting effects on the future of the Civil War. Firstly, in 1975, Amal was created as a response to what was perceived by many Shia to be the rapid loss of territorial sovereignty in South Lebanon to the Palestinian refugees and the PLO. Furthermore, fear that PLO terrorist activities would invite Israeli retribution on traditionally Shia land created a groundswell that rapidly inflated the ranks of Amal and made it a prominent counter-weight to the Palestinian forces. (Collelo, 1987) 7 years after the Amal's beginning, Hezbollah, a hardline Iran-backed and inspired group, began resisting the Israeli occupation of Lebanon. Utilizing guerrilla tactics and promising retribution against both the French, Israelis and Maronites, Hezbollah quickly attracted many who rejected Amal's moderate stances on certain issues. In Hezbollah's 1985 Manifesto, the group pledged to "expel the Americans, the French, and their allies" and to "submit the Phalanges to a just power" and to bring them to justice for crimes against "Muslims and Christians." Decades later, Hezbollah still plays a major role in both Lebanon and the greater Middle East.

Palestinians

Although not a religious group, the influx of Palestinian refugees into Lebanon in the post-Israeli independence era had enormous impacts on the state and future of Lebanon. After the Israeli independence and subsequent military victories, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians entered southern Lebanon and began to populate refugee camps. The introduction of the Palestinians refugees offered extremist Palestinian groups, including Fatah and the PLO, to take hold among the population and use Lebanese land from which to attack Israel. Furthermore, in the period following the expulsion of PLO forces from Jordan, the heavily militarized PLO had the effect of setting off a spark-plug on the civil tensions between Maronites and the Muslims and precipitating the ensuing civil war.

For many Lebanese Muslims, the Palestinian cause was worth supporting and an important cause. On the other hand, for Lebanese Christians, the PLO's presence was dangerous due to a) the group's calls for an Islamic Lebanese state b) the free reign with which the PLO was allowed to pursue guerilla activities and c) possible recriminations the PLO could provoke from ally states like Israel. This tension led to not only
PLO-Maronite conflict but also Sunni-Maronite conflict since each group viewed the new refugees in such a different manner.

The National Pact

“The system has always had plenty of freedom but suffered from a lack of democracy.” Salim al-Hoss (al-Hoss 1984, 2017-219)

“The Lebanese individual is motivated by two basic urges: sectarianism and absolute individualism. Consequently he is influenced by confessional considerations that not only shape his thinking but also order his life and govern his relations with others.” Mark Riyashi, a noted Lebanese columnist and observer

Lebanon’s history and government structure laid the groundwork for unrest and civil war. The National Pact, created in 1943, was a key source of this dissatisfaction among the diverse political body of civilians in Lebanon. Lebanon (as has just been outlined) is an extremely diverse nation with Maronite Christians, Lebanese Druze, Lebanese Sunni Muslims, Lebanese Shi’a Muslims and Palestinian refugees who all must attempt to co-exist. Obviously, the balance of power between these groups is of great concern to all, particularly in the political and economic spheres.

It is also essential to note the fact that Lebanon is in a prime location, geographically, to be influenced and impacted by its neighbors. The conflict in Lebanon is certainly internal, but many external factors play a part. The creation of the state of Israel after World War Two led to a migration of Palestinian refugees, which destabilized the demographics of Lebanon, giving the Muslim population the majority. The Cold War polarization of the world created tensions due to Lebanon’s proximity to (and “brotherhood” with) Arab nations that were siding with the Soviet Union and its Western ties to the French.

(Map of the Middle East. Source: Wikimedia Commons link)
Creation of the National Pact

The National Pact was created in the aftermath of Lebanon’s independence from France in 1943. Unlike the name suggests it is an unwritten document that laid the foundation of Lebanon as a multi-confessional state, providing shared leadership between the major religious groups. It was the result of numerous meetings between Bisharah al-Khoury (a Maronite), Lebanon’s first President, and the first Prime Minister, Riad as-Solh (a Sunni). The Lebanese Christians feared being overwhelmed by the Muslim communities in Lebanon, and the surrounding Arab nations (particularly Syria). The Muslims were fearful of Western hegemony, i.e., France. The pact forced the Muslims to let go of their aspirations for union with Syria, which lies to the east. It also reinforced the sectarian system of government that began under French rule. The confessional distribution of executive posts was based on the 1932 census and favored Christians to Muslims by a 6:5 ratio. The National Pact and the confessional system were meant to be interim measures that would hopefully bolster national spirit and diminish the differences between religious groups. (U.S. Library of Congress, The National Pact)

The National Pact’s provisions of confessionalism were:

- Parliamentary seats should be apportioned at a 6:5 ratio (Christians to Muslims);
- President of the Republic is always a Maronite;
- Prime Minister is always a Sunni;
- Speaker of the House is always a Shi’a.

Results and Critics

The National Pact is criticized for maintaining the status quo put into place by the French Mandate post-World War I. Labib Zuwiyya Yamak (1966) expresses the views of critics of the Pact by explaining that it only succeeded in maintaining the shaky balance between religious communities rather than enforcing a policy that would promote national solidarity. Essentially, the critics saw that the main objective of the National Pact was not to develop a robust civil society that is active in politics but rather to preserve the status quo. Yamak also states, “The events of 1958 have shown very conclusively how thin was the veneer of national solidarity and how precarious was the balance between the various communities.” (148) 1958 was a year of crisis for Lebanon, 17 years before civil war would break out. The Lebanese President at the time, Camille Chamoun, asked the United States to send troops to stop an overthrow of Lebanon’s democratically elected government. At this same time, there were uprisings and aggressions in nearby countries like Syria and Iraq, fueling the Lebanese President’s request for aid during this perilous time. While America troops did arrive in Lebanon in July 1958, they simply guarded the capital, and no violence erupted. (Eisenhower site)

Essentially, through the other provisions of the constitution and the National Pact, the Maronites had executive authority over everything, without any checks on power. Hassan Krayem explains that parliament could only question the cabinet, not the president and most of the other key positions in the government were in the hands of Maronites. This distribution of power at the 6:5 ratio became less relevant as time went on due to demographic shifts in the population. Although, as Krayem explains, the system was reformed in subsequent years, it remained confessional. Under President Charles al-Helou (1964-1970) the ratio was modified to 5:5 Christians and Muslims, however this only seemed to reinforce the sectarian nature of the political system. The National Pact of 1943 can also be viewed, as Khalaf suggests, as an envisioning of Lebanon ruled by both Maronite and Sunni Merchants. This model of democracy ruled by elites lasted until 1975, against all odds.

Wealth Disparity and Seeds of Opposition

What followed the National Pact and independence from France is considered to be Lebanon’s Golden or Guilded Age. Lebanon was largely devastated after the First World War. Samir Khalaf (2002) outlines in detail the devastations that Lebanon suffered during this time. It had been an autonomous area of the Ottoman Empire which was occupied and placed under harsh Ottoman rule by Jamal Pasha during WWI. The country’s natural resources and people were exploited; the people suffered from famine, terror of the government and various epidemics.

However, the country would soon be transformed into a market system after World War II. Under this new system, the social hierarchy changed. According to Khalaf (2002), “Peasants in Mount Lebanon, both Christian and Druze, acquired real estate and become land owners” (153). The strong economy that the Lebanese were blessed with during this era also manifested in a low illiteracy rate, best developed infrastructure, and the highest per capita income in the Middle East. This prosperity, however real, was imperfect, must like the democracy in Lebanon. Khalaf states that, “The so-called Lebanese Miracle, even in its golden age was, of course, far from faultless. Although the economy enjoyed high growth rates, it was not […] evenly spread. Its vibrant private sector […] walked away with its lion’s share. The basic economic needs to the majority of the population were not adequately met” (156-57).

Indeed there were a privileged few that really profited from this “Golden Age” in Lebanon, and continued to do so. Like the political power they held, the Maronite Christians were in the economic elite compared to the Muslims. Many of the underprivileged groups began to protest as the “Golden Age” waned, and those protests soon led to violent confrontations. In 1975, the fisherman of Sidon (a largely Muslim group) and other coastal areas held peaceful demonstrations to oppose the development of the Proteine Company. This company would create a monopoly over the fishing industry and the fisherman felt that it would undermine their livelihoods. There were also tensions due to the fact that the government was unable or unwilling to contain the devastation from Israeli incursions into the Southern part of Lebanon. This group felt that they had been neglected for a while, and the fact that former Maronite President Camille Chamoun was the chair of this company increased their feelings. Sidon was also 40% Palestinian at the time, but this movement against the Proteine Company evoked sympathy from much of the Lebanese people. There was a general dislike and distrust of these economic monopolies, which plagued the “Lebanese Gilded Age.” Unfortunately, these peaceful demonstrations turned into a riot in which Marouf Saad, Sidon’s most popular leader was killed, which led to confrontations between the government troops and civilian protestors. (Khalaf, 2002, pp. 227-228)

“In short, the Sidon episodes and the violent convulsions they unleashed gave vent to many of the unresolved issues which were to precipitate and sustain subsequent rounds of civil strife: regional and sectarian socioeconomic disparities, Israeli incursion and the radicalization of Palestinian refugees. Muslim demands for a more equitable share of power and political participation, state impotence, and the role of the army in maintaining internal security.” (Khalaf, 2002, pp. 228)
In summation, the Muslim groups within Lebanon (Sunni, Shi’a, Druze and Palestinian Refugees) had both their political and economic opportunities suppressed by the National Pact of 1943 and the practices of the government. Despite the demographic shift, the democracy of Lebanon failed to be representative of its people due to the mandated ratio of representation. The democracy of Lebanon was a façade, and its relative stability until 1975 was fragile. The failure to reform and act on the part of the government would lead to 15 years of complicated civil war, with many players, both internal and external.

Conflict and Violence

First Phase of the War (1975-1978)

Black Saturday

Black Saturday, or December 6, 1975 is considered to be the event that triggered the civil war in Lebanon. Four Christian members of the Phalange political party (composed of Maronite Christians, but officially secular) were found shot dead in a car in east Beirut. Beginning with this incident, conflict during the fifteen-year civil war can be characterized by vengeful acts committed between the warring factions of Lebanese society. Bashir Gemayel, leader of the Phalange Party told Phalangist officers to kill 40 Muslims due to this murder. Christian roadblocks were set up at the entrance to East Beirut, where the officers would stop cars for their identity papers and instead cut their throats. When the news of this became known in West Beirut, Muslim militias did the same thing. All told, at least 300 Muslims and likely the same number of Christians were killed in this way. As the conflict progressed, civilians proved to be an easy target for both sides. (Fisk, 1990, pp. 79)

Syrian Involvement

President Suleiman Franjeih was the president of Lebanon from 1970 until 1976 and is largely held responsible for failing to control the escalating violence. Robert Fisk, in his obituary for Franjeih, describes him as a “Christian warlord, maliose, militia strongman, grief-stricken father, corrupt president, mountain baron and, eventually, a thoughtful, intelligent, rather frightening old man…” Fisk (1990) states that for the Palestinians, the Lebanon conflict became a war of liberation for them in hope to return to Palestine. The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) saw the Maronite militias as a proxy enemy. Although the Palestinians were given refuge in Lebanon, they were determined to return to Palestine, their country. The development of this conflict led President Franjeih to ask for Syrian involvement in 1976. The Syrian forces controlled the eastern part of Lebanon, while smaller sections to the northwest and southwest were under the control of Maronite and Palestinian militias, respectively. (Fisk, 1990, pp. 79-80) This effectively divided the nation, as well as the city of Beirut, which was divided into West and East Beirut by the Green Line. Syrian troops have remained in Lebanon in varying amounts since 1976.

Second Phase of the War (1978-1982)

The war continued after the occupation of Lebanon by Syria. PLO attacks from Lebanon into Israel led to Israel’s Invasion of South Lebanon. These series of attacks would kill about 2,000 people, almost all of them civilians (Fisk, 1990 pp. 124). The next arena of conflict would be in the Greek Orthodox city of Zahle. By the time spring came in 1981, the city of Zahle was under Syrian siege, which led the Israelis to express concern that the Syrians were committing genocide against the Christians of Lebanon. (Fisk, 1990, pp.188). Bashir Gemayel, leader of the Lebanese Forces militia would later be elected President in 1982 and then assassinated. He decided that the Christians of this city needed to be protected, much like the Christians in East Beirut. Following Gemayel's assassination, a mixed coalition of Israelis, Phalanges, and youth gangs massacred thousands in the Palestinian refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila, provoking further PLO violence and Muslim anger.

Third Phase of the War (1982-1984)

Israeli Gains, Evacuations, and the Mountain War
The Israeli troop posture in Lebanon further escalated in 1982, as the Israelis, responding to more and more brazen attacks by the PLO, pushed further into the country before ultimately seizing its capital city Beirut. (IND, 2001). The Israeli occupation of Beirut led to widespread Muslim unrest and violence between the IDF forces, the LN, and the PLO. In response to the situation, the May 7th cease-fire was reached that called for Israeli evacuation of the country and for the introduction of a Multinational Force to monitor the removal of PLO forces from the country. (Hassan) The Cease-fire was roundly criticized by Muslim groups and by Syria, whose withdrawal of forces was contingent upon the Israeli withdrawal. Despite objections, acting President Amine Gemayel passed the law and it went into effect.

During the buildup to the Israeli withdrawal, Maronite forces had made strong pushes for land within the mountainous Chouf District which had led to hostilities between them and the Druze. (Ballance, 1998) Furthermore, the re-organization of the Lebanese National Army, and subsequent training of it by international forces, had created suspicions among the population that the national government was just a front for the Maronites. After securing much of West Beirut, the Lebanese Army (LA) also turned its attention to the Chouf District, introducing another powder keg to region. Although the Israelis had chosen not to interfere between the sectarian conflict, their presence had served as a check between all out war between the groups. However, as the Israelis began to evacuate, all out war began between the Druze Forces, the Maronites, the LA, and the PLO. (Ballance, 1998) Ultimately, by 1984, the Druze combatants had successfully defeated much of the Lebanese army and had seen their populations increase even more. The pressures on the Lebanese government after the failure of its army and defection of many of its soldiers to the Druze and Muslim militias was catastrophic, and soon the May 17th ceasefire was repealed, the American Marines were departing, and the country plunged into all-out chaos.

Chaos

While sectarian violence between the Maronites and Muslims still occurred, the fight between Shia and Sunni muslims (through proxies of Hezbollah and Amal for the latter) also increased. Furthermore, attacks on United States interests drastically increased during this period, including the bombing of the American Embassy in West Beirut, the 1983 bombing of MNF barracks, and the 1984 bombing of the American Embassy in East Beirut. In response to the escalating violence, the Multinational Forces departed in 1984 and soon after the last Israeli troops were all brought home except for a small buffer zone that the country would occupy until 2000.

Fourth Phase of the War (1984-1990)

Sectarian Violence

In the period following the withdrawal of the Multinational forces, sectarian violence became prevalent throughout Lebanon. Shia attacks on the Palestinian camps led to all out war between the PLO and Amal, with Syria helping orchestrate the Shia response. Due to Amal’s overwhelming force and strong international support (from both Syria and Iran), massive gains were made by the Shias into the Palestinian camps, albeit at the cost of thousands of lives. Simultaneously, in West Beirut, Amal and Druze forces tangled while Hezbollah attacks on both the PLO and Israel intensified throughout the years. Although they had previously been allies, by the late 1980s, Hezbollah and Amal had also begun to engage in hostilities, splintering what had formerly been a unified Shia military presence in the country.

An Illegitimate President, A Divided Beirut, Syrian Intervention

The appointment of Michel Aoun to the position of Prime Minister would ultimately lead to the last major wave of hostilities in the Civil War before negotiations and peace. Under the National Pact, Aoun’s appointment was illegitimate since the Prime Minister's position was traditionally reserved for Sunni Muslims. Although Aoun’s supporters claimed the position was being held “in trust” until a new Maronite President was elected, Aoun’s rise divided the Government into two sections and Beirut, functionally, into two cities. While fighting occurred between the two sides, the scale of the Syrian presence greatly increased, prompting Aoun’s “War of Liberation” against the foreign occupiers. Out armed and prepared, the War of Liberation would precipitate the last days of the Aoun governship, as Syrian victories further removed Christian control of East Beirut and weakened the fighting forces. Within the Christian community, new conflict between Aoun’s forces and the LF began, highlighting the intra-sectarian conflict that would grip both the Muslims and Christians near the final stages of the War.

Resources

- Overview of the conflict
- News Clip from 1984
- Hezbollah Manifesto
- Lebanon Manifesto

Strategies and Outcomes post Civil War

Taif Agreement

A Dissipating Fog of War

As the war dragged into the late 1980s, Lebanese public sentiment began to turn against the inter-sectarian conflict that had come to dominate the last two decades. Having been exposed to nearly unimaginable levels of death and destruction, members from various confessional communities renewed calls for unity as militia influence and membership gradually began to erode. Furthermore, the rise of the Palestinian intifada in 1987 had drawn both focus and arms away from Lebanon and towards the Gaza Strip and West Bank. With Israel, the United States, and much of the Middle Eastern world focused on both the growing Arab-Israeli conflict along with Sadaam Hussein's increasingly bellicose posture to Kuwait, calls for a national ceasefire and agreement grew from both within and without.

The Agreement (Important Excerpts)
I. General Principles

A. Lebanon is a sovereign, free, and independent country and a final homeland for all its citizens.

B. Lebanon is Arab in belonging and identity. It is an active and founding member of the Arab League and is committed to the league's charter. It is an active and founding member of the United Nations Organization and is committed to its charters. Lebanon is a member of the nonaligned movement. The state of Lebanon shall embody these principles in all areas and spheres, without exception.

H. Lebanon's soil is unified and it belongs to all the Lebanese. Every Lebanese is entitled to live in and enjoy any part of the country under the supremacy of the law. The people may not be categorized on the basis of any affiliation whatsoever and there shall be no fragmentation, no partition, and no repatriation (of Palestinians in Lebanon).

II. Political Reforms

5. Until the Chamber of Deputies passes an election law free of sectarian restriction, the parliamentary seats shall be divided according to the following bases:

a. Equally between Christians and Muslims.

b. Proportionately between the denominations of each sect.

c. Proportionately between the districts.

G. Abolition of Political Sectarianism: Abolishing political sectarianism is a fundamental national objective. To achieve it, it is required that efforts be made in accordance with a phased plan. The Chamber of Deputies elected on the basis of equal sharing by Christians and Muslims shall adopt the proper measures to achieve this objective and to form a national council which is headed by the president of the republic and which includes, in addition to the prime minister and the Chamber of Deputies speaker, political, intellectual, and social notables. The council's task will be to examine and propose the means capable of abolishing sectarianism, to present them to the Chamber of Deputies and the cabinet, and to observe implementation of the phased plan. The following shall be done in the interim period:

   a. Abolish the sectarian representation base and rely on capability and specialization in public jobs, the judiciary, the military, security, public, and joint institutions, and in the independent agencies in accordance with the dictates of national accord, excluding the top-level jobs and equivalent jobs which shall be shared equally by Christians and Muslims without allocating any particular job to any sect.

   b. Abolish the mention of sect and denomination on the identity card.

III. Other Reforms

A. Disbanding of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias shall be announced. The militias' weapons shall be delivered to the State of Lebanon within a period of 6 months, beginning with the approval of the national accord charter. The president of the republic shall be elected. A national accord cabinet shall be formed, and the political reforms shall be approved constitutionally.

D. Considering that the objective of the State of Lebanon is to spread its authority over all the Lebanese territories through its own forces, represented primarily by the internal security forces, and in view of the fraternal relations binding Syria to Lebanon, the Syrian forces shall thankfully assist the forces of the legitimate Lebanese government to spread the authority of the State of Lebanon within a set period of no more than 2 years, beginning with ratification of the national accord charter, election of the president of the republic, formation of the national accord cabinet, and approval of the political reforms constitutionally. At the end of this period, the two governments -- the Syrian Government and the Lebanese National Accord Government -- shall decide to redeploy the Syrian forces in Al-Biq'a area from Dahr al-Baydar to the Hammana-al-Mudayrij-'Ayn Darah line, and if necessary, at other points to be determined by a joint Lebanese-Syrian military committee.

4. Lebanon, with its Arab identity, is tied to all the Arab countries by true fraternal relations. Between Lebanon and Syria there is a special relationship that derives its strength from the roots of blood relationships, history, and joint fraternal interests. This is the concept on which the two countries' coordination and cooperation is founded, and which will be embodied by the agreements between the two countries in all areas, in a manner that accomplishes the two fraternal countries' interests within the framework of the sovereignty and independence of each of them. Therefore, and because strengthening the bases of security creates the climate needed to develop these bonds, Lebanon should not be allowed to constitute a source of threat to Syria's security, and Syria should not be allowed to constitute a source of threat to Lebanon's security under any circumstances. Consequently, Lebanon should not allow itself to become a pathway or a base for any force, state, or organization seeking to undermine its security or Syria's security. Syria, which is eager for Lebanon's security, independence, and unity and for harmony among its citizens, should not permit any act that poses a threat to Lebanon's security, independence, and sovereignty.

Structural

Under Taif, the confessional system saw minor reforms despite broader, and more ambiguous promises, to ultimately transition Lebanon away from a sectarian system. Instead, much of the confessional that had dominated the pre-war Lebanon remained in place although renewed focus was placed on inter-sectarian harmony and compromise. Equal Muslim and Christian representation was mandated in parliament along with the delineation of sect-specific seats, meaning that only members of that sect would be able to run for those seats. Compared to the National Pact, the Agreement allowed for more of the sects (Druze, Shiite, etc.) to be recognized in parliament although. In addition, voters would be able to cast their ballot for every seat in the district regardless of their own religious affiliation. The Agreement also reduced the power of the Maronite Christian presidency while increasing the power of the Sunni Muslim Prime Minister. As in a traditional parliamentary system, the Prime minister would be appointed by the legislature. Cabinet power was allocated equally between Muslims and Christians. The agreement provided for the disarmament of any national and non-national militia excepted for Hezbollah (which was seen as a “resistance force” rather than a militia.)

Criticisms & Consequences

Although maintaining the confessional system seemed, at the time, as the easiest way to transition from a post-war Lebanon to a newly secular nation, in retrospect many commentators have viewed it to have had negative consequences on the development, and growth, of Lebanon since
the Agreement's initial enactment. Due to the strict distinctions that were drawn between confessional groups related to party power and positions, factionalization along religious lines continued to occur. Furthermore, because the Taif allocations were based off of the highly outdated 1932 census, it failed to accommodate for the dramatically different confessional growth rates that had begun to reshape the Lebanese demographic. For Shiites, in specific, this lack of census ensured inadequate representation relative to that offered to both the Maronites and the Sunnis. Similarly, the Agreement's allocation of equal power to the President, Prime Minister, and Speaker of the Parliament created a "troika" that directly established legislative backdrop that prioritized the maintenance and expansion of power over meaningful reform and leadership. With much of the power conglomerated to only a few individuals, each supported fervently by confessional communities intent on retaining whatever power possible, the development of secular institutions in Lebanon has become non-existent, decades after the Agreement's ratification. Furthermore, the Taif Agreement opened the door for Syrian control over Lebanon for the next few decades through its explicit language both calling on Syrian forces to help enforce the power of the new Lebanese state as well as creation of joint Syrian Lebanese committees to help with the transition.

Electoral Responses to Taif

Despite the opposition of Maronite Christians both to the Agreement and the Syrian calls for new elections in the fall of 1992, parliamentary elections were held in 1992. While many of the same ruling Lebanese elite families that had dominated Lebanon both before and during the war were elected, demographic changes began to be reflected through the composition of the parliament itself in respect to political parties and leaders. Although both Sunnis and Shiites made gains in their relative legislative power, Maronite representation was largely diminished, with parties like the Phalanges no longer commanding any real numbers. Furthermore, the rise of Hezbollah and Amal became evident in the elections, as both gained seats in the new parliament. The subsequent elections in 1996 emphasized this trend, as Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri won broad support both from various Lebanese voting blocs but also from all of their main benefactors Syria. In the meantime, factionalization in the Maronite community continued, as some began to look at non-Christian parties (e.g. Hezbollah) for representation while others held out for the return of Michel Aoun.

Demography

Due to the sensitive issue of the size of the confessional groups, a national census has not been conducted since 1932. This is clearly a problem when you're trying to move forward and reform the structure of the government. Yet, Statistics Lebanon, a Beirut based research firm has found the following demographic information about Lebanon. In a population of roughly four million, the demographic breakdown is as follows:

- 27% Shi'a Muslim
- 27% Sunni Muslim
- 21% Maronite Christian
- 8% Greek Orthodox
- 5% Druze
- 5% Greek Catholic
- 7% Other smaller Christian denominations
- Other small numbers of Jews, Baha'is, Mormons, Buddhists and Hindus

They also note that there has been a steady decline in the proportion of Christians relative to Muslims, mainly due to emigration and a higher-than-average birth rate for Muslims over the past 60 years. In addition, there are 18 officially recognized religious groups, which include 12 Christian sects, four Muslim sects, Druze and Judaism.

Maronites

For Maronites, the post Taif agreement era has been one of relative diminishment and dwindling of power. While Taif removed many of the structural advantages the Maronite community enjoyed in the pre-war era, the rapid shift in growth rates for the confessional communities quickly made the Maronites a minority in the country. Furthermore, the Syrian withdrawal of support effectively marginalized Maronite power within the system, made worse by deep felt antagonism held by Lebanese Muslims for the Maronites' cooperation with Israeli forces during the war. Over the years, many Maronites, along with other Lebanese Christian groups, emigrated outwards do to perceived lack of power ushered in by both demographic and institutional changes.

Shi'as

In the period following the Civil War and the Taif Agreement, Shi'ites in Lebanon began to experience more power and clout in society. Despite the lack of a national consensus (which therefore systematically under-allocated Shi'ite roles in government proportional to demographics), Shia leaders began to be elevated in a vast majority of fields, including public roles in the Parliament, National Army, and Police. Control of certain arms of government ensured the beginning of investment in traditionally downtrodden Shia regions along with growing access to infrastructure and education. Representation among Shia's as largely split between the more moderate Amal movement and Hezbollah, the latter capitalizing on its support from many Lebanese Muslims to transition from simply a military group to a domestic political force as well. Through the building of "schools, hospitals, and dispensaries; consumer, housing, and construction cooperatives; sports and cultural clubs; and youth, women, and scouting groups", Hezbollah appealed to many Shiites; through its ultimate success in forcing the Israeli withdrawal from South Lebanon in 2000 it became a household name and a broader global symbol of Arab militancy and resistance. Creating a unique "Hezbollah State" within the country, including owning its own TV station and military. While exact numbers are not known, Hezbollah is assumed to have thousands of active military members along with nearly 20,000 missiles.

Syrian Influence on Post-War Lebanon

Criticisms & Consequences
In 1976, Syrian forces entered Lebanon in order to help protect Maronite Christians from PLO forces. In the period following their initial entry, Syrian forces gradually began to expand into Beirut, eventually coming to control much of the Western Part of the city along with the Northern and Eastern regions. Tacitly supported by the United States due to its opposition to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990, Syria's influence on Lebanese politics gradually grew, culminating with a 1991 agreement between Lebanon and Syria that officially recognized the legal presence of Syrian forces on Lebanese soil and established Syrian-Lebanese councils tasked with the implementation of social, political, and economic reforms within the country. Utilizing the power it had gained through both Taif and the 1991 agreement, Syria pushed, supported, and financed numerous pro-Syria politicians to positions of power within Lebanon. Furthermore, through patronizing various Lebanese confessional groups, Syria managed to play a heavy hand in most domestic affairs, utilizing the rigid confessional system to play various groups off each other while consolidating power and influence. In 1989, Syria successfully pushed for the election of Maronite Elias Hrawi and in 1995 secured another three year term for him. In the following election, Syria orchestrated not only the election of President Emile Lahoud but also supported the Prime Ministers Rafiq al-Hariri and Salim al-Hoss along with Speaker of Parliament Nabih Berri, giving Damascus near complete control over the three major organs of power within post-Taif Lebanon. However, with time, the Syrian iron grip on Lebanese began to loosen. Despite the textual support for the Syrian-Lebanese relationship, gradually numerous groups began to express desires for the removal of Syrian forces from the country. The relationship was ultimately put on the brink by the events of 2005 related to the assassination of Prime Minister Rafik Hariri.

Cedar Revolution

The Cedar Revolution was triggered by the assassination of the former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri on February 14, 2005. The Cedar Revolution was named by Paula J. Dobriansky, the U.S. Under Secretary of State for Global Affairs, drawing comparisons with the Rose Revolution of Georgia and the Orange Revolution of Ukraine that had recently occurred. The Lebanese referred to it as “Independence Uprising.” Lebanese Prosecutors investigated Hariri’s death at once. There was a suspected link between a group of 10 Australians who flew back to Australia from Beirut shortly after the truck bombing. While these travellers seemed suspicious due to their lack of luggage and alleged trace amounts of suspicious scents, which could be traces of explosives, there was no substantial evidence found against them. There was no substantial evidence, however the Syrian government bore the brunt of Lebanese outrage at the murder. For some time, a rift had been growing between Hariri and Damascus, and just after Hariri’s resignation in 2004, a pro-Syrian Prime Minister, Omar Karami was appointed. These tensions led to huge numbers of Lebanese protesting and holding rallies beginning on February 21, 2005. They called for the removal of Syrian troops from Lebanon, and blamed the pro-Syrian president of Lebanon, Emile Lahoud, for the murder. This time, demonstrations came from a unified front of Lebanese. While in 1990, thousands of Lebanese Christians demonstrated for weeks, asking Damascus to withdraw Syrian troops from Lebanon, 15 years later, Duze, Christians, Shi’as and Sunnis were all demonstrating for Lebanon. They were raising the national flag in a rare sign of (fragile) unity for the often war-torn country.

During the next two months, there were a series of protests from both the Anti-Syrian groups and the Pro-Syrian groups. Hezbollah represented the pro-Syrian groups, organizing protests, which rejected the U.N. resolution that called for the complete and immediate withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon. Hezbollah leader Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah demanded that the United States and other Western countries stop meddling with Lebanon's affairs, saying, “I want to tell Americans, do not interfere with our internal affairs. Let your ambassador relax in his embassy, and leave us alone.” This opposition led to a series of bombings and assassinations in Lebanon as tensions grew. In the end, Syrian troops were forced to withdraw based on the terms of U.N. Resolution 1559, which meant a complete and immediate withdrawal of troops, rather than the gradual withdrawal outlined in the Taif Agreement. On April 26, 2005, the last Syrian troops left Lebanon and the Syrian government was able to notify the U.N. that it had complied with Resolution 1559.
While this meant that there was the opportunity for a wave of democracy and change within Lebanon, it is worth noting that even after the withdrawal of troops, Syria retained their presence in Lebanon. According to reporting from the Washington Post by Robin Wright, a significant part of Syria’s intelligence forces were still in Lebanon past the final withdrawal of 14,000 troops. The international community saw this contradiction as an undermining of its promise to withdraw its presence after 30 years of occupation.

Political Parties

Post-Civil War, Lebanon doesn’t really have a clear two-party system or a reasonably sized multi-party system. Rather, there are two coalitions of parties and a small group of independent parties that join the coalitions after the election in order to form a government.

Political parties and leaders:

14 March Coalition: Democratic Left [Ilyas ATALLAH]; Democratic Renewal Movement [Nassib LAHUD]; Future Movement Bloc [Sa’ad al-HARIRI]; Kataeb Party [Amine GEMAYEL]; Lebanese Forces [Samir JA’JA’]; Tripoli Independent Bloc
Independent: Democratic Gathering Bloc [Walid JUNBLATT, leader of Progressive Socialist Party]; Metn Bloc [Michel MURR]

(List of political parties and leaders. Source: CIA World Factbook)

After the 2009 elections, the March 14th Alliance had the majority in the parliament, winning 71 of the seats and the March 8th Alliance (in a coalition with Reform and Change) won 57 of the seats. The March 8th coalition also takes its name from a significant date leading up to the Cedar Revolution in which a demonstration was held thanking Syria for helping to stop the Lebanese civil war and helping the Lebanese efforts to resist Israeli occupation. This coalition of parties includes Hezbollah, and clearly feels an allegiance to Syria. On the other hand, the March 14th Alliance, named after the date of the Cedar Revolution, is made up of parties that are united by their anti-Syrian stance.

(Protestor burning poster of Pro-Syrian President Emile Lahoud. Source: Wikimedia Commons link)

Lebanon’s most recent elections were held in 2009. The 2009 parliamentary elections were considered to be significant in the post-war era. There was a record 54% voter turnout, and they are the first elections since before Lebanon’s civil war without Syrian control and influence. The
2009 election results also placed two coalitions against each other that have very different views. The March 14th coalition is Western-backed and the March 8th coalition includes Hezbollah and is supported by Iran and Syria. Until July 2011, Prime Minister Saad Hariri from the March 14th Alliance headed the government. Since the formation of the new government in July 2011, Najib Mikati has been the Prime Minister. Najib Mikati is a member of the Free Patriotic Movement, a party in the Change and Reform bloc which has caucused with the March Alliance to make the government.

It could be argued that the true government and the nature of its politics are still in its infancy still in Lebanon. They have not yet had much time without the influence of outside powers, and they are still considering reforms to their electoral process. Lebanon continues to be in a very precarious spot due to the accidental forces of geography. Many factors make things quite uncertain in Lebanon, such as the influence of Hezbollah as a party that may want to have a blocking veto in the government. The March 14th Alliance’s refusal to grant a blocking veto led to political paralysis and violence in May 2009 (Yacoubian).

Doha Agreement

Reached on May 21, 2008, the Doha Agreement helped rival Lebanese factions end an 18 month long political crisis. Negotiated in Doha, Qatar, this Agreement is credited with ending the crisis and preventing another civil war. This crisis was brought to a head when the government decided to remove Hezbollah’s telecommunications network and resign the Rafik Hariri International Airport’s head of security after discovering a Hezbollah surveillance camera. These decisions led to riots throughout Beirut that resulted in clashes between Hezbollah and the majority. Hezbollah militants eventually took control of western Beirut, marking the first time after the Lebanese Civil War that Hezbollah used weapons.

The provisions of the agreement were to form a national unity government, with all parties committed to not resign or obstruct the government’s actions. The parliament would convene within 24 hours of the agreement being reached to elect Michel Suleiman as president. There was also electoral reform redistricting districts in Beirut, an agreement that parties will abstain from using violence and weapons in order to achieve political gains. Finally, the parties agreed to follow the law and “uphold the sovereignty of the state throughout Lebanon so as not to have regions that serve as safe havens for outlaws, out of respect for the supremacy of the law, and to refer all those who commit crimes and contraventions to the Lebanese judiciary.”

While this agreement was a positive step and prevented civil war, many were dissatisfied with the results. Many Western powers were happy to see an end to the crisis, and viewed the agreement as a step in the right direction. It allowed for the government to function once more after extreme paralysis. Amal Saad-Ghorayeb, a Lebanese political analyst, said: “Obviously this is a compromise between the government and the opposition; a settlement, not a solution. In no way does it address the real grievances that led to the current crisis.”

Economics: Pessimism Reigns

Fifteen years of war wreaks emotional, psychological, demographic and economic havoc on a country. The Lebanese economy was radically changed due to its huge human, physical and economic losses. In a country of 4 million, roughly 3% of the population was killed, 2% displaced and 28% emigrated. Prior to the war’s start in 1975, Lebanon ranked 4th among middle-income countries and by 1990 it ranked 20th in this same category. In 1990, half of the telephone network was not working, one third of the electricity was not working, and 80 percent of the water table was polluted. Its infrastructure damaged, Lebanon’s weakened economic position was exacerbated by changes in its environment. It was no longer the prime tourist destination in the area, with the diversification of Arab tourists’ destinations to Greece, Morocco, Spain, and Egypt. The Arab oil-producing countries and their services were modernized which negatively affected Lebanese industries. Those same oil-producing countries had volatile revenues, which affected exports of Lebanese goods, skills and services to these countries.

There were, however a few things to be hopeful that Lebanon would have an advantage at the start of the 1990s. There was a considerable amount of experience and competence acquired by Lebanese companies and individuals abroad as well as a good amount of capital accumulated through investments.

The 1990s continued to be a turbulent decade for Lebanon, despite the prospect of an economic recovery as Lebanon settled into peacetime. In reality, there were unwiseful spending and monetary policies that increased the debt. Many of the markets in the region became less accessible to Lebanese goods. There were many political events that contributed to instability. In all, the first half of the 1990s showed rapid growth, followed by economic decline and recession after 1995. This downturn can be attributed to, “...the government’s monetary, financial and economic policies. Other influences included one-sided regionalization and globalization, the change in regional political environment, Lebanon’s loss of competitiveness, the inconsistent economic policies of successive governments, and the fall in oil prices” (Boutros Labaki, 2003, pp. 196).

While there were significant wealth disparities between the Christian population (who tended to be land-owners and in the economic elite) and the Muslims, economic differences seem to be less significant or prominent post-war. Unfortunately, if there is anything that 15 years of violence has seemed to create, it is a sense of skepticism and uncertainty, among all Lebanese. There isn’t as much of a difference between sects in public opinion polls concerning economic issues.

Theodor Hanf analyses opinions and attitudes of the Lebanese comparing 2002 data with data collected in 1981, 1984, 1986 and 1987. Any economic inequalities were not solved by the war or in peacetime, according to the Lebanese. In 2002, an overwhelming majority (89%) of Lebanese (regardless of education differences or religious affiliation) agrees with the statement: “In Lebanon a rich minority is buying up everything, and the large majority is losing out.” Similar numbers agree that the differences between the social groups have widened in the past 5 years. Hanf summarizes the findings:

“Attitudes and opinions about the economy and society in 2002 were either little changed from those in the war years—or were more pessimistic. [...] People are even more pessimistic about their children’s prospects than they were in the war years.” (pp. 204)

Overall, it appears that the government has failed to create a middle class and rebuild economically after the war. There is also skepticism from
many of the Lebanese concerning the fairness of the system, both economically and politically. Lebanon is still perceived as a society controlled by elites. The only hopeful part of this sentiment is that it seems that it isn't viewed as a particular sect that is the elite as in the past. Yet, a society with great inequality and a pessimistic outlook on social mobility is not a healthy one, and all political parties should be concerned about the welfare of its people.

Recent Electoral Reform Developments

While the Taif Agreement reformed the government and set Lebanon on a path towards normalcy and democracy, it is still facing reforms and challenges. Recently, there has been a debate over changing Lebanon's electoral law. According to reporting from Elias Muhanna in January 2012, there is a loose coalition of independent politicians seeking to reform the electoral process. Currently Lebanon has a majoritarian or "winner-take-all" model which means that small, new parties have little chance of getting elected in a district where a more established party dominates. Proportional representation would allow for these small parties to win some seats even with a minority of votes. This would allow for multiparty representation in each district, and it would empower lesser-known independent candidates. This could allow for a new coalition of independent candidates to form over time and fight towards a more liberal agenda. Of course, the major parties want to maintain the status quo for fear that they will lose their primacy without the policies as they stand. This proposed law would also create fewer and larger electoral districts, which means larger constituencies. This means that many more Christian candidates could be voted in on the lists of non-Christian parties, which would decrease the influence of the Christian political elite.

The Lebanese Christian parties oppose this law, and have drafted a counter-proposal which would institute proportional representation, but require citizens to vote only for members of their own sect. As Muhanna points out, "One of the many problems with this idea is that it would generate considerable inequalities of suffrage between Christians and Muslims. As is, Christians already have greater voting power than Muslims because they still occupy half of Parliament even though they now represent less than half of Lebanon's population."

The president's proposal hope for a country where its citizens vote for candidates on the basis of political platform rather than sect, which would be a huge step forward in the struggle to end political sectarianism. It seems unlikely that this law will go into effect in time for the 2013 elections, however a 2011 survey by ARA Marketing Research & Consultancy shows that 59% of Lebanese are in favor of proportional representation over the current system. Favorability for this electoral reform has grown over time overall and in all sects except for the Druze community.

References (Part 1)


References (Part 2)


