



Brandeis University

Crown Center
for Middle East Studies

Mailstop 010
Waltham, Massachusetts
02454-9110

781-736-5320
781-736-5324 Fax
www.brandeis.edu/crown

Middle East Brief

Judith and Sidney Swartz Director
Prof. Shai Feldman

Associate Director
Kristina Cherniahivsky

*Charles (Corky) Goodman Professor of
Middle East History and
Associate Director for Research*
Naghmeb Sohrabi

Senior Fellows
Abdel Monem Said Aly, PhD
Khalil Shikaki, PhD

*Myra and Robert Kraft Professor
of Arab Politics*
Eva Bellin

*Henry J. Leir Professor of the
Economics of the Middle East*
Nader Habibi

*Sylvia K. Hassenfeld Professor
of Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies*
Kanan Makiya

Junior Research Fellow
Eric Lob, PhD

Lebanon at the Brink: The Impact of the Syrian Civil War

Prof. Joseph Bahout

Has the Syrian civil war become also a Lebanese war? And if so, how long will it take before the country comes apart at the seams? By several measures, conditions in today's Lebanon already resemble those that prevailed in the country on the eve of the civil war that consumed and transformed it between 1975 and 1990. Regional tempests and perils, beginning with the aftereffects of the 1973 October War but probably reflecting as well aftershocks of the earlier 1967 Six-Day War, have been grafted onto Lebanon's internal fragilities and cleavages so as to gradually unravel the state. And the country's seemingly unbearable burdens have been exacerbated by its numerous political factions—and by these factions' armed militias pursuing their separate agendas.

But if Lebanon is again confronting the possibility of imminent disintegration, is it inevitably heading toward a similar fate? When hearing some Lebanese say, "We've been there, done that—but are about to do it again," many both in Lebanon and outside it doubt that the Lebanese have learned any useful lessons from their tragic recent history.

This Brief explores the danger facing Lebanon by first examining the Sunni-Shia cleavage in Lebanon that existed prior to the outbreak of the Syrian civil war. It then examines the ways in which the Syrian crisis has impacted these tensions, leading to a sectarian struggle that has increasingly become existential for the communities involved. The Brief's final section examines why Hezbollah involved itself to such an extent in Syria's civil war and

January 2014
No. 76

whether this intervention has now become the most important factor leading Lebanon again toward the abyss.

Old Cleavages Reactivated

The fault lines that threaten to inflame Lebanon in the wake of the Syrian cauldron were visibly at play well before the 2011–12 Arab Awakening. Indeed, the reshaping of the Lebanese polity after the Taif Accords of 1989, which put an end to the civil war in October 1990, was already associated with a slow, seemingly irreversible accumulation of crises and feuds waiting to explode. Seen from this perspective, Lebanon’s eruption seems long overdue. So when the cycle of Arab uprisings began, ultimately reaching Syria, the regional turmoil only added fuel to an already stoked fire of instabilities and divisions.

The most obvious and most visible of such Lebanese cleavages can be traced back to 2005, with the profound fissure caused by the assassination of Prime Minister Rafik Hariri and the crises that followed. While Hariri’s killing was immediately perceived and interpreted by his largely Sunni followers as the Syrian regime’s unacceptable physical elimination of a prominent Lebanese and Arab figure—thereby reviving the old scars left by the confrontation between the Assads and the Sunni community in Lebanon—the subsequent inquiries of the Special International Tribunal created to investigate the murder also pointed to the direct involvement of the Lebanese Hezbollah. Whatever the truth behind these allegations and suspicions, for Lebanon’s Sunnis, Hariri’s assassination constituted an act of unbearable aggression, and a very profound breach in the foundations of “peaceful coexistence” in Lebanon. This was only exacerbated both by Hezbollah’s claim, to a considerable extent rightfully, to represent the Shia public and by the assassination’s *timing*, coming as it did at the end of a very ambiguous period of hidden and muted competition between the two communities—one that had been at play, underneath the surface of a fragile and dysfunctional but until then viable consociational system, since that system was established at the end of the Lebanese civil war.

In retrospect, the root of the Sunni-Shia cleavage must be found in the making and implementation of the Taif Accords themselves, and in the architecture of power instituted in post-war Lebanon under Syrian tutelage. This post-war system transferred political hegemony from the Christian Maronite community to an uncertain duopoly of Sunni and Shia leadership, embodied in a potent Sunni Prime Minister and an equally potent Shia Speaker of the Parliament, with the occupants of these two offices jockeying for power under the smokescreen of their respective institutions’ checks-and-balances prerogatives.

The ongoing Syrian power play was initiated by Hafez al-Assad and orchestrated by those holding the “Lebanese File” in Damascus: Abdel-Halim Khaddam and General Ghazi Kanaan. They continued playing this role to an even greater extent under Bashar al-Assad, aiming to enhance Syria’s regional position and to respond to the imperatives of intra-Syrian power balancing. At the same time, Syria’s involvement froze or at least limited the competitive excesses of Sunni-Shia power jockeying while circumscribing its damaging effects. By domesticating the two rising forces in Lebanon—liberal-oriented and pro-Persian Gulf, post-Hariri Sunni versus more statist, anti-Western, and pro-Iranian Hezbollah-led Shia—the Assad regime could remain master of the game inside a fragmented Lebanese landscape and at the same time be in a position to permanently blackmail its Saudi and Western opposite numbers.

Joseph Bahout is professor of Middle-Eastern Politics at Sciences-Po Paris and Senior Researcher at Académie Diplomatique Internationale. He also serves as a Permanent Consultant with the Policy Planning Unit of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and is an Associate Fellow at the Geneva Centre for Security policy (GCSP).

The opinions and findings expressed in this Brief belong to the author exclusively and do not reflect those of the Crown Center or Brandeis University.

This nuanced and quite subtle edifice was to experience a first and quite serious crack in 2003, with the Iraq War and the fall of Saddam Hussein. If the latter event was perceived by the Lebanese sectarian mind as a shift in the equilibrium to the detriment of Arab Sunni on a regional scale, it also signaled the beginning of the end of the Syrian-mediated balance of power in Lebanon, to the detriment of the pro-Western Hariri-affiliated forces while favoring Hezbollah and its Lebanese allies. The much resented assassination of Hariri amplified these trends, which were subsequently further strengthened with the emboldening of Hezbollah in the aftermath of the July 2006 war. Bashar al-Assad's narrative of victory in that war, formulated in very harsh words that also expressed contempt for the pro-Hariri camp in Lebanon and its Saudi and Gulf patrons, further inflamed matters. When in 2008–9, Hezbollah took over Western Beirut and other Sunni areas, and when a few weeks before the beginning of the Syrian uprising, Saad Hariri's government was overthrown by Hezbollah's vigilantes, war between the Lebanese factions, and between some of these factions and the Syrian regime, was already well under way.

Fighters and Refugees: A Powder Keg

With the eruption of the Syrian civil war, the already torn Lebanese social and political fabric was further rent by two groups crossing the Syria-Lebanon border: fighters and refugees. Owing to the recent history of interpenetration of the two spaces, the badly demarcated Lebanese-Syrian border is a porous one, crippled by several varieties of cross-border traffic and smuggling. Groups of Sunni militants from Akkar, Tripoli, and western Bekaa—areas where strong Salafi networks have flourished since the middle of the 1980s, ironically sometimes encouraged via manipulation by Syrian military intelligence (*Mukhabarat*)—hurried to lend a helping hand to their Syrian brethren on the other side of what seemed to them an imaginary frontier. In the opposite direction, wounded fighters from the Syrian Free Army, battling in Tall-Kalakh, Homs, and Qusayr—or in Zabadani, a few miles away from Lebanese villages—began to cross the border in search of medical care, shelter, rest, and resupply.

Soon thereafter, the movement of fighters in both directions began to get organized, as it represented a political and tactical opportunity that could be seized by the various anti-Assad forces in Lebanon—beginning with the Hariri faction, whose representatives in the border regions began to act as patrons of the Syrian rebellion in these areas. This involvement, which was largely realized on an individual basis, was used as a pretext by the more centralized and strategically oriented Shia forces when Hezbollah decided to fully and openly enter the Syrian

war. With the full militarization of the Syrian revolution, and on the eve of the crucial battle for the small city of Qusayr in the Homs province, Hassan Nasrallah, having previously hidden behind the pretense of protecting some Shia villages on the Lebanon-Syria border, declared that the party not only was fighting in an organized way alongside the Assad regime's forces, but was also politically supporting the Assad regime. From then on, the Assad regime's fate would be inextricably linked to Hezbollah's, and Lebanon's political equilibrium would be fatally intertwined with Syria's.

The refugee issue is the other, equally important, aspect of this interpenetration between the two countries. Both in numbers and in nature, the unstoppable flow of Syrian refugees pouring into Lebanon soon became a ticking time bomb. In a small country of approximately four million inhabitants, where approximately a quarter of a million Palestinians are already living in refugee conditions, it has not been easy to absorb what are widely estimated to be approximately one million displaced Syrians. Moreover, these Syrian refugees did not come to a neutral space but to a politically and sectarianly tense environment that was already densely populated. Mostly Sunnis who left their country on account of the violence exercised against them by the Assad regime, these refugees now saw their country as largely Alawi and as supported by their Shia "relative" in Lebanon.

Adding to this potentially explosive friction is the fact that most of these refugees are situated in Lebanese areas close to the Syrian border, where relations between Shia and Sunni Lebanese villages were already inflamed. Villages like Aarsal or Majdel-Anjar were quickly transformed into rear bases for what was becoming a Syrian mini-society, in open confrontation with a Hezbollah-led "resistance" counter-society, already powerfully present in the same regions.¹

If the deprived and impoverished job seekers among the Syrian refugees in Lebanon constitute a burden on the country's labor market and on its formal and informal social safety nets, the wealthy refugees raise a different set of problems. The exiled Syrian upper class, mainly concentrated in Beirut and in some parts of posh Mount Lebanon, was expected by some to save the Lebanese real estate market from the morass it was about to sink into, and it certainly raised both rentals and selling prices to the levels of a possible bubble. But many among this Syrian bourgeoisie are—or at least until recently were—pro-Assad. Their presence in Lebanon appears to be motivated in part by financial expediency, as they seek to shelter their sometimes huge capital and bank accounts in the interstices created by the vaunted Lebanese banking secrecy.

It is no secret that many financial institutions in the Beirut market offer a channel for fleeing Syrian capital, allowing it to escape the heavy ring of sanctions and regulations with which the international system has surrounded Syria. In time, however, this mechanism, at first salutary for the Lebanese business community, has itself become a target of international surveillance. Indeed, several high-level U.S. Treasury delegations to Beirut had to remind the Lebanese banking system of its obligations with respect to the transparency and traceability of financial transactions.² If these constraints were in fact applied and sanctions implemented, not only would the substantial flow of money and capital that sustains banking deposits dry up (thus endangering Lebanon's balance of payments), but the financial sanctuary Lebanon offers Arab wealth from various sources would be threatened—and that cannot be ignored in a country whose economy is mainly built around, and relies on, its banking sector.

Vital Threats, Existential Fears

It was inevitable that sooner or later the bloodshed in Syria, grafted onto existing tensions in Lebanon, would transform the Lebanese sectarian struggle from a primarily “political” one to an increasingly and notably more “religious” conflict. Increasingly, the struggle in the Levant is assuming an existential character, whereby “communities,” however imagined or over-constructed, perceive themselves as defending not only their share in the country's power structure, but their very existence and survival—so that interest-based political turf lines are being replaced by “identity”-based imaginary boundaries. As such, the more intense the conflict becomes, and the more violence is employed, the greater the extent to which sectarian competition is internalized as a zero-sum game, wherein negotiation and compromise are equated with defeat and loss.

This is the case with respect to the two great communities now struggling in the Levant, the Shia and the Sunni, more than for any others. For Lebanese Shiites, the fall of the Assad regime would be much more than a hard blow to the “resistance axis” linking them to Iran; it would, they assume, be the first step in a Sunni continuum of revenge, extending from Lebanon through Syria to Iraq, that would undo the entirety of the Shia community's gains, and threaten to return it to an era of submission to a dominant other.

On the other hand, for Lebanese Sunnis and their allies, only the fall of Assad will free them, along with the Lebanon they envisage, from an Iranian-backed Shia hegemony that finds in the Syrian regime its immediate

backbone—and only such an endgame could ensure that justice prevails after years of living under physical threat.

Obsessed as the Shia community is with a sense of existential danger that it locates both internally (the Sunni Arab powers) and regionally (Israel), it is remarkable to see that its fear is paradoxically coupled with an equivalent feeling of hubris, rooted in what Hezbollah calls the “power surplus” accumulated during the years of Syrian tutelage, crowned by Israel's unilateral withdrawal from south Lebanon in May 2000, and consolidated by Hezbollah's performance in the 2006 war. Such hubris is expressed in a growing number of unchallenged acts of aggression at all levels of the Lebanese political scene, from dominating state institutions to silencing dissent on the part of opposition voices inside the community, something Hezbollah had until recently avoided.

For the Sunni community, the accumulation of events, beginning with the 2003 Iraq War and followed by the Hariri assassination in 2005, Hezbollah's accusation that the March 14 alliance was plotting to actively undermine it in 2006,³ the “soft coup d'état” over Beirut in 2008, and, later, the toppling of Saad Hariri's government in 2008 and 2009, amounted to an unbearable sequence of humiliation, resentment, and often despair, in the face of what they increasingly perceived to be an irresistible and unconquerable force. Herein also lies a fascinating paradox: The Sunni political culture, which had for a long time been suspicious of Lebanon's state institutions, which it regarded as the exclusive property of the dominant Christian Maronite elite, had finally reconciled itself, in the aftermath of the Taif Accords, to the idea of Lebanese statehood, as the Sunni community itself became one of the main stakeholders in the new polity. With the strong presence of Rafik Hariri as head of government for almost thirteen years (1992-2005), the Sunnis of Lebanon began to develop a sense of ownership regarding the Lebanese state and its institutions.

In the aftermath of Hariri's assassination, however, Sunnis began to feel that this same state was being “stolen” from them by the rising might of Hezbollah, and to fear that the same security institutions that had for so long been the instruments of their suppression by the Maronite community might soon be enlisted for this same purpose, this time at the hands of a new rival: the Shia community. Along with this anxiety was a loss of direction and guidance accompanying the potentially dangerous erosion of traditional political leadership inside the community—exacerbated by the inability of any contender to the Sunni *Zaama* (leadership) to fill the void left by the loss of Rafik Hariri, however over-constructed and inflated his image

as a historical figure now became. Under such conditions, the steep rise of radical Salafi factions, further mobilized by the ongoing fight in Syria and backed, on a regional level, by the panicked regimes of Gulf states, was not surprising.

Squeezed between these two “super-communities,” at odds both in Lebanon and in its Syrian extension, sects that increasingly perceive themselves as “minorities” now feel more endangered than ever. The Christian political mindset since the end of the Lebanese civil war had been one of marginalization and a loss of pre-eminence, but amidst the increasingly lethal polarization between the Shia-led and Sunni-led camps, consolidated and crystallized by the Syrian bloodshed and the powerful imagery it projected, that was now being superseded by the very real prospect of the exacting of revenge against Christians. At the same time, the Druze community, already numerically fragile and stretched over a Syrian-Lebanese-Israeli triangular border, foresees a likely fierce infighting within the Islamic world over the years or decades to come, and is concerned that it will once again have to deploy considerable tactical ingenuity to avoid being further weakened by it.

Breaking Down

These deep and structural frictions between sectarian tectonic plates in an unstable Lebanon are taking place in the context of a severely disintegrated and comatose state system, whose security institutions are paralyzed—and torn and divided along the same sectarian lines.

The Lebanese state is currently an empty shell; almost all its institutions and power centers are in limbo. When the government of Najib Mikati fell in March 2013 as a consequence of the resignation of Hezbollah’s ministers and their allies in the wake of their heavy involvement in Syria, a new prime minister was named, but he is still prime minister designate, with no possibility of forming a new cabinet, for exactly the same underlying reasons related to the Syrian crisis. In constitutional terms, this means that executive power is currently dispersed: The interim government is not really functioning but only overseeing day-to-day affairs, while a replacement government is still to be created.

The legislative branch is in a similar limbo. The parliament’s mandate expired in June 2013, but elections could not be held owing to the lack of consensus regarding an electoral law, as well as to a degraded security situation. The parliament responded by extending its own mandate, as it repeatedly did during the civil war, but it is now in a situation of crippled legitimacy and almost total lack of

productivity. On top of this series of power vacuums, the term of the President of the Republic expires in the spring of 2014, yet new elections are not foreseen under current conditions.

The upshot of all this is a political environment wherein no party is held accountable, no clear locus of decision making can be identified, and no arbiter can be appealed to—and wherein open bickering is common practice amid a race to power in which each and every “head of institution” increasingly “overbids” on behalf of his “community,” which serves as his protector of last resort. From the failed or quasi-state that Lebanon had been for the previous years, since 2005 the country has seemed to be irremediably slipping toward the verge of a complete breakdown.

All of these developments are strikingly parallel to the period preceding the 1975–90 civil war. The most arresting, but also the most potentially dangerous, of these comparisons with the pre-1975 period is the situation of the armed forces and the security complex. In this context, it is noteworthy that another vacated top-ranking position in the Republic is that of Commander in Chief of the Army, whose term expired at the end of the summer and was also extended, owing to the lack of consensus on an accepted general to replace him, and also in order to keep him in reserve for a possible run for the presidency once Michel Suleiman’s mandate is over.

The Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) are also overstretched and physically exhausted, a consequence of its handling of missions in many parts of the country with insufficient means. But its real and much more severe problem lies elsewhere: in the rapidly declining acceptance and support the troops are receiving among some important segments of the national polity. Historically, the LAF has always been perceived as a consensual quasi-police body, loved and respected by rank-and-file Lebanese precisely on account of its political neutrality and the status it acquired as the ultimate and only “nation builder” in a highly segmented country.

Today, it is this very status that is at serious risk—something the LAF also witnessed during the 1975–90 civil war, when it experienced implosion and fragmentation. Widely reconfigured under Syrian tutelage during the post-war period, but now also deeply penetrated by Hezbollah, especially at its intelligence level, and still influenced by Christian officers close to Hezbollah’s ally and a former Commander in Chief, Michel Aoun, the LAF is drifting toward political choices that could put it in confrontation with the Sunni center, as well as with the radicalized segments of the Sunni street. On top of overall

Sunni resentment and their declining faith in the state as such, the community is also indignant about being treated on a different footing where issues of security are involved—for example, in the case of the exception extended to Hezbollah that allowed it to maintain weaponry and an arsenal (under the pretext of its being a “resistance group”).

The Sunni community also does not understand why it is that while army commandos deploy in Saida (Sidon) or Tripoli to curb Salafi factions, the same LAF refrains from any reaction in response to the shooting of a peaceful demonstrator by Hezbollah vigilantes in front of the Iranian embassy in Beirut. Nor does the Lebanese judiciary or its police auxiliary serve warrants issued by the Special Tribunal in charge of the Hariri assassination against known and active Hezbollah figures.⁴

In addition, the LAF has increasingly become suspect on account of its “Commander’s syndrome,” meaning the Commander in Chief’s recurrent ambition to attain the presidency of the Republic, an unhealthy custom now established with the consecutive election of two previous Commanders in Chief: Emile Lahoud and Michel Suleiman. Currently, General Qahwaji seems to be seeking to fulfill this ambition by pleasing the strong local players, Hezbollah and other Syrian allies (including the Syrian Social-National Party [SSNP], the Amal Movement, the Christian Marada party of Sleiman Franjeh, and the Free Patriotic Current of General Michal Aoun), as well as some international powers, by subsuming his actions under the banner and rhetoric of the “war on terror”—which, in today’s Lebanon and in the wake of the bloodshed in Syria, means the tracking and fighting of Sunni networks, labeled as “Jihadi Takfiris.”

As a result of the LAF’s imperiling of its neutral status, not only does the security situation continue to deteriorate, as already evidenced by the proliferation of bomb attacks and targeted assassinations of all kinds,⁵ but the security apparatus itself, like the state structure as a whole, is threatening to split and fragment. Outside the Lebanese army, Internal Security Forces appear to be sitting on the opposite side of the political-sectarian fence, and are increasingly perceived by *their* skeptics as allied with the Hariri movement, and as the Sunni community’s residual guard.

Whereas such an imploding situation is not really new for Lebanon, since 1990 some sort of minimal regional consensus has prevented the country from slipping into open conflict and warfare. Now, however, the regional safety net that has traditionally safeguarded Lebanon from itself is today itself in a shambles. The regional expansion of the Syrian revolution has put an end to the Syrian-

Saudi nexus that has so far succeeded in neutralizing Lebanon; and recent bombings, like the one targeting the Iranian Embassy in Beirut last November,⁶ are signaling the beginning of an open confrontation among Damascus, Riyadh, and Tehran on Lebanese soil. Egypt, another historical caretaker of Lebanon, is well out of the picture for the foreseeable future. And while Qatar and Turkey tried their hand at stabilizing the situation in Lebanon in 2008–9—actually quite successfully then—they are now overwhelmed by the scope and volatility of the regional conundrum that confronts them.

Whose Quagmire? Whose Abyss?

The final questions to be addressed here are: Why did Hezbollah involve itself to such an extent in Syria’s war? And has this involvement become the most important factor leading Lebanon again today toward the abyss?

When the cycle of Arab revolutions began in Tunisia and then Egypt, Hezbollah, along with the leadership of both Iran and Syria, welcomed these upheavals, which they interpreted as being directed against the West and its local “lackey regimes.” Some observers even triumphantly declared that they were inspired by, and were the indirect consequences of, the Islamic revolutionary model.⁷

But when the same wave subsequently reached Syria, this interpretation underwent a distinct shift, as did the tone of the response. What had been viewed as liberation movements expressing the Arab and Islamic masses’ will to reclaim their fate were now seen as the results of a plot, alternately led by the Western powers, the Gulf States, and obscure, unidentified forces and undertaken with the aim of breaking the will of the “resistance axis,” weakening its key Syrian link, and ultimately threatening Tehran’s grand designs.⁸

Nonetheless, in the first months of the Syrian conflict, Hezbollah’s response was relatively restrained: It made some attempts at opening channels to some factions of the Syrian opposition, with which both Hezbollah and Tehran shared some, if only minimal, common grounds. In Lebanese circles, many optimistically expected a “soft landing” from the uprising, with Hezbollah seeking to calmly and pre-emptively prepare for a post-Bashar era by cutting its losses in Syria, and by seeking to renew the Lebanese National Pact and renegotiate the Taif architecture in order to accommodate the change.

Was Hezbollah’s sudden shift at the end of the summer of 2011, with the beginning of its direct involvement in the crushing of the Syrian rebellion, a top-down Iranian decision imposed on Hezbollah? Or did the party begin

to see the Syrian civil war as an existential menace, to be curbed by putting its entire weight behind a surrounded and paranoid regime?

Iran seems to have quickly understood the opportunity presented by a Syrian quagmire, and by a war of attrition that offered it the possibility of achieving several aims, including a renewed confrontation with its many enemies. Assad's resistance to the popular uprising, later fortified with Iran's help, was a way for Iran to gain time while it laid the groundwork for a better bargain, such as the one behind the P5+1 agreement with Tehran. Tehran's probable calculus was that Syria would in time sink Iran's regional rivals and enemies, mainly Saudi Arabia and Qatar as well as Turkey. Meanwhile, Iran would be preparing its own version of the post-Bashar era, by pouring into Syria hundreds and then thousands of fighters from Hezbollah and from the Iraqi Abu-Fadl El-Abbas brigades and putting them in charge of protecting the nerve centers of the regime and the country, as well as by forming and training popular militias constituted by Alawis and other minority factions. By doing so, Iran was also taking an option on an ungovernable and militia-controlled Syria if and when Assad should fall. In this scenario, the country would slip into quasi-chaos, transforming it into a geopolitical morass that would allow Iranian-backed forces to debilitate Tehran's rivals by engaging them in endless asymmetrical warfare.

For Hezbollah, whether by obligation or choice, Syria soon began to appear as the barricade on which it should pre-emptively defend its benefits and power in Lebanon, while curbing the potential of Sunni revenge. But what at first had appeared to be an easy punitive and preventive campaign had soon become a very costly one. Risking overreach and the possibility of Israeli action against its forces, Hezbollah was vulnerable to what could become unbearable losses. Meanwhile, internally, the cost appeared increasingly to be an ideological or structural/definitional one. In place of a political legitimacy built on the pillars of "resistance to the Israeli enemy" and the virtues of pan-Islamic unification, Hezbollah now presented itself as the defender against terrorism and Sunni Jihadism as well as the protector of minorities—all themes that, ironically and perversely, could end up catalyzing and accelerating the very same *fitna*, or inter-Muslim schism, against which Hezbollah was presenting itself as the champion.

Lebanon remains the country where Hezbollah has to live, while coexisting and building a future with very differing forces and cultures. It is also a country whose fate is tightly intertwined with that of its neighboring Syria. Regardless of the immediate political outcome of the seemingly endless Syrian abyss, the cost of Lebanon's involvement in

Syria's war is already, and will probably be in the end, a heavy and deeply corrosive one, for the country and for all its inhabitants

Endnotes

- 1 On Sunni-Shia tensions in the Bekaa area in Lebanon, on the eve of the Syrian conflict and after its escalation, see, inter alia, [Damien Cave, "In Lebanon, Sunnis Threaten Shiites as Kidnappings of Syrians Rise," *New York Times*, August 16, 2012*](#); ["Lebanese Families Drawn into Syrian Conflict," *BBC*, June 18, 2013*](#); and [Karin Laub, "Syrian Conflict Deepens Sectarian Rifts in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley," *The Times of Israel*, October 17, 2012.*](#)
- 2 On the various aspects of the U.S. Treasury's tracking of illegal money flows transiting via the Lebanese banking system, see, inter alia, ["U.S. to Lebanon Banks: Stay Away from Drug Dealers, Terrorists," *Al-Monitor*](#); and ["U.S. Official: Lebanon Must Avoid Serving as Sanction Haven for Syria, Iran," *Now*, November 15, 2013.](#)
- 3 Hezbollah's narrative of the July 2006 war is that parallel to Israel's attack, the March 14 alliance inside Lebanon was actively working on diplomatic levels to undermine the resistance's position, while at the same time attempting to share information about Hezbollah's military positions and the location of key figures with Israel.
- 4 On the incident in front of the Iranian embassy that led to the killing of an anti-Hezbollah militant, see [Sarah El Deeb, "Anti-Hezbollah Protester Killed in Lebanon," *Associated Press*, June 9, 2013.*](#)
- 5 Since summer of 2013, a series of bombings have occurred in the southern suburbs of Beirut and in Tripoli, and targeted assassinations against political figures have resumed. On the latest incident, see ["Shatah's Assassination, Recent 'Crimes' to be Referred to Judicial Council," *Naharnet*, December 28, 2013.*](#)
- 6 See [Loveday Morris and Ahmed Ramadan, "Deadly Blasts Near Iran's Embassy in Lebanon Linked to Syrian War, Sectarian Divisions," *The Washington Post*, November 19, 2013*](#); and [Martin Chulov, "Lebanon 'Captures Iranian Embassy Bombing Mastermind,'" *The Guardian*, January 1, 2014.*](#)
- 7 Some of these analyses can be found in: [Lt. Col. \(ret.\) Michael Segall, "Is Iran a Role Model for Arab Revolutions?" \(Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, March 7, 2011\)*](#); [Faris Abo Hilal, "Iran and the Arab Revolutions: Positions and Repercussions" \(Arab Center for Research & Policy Studies, September 7, 2011\)*](#); [Michael Eisenstadt, "Iran's Islamic Revolution: Lessons for the Arab Spring of 2011?" *Strategic Forum*, no. 267 \(April 1, 2011\)*](#); [Sadegh Zibakalam, "Tehran: Arab Spring Is Islamic Revolution Coming into Bloom," *IRD*, May 23, 2011.*](#)
- 8 On Iran's stakes in Syria and its siding with the Assad regime, see [Karim Sadjadpour, "Iran's Unwavering Support to Assad's Syria," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, August 27, 2013*](#), for statements by Iranian figures on the Syrian crisis as a "plot" ultimately directed against Teheran, see ["Syrians' Resistance Thwarted Colonial Plots: Iran MP," *Shia Post*, October 31, 2013.*](#)

* Weblinks are available at www.brandeis.edu/crown



Brandeis University Crown Center
for Middle East Studies

Mailstop 010
Waltham, Massachusetts
02454-9110

781-736-5320
781-736-5324 Fax
www.brandeis.edu/crown

Middle East Brief

Lebanon at the Brink: The Impact of the Syrian Civil War

Prof. Joseph Bahout

Recent Middle East Briefs:

Available on the Crown Center website: www.brandeis.edu/crown

Eva Bellin, "Drivers of Democracy: Lessons from Tunisia" No. 75

Nader Habibi, "The Economic Legacy of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad" No. 74

Seyedamir Hossein Mahdavi, "Can Iran Surprise by Holding a "Healthy" Election in June?" No. 73

Asher Susser, "Is the Jordanian Monarchy in Danger?" No. 72

Payam Mohseni, "The Islamic Awakening: Iran's Grand Narrative of the Arab Uprisings," No. 71

Abdel Monem Said Aly and Karim Elkady, "The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly of Egypt's Political Transition," No. 70

