UNDERSTANDING THE GEO-POLITICS OF THE WAR IN SOUTHERN LEBANON

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Introduction

The Lebanon–Israeli border is the only Arab-Israeli front that has witnessed continuous violence since the late 1960s. The past four decades have seen proliferation of small disputes over territory along the demarcation line between the two countries. In other circumstances, disputes of this nature could be managed or even resolved with ease. Yet, in the absence of a comprehensive peace pact between Syria and Israel, Lebanon remains both an instrument of and a potential trigger for broader regional conflict. Lebanon is not a major actor in Arab politics. Even its most political and militant actor, the Hezbollah, has only a few hundred full-time fighters. But Lebanon's role in the Arab-Israeli conflict has principally been as a theatre in which various actors mainly Syria, Iran, Israel, Lebanon (Hezbollah) and the Palestinians believe they can wage surrogate battles. Hezbollah and Southern Lebanon in particular gained importance by becoming ideal proxies for the larger regional conflict and military action intended by and for others. Paradoxically, it is precisely because of Lebanon's relative military insignificance that continues to make it so volatile but crucial actor in that regional war. Despite Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon in May 2000 after almost three decades of occupation, little has changed in this respect. Perhaps one of the reasons that account for this, is the ambiguous nature of the various United Nations resolutions which do not provide the proper framework for resolving the fundamental issues fueling the conflict. But more significantly, it also raises critical questions regarding the understanding of the major issues that underlie the conflict, which has to some extent resulted in the inability of the UN to resolve it. In that regard, this paper seeks to discuss the geo-politics of Lebanon which will include the root causes and the politics surrounding the Lebanese conflict.

The paper begins with an overview of Lebanon with particular emphasis on its origin and geography. Next, the background of the conflict before and after independence is provided to better comprehend its

root causes. The subsequent section discusses the rise of Hezbollah as well as the establishment and withdrawal from the Security Zone by Israel from Southern Lebanon. The border tensions between Lebanon and Israel, which consequently led to the 2006 War and the measures adopted to prevent renewed conflict in Lebanon are also explored. Particularly, the 'Palestinianization' of the conflict by Hezbollah and the impoverished nature of South Lebanon which helped to keep the conflict going are given much attention.

Overview of Lebanon

The small Middle East mountainous country of Lebanon was first settled around 3000 BC, by Phoenicians, who were eventually absorbed into the Holy Roman Empire. Since its emergence in 3000 BC, Lebanon has been invaded and conquered over the centuries by the Assyrians, Ayyubids, Babylonians, Byzantines, Mamluks and Ottomans (Dalton: 2011). It was Turkey's defeat in the first World War, and the subsequent influence of the French that transformed the country into the modern land we know today (ibid). Lebanon finally gained its independence in 1943, but was unfortunately ravaged by a 15-year civil war that ended in 1990. At that war's conclusion, the Lebanese government and people finally established a more equitable political system, and began in earnest to rebuild the damaged infrastructure of their country. Admittedly, some historical, cultural and religious conflicts (rather common in the Middle East) do remain, and the country still struggles with needed reforms. Today, Lebanon is finding its rightful place in the world, and the world is paying attention. The historic cities of Beirut and Tripoli, and the remarkable Phoenician history (with its well preserved ruins) draw increasing numbers of visitors (ibid).

Map 1: Map of Lebanon showing Major Cities/Towns

Origin and Geography of Lebanon

The name Lebanon ("Lubnān" in standard Arabic; "Libnén" in the local dialect) comes from the Aramaic (and common West Semitic) root "LBN", meaning "white," which could be regarded as reference to the snow-capped Mount Lebanon (Harb, Daily Star, February 2004). Occurrences of the name have been found in three of the twelve tablets of the Epic of Gilgamesh (as early as 2100 BC), the texts of the library of Ebla (2400 BC), and 71 times in the Old Testament (Pollak, 2007). The name is recorded in Ancient Egypt as *Rmnn*, where *R* stood for Canaanite (Ross, 2009). Officially, the Republic of Lebanon or Lebanese Republic is a country in Western Asia, on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea. It is bordered by Syria to the north and east, and by Israel to the south. It is close to Cyprus through the Mediterranean Sea.

To meet the interest of the diverse cultural groups living within its boundaries, Lebanon evolved in 1943, a unique political system known as 'confessionalism,' based on a community-based power-sharing mechanism. It was created when the ruling French mandatory power expanded the borders of the former autonomous Ottoman Mount Lebanon district, that was mostly populated by Maronite and Druze (O'Connor & Mary E., 2009). The red stripes on the Lebanese flag (Figure 1) means self-sacrifice and the white stripe symbolize the snow- capped peaks of their mountains. This is also clearly marked in the Coat of Arms of Lebanon (Figure 2).

Figure 1 Flag of Lebanon   **Figure 2 Coat of Arms of Lebanon**

According to the July 2008 Lebanese Government population census estimates, the number of people inhabiting Lebanon was 3,971,941 (CIA World Fact Book, 2006). Approximately 18 million people of Lebanese descent are spread all over the world. Of these the majority are Christians (ibid). It is estimated that in 2007, Lebanon hosted approximately 325,800 refugees and asylum seekers. Palestinians numbered 270,800, of which 50,200 were from Iraq, and 4,500 from Sudan (World Refugee Survey, 2008). No official census has been taken since 1932. However, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) World Fact Book (2006) gives the following population distribution: Muslim - 59.7% (Shi'a, Sunni, Druze, Isma'ilite, Alawite or Nusayri), Christian - 39% (Maronite Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Melkite Catholic, Armenian Orthodox, Syriac Catholic, Armenian Catholic, Syriac Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Chaldean, Assyrian, Coptic, Protestant), and 1.3% as others. There are 18 recognized religious sects. Some followers of the Druze religion do not consider themselves as Muslims though the state legally considers them as such. It is remarkable that almost fifty-percent of the groups in this diverse population number less than 5,000 members each, making them inconsequential to the

overall social fabric of Lebanon and its political dynamics. According to the Pew Research Center (2006)[2], 54 percent of Lebanese Muslims believe that religion is very important.

Arabic is the official language as prescribed in Article 11 of Lebanon's constitution. However in certain cases as prescribed by law, the French language may be used. The majority of Lebanese people speak Arabic, and sometimes French or English. Lebanese people of Armenian or Greek descent often speak Armenian or Greek fluently. Also in use is Syriac by Maronite and the Syriac minorities (O'Connor & Mary E., 2009). Other languages spoken include Circassian (spoken by 50,000), Tigrinya (30,000), Sinhala (25,000), Polish (5,000), Russian, and Romanian (together 10,000 speakers) (ibid). The colloquial language used in Lebanon, which is known as Lebanese, belongs to a group of dialects called Levantine Arabic. It differs from modern standard Arabic (CIA World Fact Book 2006). In recent years, it has become increasingly common for Lebanese people, especially the better educated, to speak in a combination of Lebanese, English (40%) and French (45%), whereby the same sentence would include words or expressions from the two languages (Ibid). In the 1960s, Lebanese linguists proposed 37 letters for the Lebanese dialect based on the Latin alphabet. The Arab League rejected the idea, putting pressure on the Lebanese government to refuse such a project (O'Connor & Mary E., 2009) .

The area, including modern Lebanon, has been home to various civilizations and cultures for thousands of years. Lebanon was originally the home to the Phoenicians. It was subsequently conquered and occupied by the Assyrians, the Persians, the Greeks, the Romans, the Arabs, the Crusaders, the Ottoman Turks and lastly the French. Lebanese culture therefore has over the years evolved through borrowing from all of these invading groups. Lebanon's ethnic and religious diversity, has also contributed to the country's festivals, musical styles and literature, as well as cuisine. When compared to the rest of Western Asia, Lebanese society is highly educated (ibid). According to the CIA World Fact Book

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[2] Pew Research Center is a nonpartisan source of data and analysis, and takes no advocacy positions.

(2006), over eighty percent of the population was literate as at 2006. Lebanese society is very modern and has features that are similar to other cultures of Mediterranean Europe. It is often considered as Europe's gateway to Western Asia, as well as Asia's gateway to the Western World.

Lebanon: From Conflict to Independence

Bashir Shihab II, had come to power in 1788 through local politics. He formed alliances that would facilitate access to trade, weapons and money in the region (Fawaz, 1983). He disarmed the Druze and allied with France, governed in the name of the Egyptian Pasha Muhammad Ali, who entered Lebanon and formally took over lordship in 1832, thereby creating a sectarian divide (ibid). For the remaining eight years, the sectarian and feudal rifts of the 1821–1825 conflict were heightened by the increasing economic isolation of the Druze, and the growing wealth of the Maronite (ibid). According to Makdisi (20000, the discontent over Shilah II's policies erupted into open rebellion, fed by both Ottoman and British money and support. Shilah II fled and was succeeded by Bashir III who ruled under the tutelage of the Ottoman (Makdisi, 2000). In 1841, conflicts between the impoverished Druze and the Maronite Christians exploded. The Druze massacred Christians at Deir al Qamar, and the fleeing survivors were slaughtered by Ottoman soldiers (Ibid). The Ottomans attempted to create peace by dividing Mount Lebanon into separate Christian and Druze districts, but this would merely create geographic power bases for the warring parties, that plunged Lebanon into civil war repeatedly (ibid).

A major destabilizing factor in the region was France's support for the Maronite Christians against the Druze, which in turn, led the British to back the Druze, and exacerbated religious and economic tension between the two communities. Following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire after World War I, the League of Nations placed the five provinces that make up present-day Lebanon under the direct control of France (Firro, 2002). According to the agreements reached at San Remo, France also had control over the territory called Syria, which was scheduled to be an independent country, with a Class A Mandate. France established the Lebanon-Syrian border to the "Anti-Lebanon" mountains, on the far side of the Beqaa Valley, a territory which had belonged to the province of Damascus for hundreds of

years, and was far more attached to Damascus than Beirut by culture and influence (Firro: 2002). This doubled the territory under the control of Beirut, at the expense of what would become the state of Syria.

Consequently, the demographics of Lebanon were profoundly altered, as the territory that was added contained people who were predominantly Muslim or Druze. Lebanese Christians, of which the Maronite were the largest sub-grouping, now constituted barely fifty percent of the population, while Sunni Muslims in Lebanon saw their numbers increase eightfold, and Shi'ite Muslims fourfold. By 1960, Muslims constituted the majority of the population, which contributed to Muslim agitations against the prevailing balance of power (Ibid). Since then, Lebanon's history has been marked by alternating periods of political stability and turmoil, interspersed with prosperity built on Beirut's position as a regional centre for finance and trade.

Lebanon: A Theatre of Conflict

Since the early 1970s various armies and militias involved in the Arab-Israeli conflict have sought to control Southern Lebanon as a leverage over their opponents. The once quiet border region developed into a major frontline when, in 1970, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) transferred its headquarters to Lebanon in the wake of Jordan's clamp-down on armed Palestinian groups operating from within its territory (Cobban, 1987).[3] Lebanon, which harbours several thousands of Palestinian refugees, then became a natural staging ground for the PLO.[4] Together with other Palestinian factions and Lebanese volunteers, the PLO developed a major military force capable of attacking Israel across its northern border. For much of the 1970s, forces loyal to Yasser Arafat controlled southern Lebanon from which they carried out frequent cross-border raids and artillery attacks on Israel. These triggered Israeli reprisals against Palestinian bases and refugee camps in the area, as well as Lebanese villages. The

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[3] The Palestinian-Jordanian clashes in the autumn of 1970 became known as 'Black September'. In July 1971 all Palestinian guerrillas had left Jordan. An estimated 3,000 Palestinians, military and civilians, were killed and several Palestinian refugee camps destroyed.

[4] The exact number of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon is hard to assess. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) estimates that over 300,000 are registered but the actual number of refugees living in Lebanon is almost certainly significantly lower.

Lebanese government could not exert any pressure on the PLO until 1975, when Lebanon descended into civil war which led to the virtual collapse of most state institutions including the Lebanese army.

Apprehensive that a Palestinian-Muslim victory might trigger attempts by Israel to impose its full control over Lebanon, Syria responded to a request by Lebanon's Christian president for help by sending its troops into the country. Syria's intervention saved the Christian forces from defeat. After October 1978, Syria continued this mission as a peace force, which was subsequently named the Arab Deterrent Force (ADF) mandated by the Arab League. One ADF task was to oversee the withdrawal of all foreign troops, including Syrian troops. But when other Arab states failed to contribute sufficient peacekeepers, the Syrian troops already present in Lebanon constituted the bulk of the ADF, thus giving Syria a case for retaining its presence in Lebanon. Meanwhile, Palestinian fighters frequently struck Israel from southern Lebanon. On 14 March 1978, a Palestinian commando killed over 30 bus passengers on a motorway near Haifa in Israel (Erskine, 1989). Three days later, Israel invaded Lebanon up to the Litani River, 30 kilometres into Lebanese territory with the objective of wiping out Palestinian armed groups based in the South. On 19 March 1978, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 425, calling on Israel to cease its military actions against Lebanon immediately, and "withdraw forthwith its forces from all Lebanese territory." It also established the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) "for an initial period of six months," with the mandate to verify Israel's withdrawal. At first Israel seemed willing to comply, but in June 1978, it handed over a ten-kilometre wide strip along the border, known as "security zone," to a pro-Israeli militia led by former Lebanese Army Officer Sa'ad Haddad. In 1980, this militia became known as the South Lebanon Army (SLA). Lebanon thus became the surrogate theatre for war between Palestinians and Israelis that produced many casualties and the exodus of an estimated 25,000 refugees (Theodor, 1993: 230).

Haddad's militia failed to provide Israel with security as Palestinian fighters continued to shell northern Israel. On 6 June 1982, the Israeli Army again invaded Lebanon in what was initially described as a measured retaliation for the attempted assassination of the Israeli ambassador in London (Ze'ev & Ehud

1994).[5] Yet it soon became clear that the aim was far more ambitious, and included forcing Palestinian commandos to move farther north, destroying the PLO and setting up a friendly, Christian-dominated government in Beirut. Syria and Israeli forces engaged in brief but heavy fighting during which Syria's missile installations in Lebanon were destroyed and its air force decimated. Israeli troops besieged West Beirut, and a bloody showdown with the PLO seemed inevitable (ibid). However, after receiving international guarantees regarding the safety of Palestinian civilians, the PLO evacuated its armed forces and leadership to Tunis.

The Rise of Hezbollah and the Security Zone

While Israel had rid southern Lebanon of armed Palestinian groups, the invasion produced an unexpected and ultimately, more damaging effect among Lebanon's Shi'ite population. It served as a catalyst for mobilizing a protest movement of the charismatic Shi'ite cleric Sayyid Musa Sadr. Sadr was born in Iran and educated in Iraq. He drew thousands of followers with a strong political message of mixed denunciation of the Shi'ites' social deprivation in Lebanon, radical Islamist, and support for the Palestinians (Fouad, 1986).[6] Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982 brought enormous pressure on the leadership of Amal,[7] which had emerged from the Movement of the Dispossessed in the southern suburbs of Beirut, particularly, from its rank and file to actively resist Israel's armed presence. The first signs of the internal conflict in the Amal Party emerged in the early days of the Israeli invasion of 1982, when Amal split over Berri's decision to take part in the National Salvation Committee set up by Lebanese President Elias Sarkis. Amal's deputy leader and official spokesman, Hussayn al-Musawi, viewed this as a deviation from Sadr's line and as acquiescence to Israeli/US plans (ibid).

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[5] Israel blamed the PLO even though it emerged that a rival splinter group, led by Abu Nidal, masterminded the assassination attempt.

[6] As-Sadr's popularity gained almost mythical proportions when he mysteriously "disappeared" during a visit to Libya in September 1978. His fate remains unknown.

[7] Amal became one of the most important Shi'a Muslim militias during the Lebanese Civil War. Amal grew strong with the support of, and through its ties with Syria, and the 300,000 Shi'i internal refugees from southern Lebanon after the Israeli bombings in the early 1980s. Amal is also an Arabic noun, meaning "hope.

Musawi founded Islamic Amal, apparently with the blessing of Iran whose leader, Ayatollah Khomeini, saw in Lebanon and his country's historic ties with its Shi'ite community, an opportunity for exporting Iran's Islamic Revolution. Many important officials, including many who became most influential in Hezbollah split from Amal. [8] Other disgruntled Amal members joined smaller, highly secretive groupings, including Islamic Jihad, which also received support from Iran. Islamic Jihad has been widely held responsible for several violent acts, including the bombings of the US Embassy and US Marine and French barracks in Beirut in 1983, and the US Embassy's annex in 1984, which killed hundreds, as well as the kidnapping and murder of several US and other Western citizens.(Hala, 1997).

The links between Islamic Jihad and Hezbollah remain murky. According to Hezbollah's own and other accounts, Islamic Jihad was never part of Hezbollah's organizational structure (ibid). What is clear is that, with the arrival of 1,500 Iranian Revolutionary Guards, a loose alliance of several Islamist Shi'ite individuals and groupings that included Islamic Amal, undertook joint attacks against Israeli forces. Between August and September 1982, the leaders of this umbrella organization established the "Committee of Nine", which became the *Majlis as-Shura*, or Consultative Council of what in 1984, became a newly established party named Hezbollah that soon developed into one of Lebanon's most disciplined and best organized armed groups. [9] In Hezbollah's view the conflict with Israel is "existential," and therefore ruled out any reconciliation, and vowed to liberate Jerusalem (Hala, 1997).

Meanwhile, the Israeli army had become increasingly entangled in Lebanon's internal politics and the violence associated with it. After a failed attempt in 1983 to conclude a peace agreement with the Lebanese government, Israel ordered a phased and partial withdrawal from South Lebanon. In 1985, all

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[8] All three future Hezbollah Secretary-Generals – Subhi al- Tufayli, Abbas al-Musawi, and Hassan Nasrallah – as well as many high-ranking future Hezbollah high-ranking officials – Ibrahim Amin al-Sayyid, Muhammad Yazbeq, Hussein al-Khalil, Na'im Qassim, Muhammad Ra'id – were among those who split from Amal.

[9] In 1996, U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher claimed that Iran provided Hezbollah with roughly $U.S.100 million per year.

Israeli troops moved south to join the strengthened SLA, now led by the former Lebanese Army General Antoine Lahad. Together they patrolled the 850-square kilometer "security zone", which extended beyond the Israel/Lebanon border into Lebanon. The withdrawal paved the way for the end of Lebanon's civil war in 1986 (ibid).

In October 1989, Lebanon's surviving members of parliament gathered in the Saudi resort of Ta'if to sign the Document of National Reconciliation (The Ta'if Accord), brokered by the Arab League. The Accord set in motion a peace process that concluded the civil war by the end of 1990. Three elements had a lasting impact on southern Lebanon (Mansur, 1993). First the Accord consolidated Syria's influence over Lebanon's internal politics. It granted Damascus substantial leverage to ensure that the government would not do a unilateral deal with Israel regarding the occupied South. Any peace had to be "comprehensive." This included an Israeli-Syrian agreement on the Golan Heights. Second, it called for the liberation of the South pursuant to UN Security Council Resolution 425, which made armed resistance a legitimate means in accordance with international law. Thirdly, it set in motion the dismantling of all militias. However, groups resisting the Israeli occupation, notably Hezbollah, were exempted from having to surrender their weapons. Together, these elements formed the joint Syrian-Lebanese approach to peace in southern Lebanon. As long as Israel occupied Lebanese territory and Syria was in a state of war with Israel, Hezbollah was free to carry out armed attacks on Israeli troops in the South.

The Ta'if Accord and Syria's predominance also began the normalization of Lebanon's political order and Hezbollah's increased activities and integration in the south. The Hezbollah leadership was suspicious of Syria's intentions because Syria supported Amal during its bloody confrontations with Hezbollah in 1987-1989. Furthermore, Hezbollah at first opposed the Accord because it failed to radically transform Lebanon's political system in which power was unequally distributed and, in its view, rather strengthened the dominant role of the Maronite community (Wadah, 1998: 26-27). Finally, the Hezbollah at this stage was fully committed to the idea of establishing an Islamic republic in

Lebanon. Notwithstanding these concerns, in 1992 Hezbollah decided to participate in parliamentary elections. Since then, Hezbollah has often secured one of the largest blocs of representation in the legislature (Author's Field Notes, 15 June 1992). This strong electoral support was the result of its resistance to Israeli occupation. Hezbollah's popularity was also derived from the wide-ranging social services it provided. Its charity and support organizations include *Jihad al-Bina'* (a construction company that assists those rebuilding war-damaged homes in the South); the Islamic Health Committee; hospitals and pharmacies; NGOs supporting women; a research centre focusing on socio-economic issues; various social welfare organizations; schools; and mosques (Wadah, 1998). Following its acceptance of the post-Ta'if political order, Hezbollah developed into a broad-based party providing both civil and military services.

Although Hezbollah frequently asserted its organizational independence it had to seek permission from Syria regarding its activities in the Israeli security zone in southern Lebanon. Meanwhile, Hezbollah pursued a policy of attacking both the SLA and Israeli troops in Southern Lebanon. It frequently used civilian areas as the staging ground; and Israel's retaliation also often targeted Lebanese villages in which Hezbollah fighters had taken refuge. In July 1993, following the killing of seven Israeli soldiers in Southern Lebanon, Israel launched "Operation Accountability" and attacked a number of villages in Southern Lebanon harbouring Hezbollah fighters. According to the Human Rights Watch Report of 1996, Israeli armed operations resulted in the death of about 120 Lebanese civilians and forced thousands of villagers and Palestinian refugees to flee northwards. Material destruction ran into millions of dollars (Human Rights Watch, May 1996). A cease-fire on 31 July 1993 was followed by a US brokered unwritten understanding in which Israel and Hezbollah would refrain from the use of civilian targets; but Hezbollah and Israel systematically violated this 1993 understanding (UNSC Report, January 1996).

In March 1996, Hezbollah fired Katyusha rockets into northern Israel in reprisal for the killing of several Lebanese civilians in the "security zone". Several Israeli civilians were injured. On 11 April, Israel retaliated. It hit a UN-compound in Qana where Lebanese villagers were sheltering, causing the death of over 100 civilians. Israel's operation lasted seventeen days and triggered another civilian exodus northwards (ibid). Over 150 Lebanese, mainly civilians, were killed (ibid). In response, Hezbollah fired hundreds of Katyusha rockets into northern Israel. Under US and French auspices and after a vigorous diplomatic campaign, the parties reached a new agreement, written, but not signed (ibid). This agreement acknowledged the parties' "right of self defence" but committed them to refrain from targeting civilians. It also created an Israel-Lebanon Monitoring Group (ILMG) in which the US, France, Israel, Lebanon and Syria, were to contribute personnel. Any member of the ILMG could report alleged violations to the monitors for investigation and appropriate action. The ILMG was a relative success. Attacks on civilians were drastically reduced and there were no major escalations of the type that occurred in 1993 and 1996 (ibid). For Israel, however, the human and political toll was increasingly costly. SLA morale plummeted, and growing numbers of Israelis questioned a military occupation that still led to the deaths of their soldiers.

Withdrawal of Israel from Lebanon

During his campaign in 1999 for election as Israeli Prime Minister, Ehud Barak, vowed to withdraw Israeli forces from Lebanon by July 2000 (Jerusalem Post, 4 March 1999). He argued that withdrawal would occur in the context of a political agreement with Syria and Lebanon, that would ensure that Israel could leave in an orderly manner and secure its borders, while Syria would not feel that its power base in Lebanon had been undermined. Barak's first step as Prime Minister was to instruct the SLA to pull out of the 36 villages of the Jezzine region of Southern Lebanon, in May 1999 (UNSG's Report 21 July 1999). Following this, Barak announced his government's intention to withdraw unilaterally and unconditionally from Southern Lebanon by July 2000. Israel's impending departure led to the SLA's immediate collapse. By 24 May 2000, all Israeli forces had left southern Lebanon, leaving the UN to

negotiate a demarcation line between Israel and Lebanon, what became known as the *Blue Line* in compliance with UN Resolution 425 (UNSG's Report, 20 June 2000).
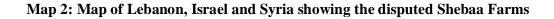
Nevertheless, the establishment of the Blue Line did not end the conflict. On 4 June 2000, the Lebanese Government informed the UN Secretary-General that it considered Israel's withdrawal incomplete so long as Israel remained in a 25-square kilometre area called the Shebaa Farms, which the Lebanese claimed as theirs. Israel's position, and that of the Security Council, was that this area was occupied Syrian territory and thus, within the purview of UNSCR 242 (governing the Israeli-Syrian conflict), not UNSCR 425.[10] This Syrian and Lebanese claim allowed them to maintain that their conflict with Israel was not over. The Lebanese Government therefore refused to deploy its army along the Blue Line and allowed Hezbollah to attack Israeli positions in the Shebaa area. This predictably triggered Israeli counter-attacks. The old practice of tit-for-tat had entered another phase. With Hezbollah fighters and Israeli troops literally facing each other at multiple locations on the border, new rules had to be developed and enforced.
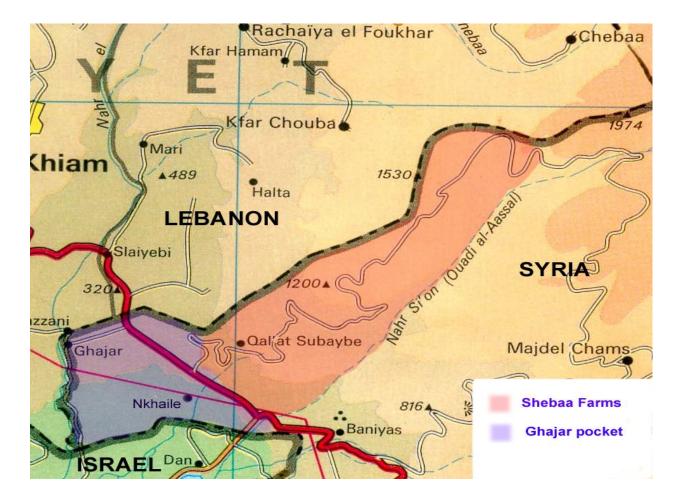
The period immediately following Israel's withdrawal was characterized by verbal rattling and efforts by Hezbollah to test Israel's sincerity of withdrawal. On 24 May 2000, Israeli Foreign Ministry Bulletin stated the Israeli Government's position that: "If, after the withdrawal, terrorism continues, Israel will react forcefully….This reaction will be directed against both the terrorist organizations and those parties (Syria) which extended aid to these organizations."[11] This implied that, Syria might also be a target of retaliatory attacks. On the other hand, Hezbollah Secretary-General, Hassan Nasrallah, warned that Israel could expect "additional defeats and disappointments" as his organization planned to "complete

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[10] The Shab'a Farms are an uninhabited area of 25 square kilometres in the southeast tri-border region, a collection of farms attached to the nearby Lebanese village of Shab'a, formerly cultivated by the village's residents and occupied by Israel during the 1967 war. Lebanon's claim to the area is at best very thin, with both Lebanese and Syrian maps consistently identifying it as Syrian territory: see Appendix B, section A. ICG's position is that Israel should withdraw from the land in question in the context of a negotiated peace with Syria, with its ultimate disposition then being up to Syria and Lebanon.

[11] Israel Foreign Ministry, Information Division, *The Israeli withdrawal from Southern Lebanon: Background Points*, 24 May 2000.

the liberation," if it did not meet their demands. Their demands included withdrawal from the Shab'a Farms, release of all Lebanese prisoners in Israeli jails, and an admission that the conflict transcended Lebanon and was linked to the return of Palestinian refugees.[12]

Map 2: Map of Lebanon, Israel and Syria showing the disputed Shebaa Farms

Source:http://www.nowlebanon.com/Library/Files/MapsAndGraphigs/shebaa.html.

The first serious clashes occurred in early October 2000, when Hezbollah attacked an Israeli position in the Shab'a[13] Farms and kidnapped three soldiers whom it offered to exchange for Lebanese prisoners in Israel. A month later, roadside bombs were detonated in the Shebaa area, killing an Israeli soldier. Though Israel resumed flights into Lebanese airspace, it did not respond to the Hezbollah attacks. It

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[12] Sixteen Lebanese nationals were held in Israel, including Hezbollah leaders Shaykh 'Abd al-Karim 'Ubayd and Mustafa al-Dirani, abducted from Lebanon in 1989 and 1994 respectively. By Amnesty International, Annual Report, "Israel and the Occupied Territories", 2001 & 2002 issues.

[13] Shebaa sometimes referred to as Shab'a

appeared that armed operations would be tolerated if confined to the Shebaa Farms area.[14] However, on 15 October 2000 Hezbollah pushed farther in its search for new ways to challenge Israel. It announced the capture of an Israeli Intelligence Officer, following a security operation (UNIFIL Report, 16 October 2000), and later launched a missile attack on a tank in Shebaa. Israel retaliated by bombing a Syrian radar post 45 kilometres east of Beirut on 16 April 2001. Sporadic Hezbollah attacks and counter attacks by Israel continued until July 2006 when a major war broke out between Hezbollah (Lebanon) and Israel.

Border Tension and the 2006 War

Hezbollah became part of the Lebanese government following successful elections in 2005. According to the UNIFIL report of 24 November 2005, Hezbollah fighters on 21st November 2005, launched an attack along Lebanon's entire border with Israel; the heaviest in the five and a half years since Israel's withdrawal. The barrage was supposed to provide tactical cover for an attempt by a squad of Hezbollah Special Forces to abduct Israeli troops at the Israeli side of the village of Al-Ghajar. The attack failed when an ambush by the IDF Paratroopers killed four Hezbollah members and scattered the rest. The UN Security Council accused Hezbollah of initiating the hostilities (ibid). In late December 2005, Hezbollah attacked the Israeli village of Kiryat Shmona wounding three people. The UN called on the Lebanese Government "to extend its control over all its territory, to exert its monopoly on the use of force, and to put an end to all such attacks" (UNSG's Report, 28 December 2005). The Lebanese government denounced the attack as "aimed at destabilizing security and diverting attention from efforts exerted to solve the internal issues prevailing in the country" (UNSG's Report, 20 December 2005). On 12th July 2006, Hezbollah guerillas crossed into Israel, killed three Israeli soldiers and kidnapped two others, precipitating a war with Israel. The Israeli air force hit Hezbollah positions in the south and strategic targets throughout Lebanon, while Israeli ground forces moved against Hezbollah in Southern Lebanon. Hezbollah resisted the ground attack and fired thousands of rockets at civilian targets in Israel. By the

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[14] That is, if skirmishes occurred only between the Shab'a Farms and, on the Lebanese side of the Blue Line, the adjacent Shab'a village and Kfar Shuba.

time the 33-day war ended, an estimated 1200 Lebanese civilians and hundreds of Hezbollah fighters had died, along with 119 Israeli military forces and 43 Israeli civilians (UNSG's Report, 31 August 2006). UN Security Council Resolution 1701(2006) which ended the war, provided for a ceasefire, Israeli withdrawal and lifting of blockades, disarming of Hezbollah and other militias and a ban on unauthorized weapons transfers into Lebanon. Significantly, UNSCR 1701 further strengthened the mandate of the peacekeeping force in Lebanon and authorized its enlargement from about 2,000 initially to a maximum of 15,000. Bolstered by the UN force, which by the beginning of 2007 had more than 11,000 personnel, the Lebanese Armed Forces deployed to Southern Lebanon and the border with Israel for the first time in almost four decades (Author's Field Notes, 31 January 2007).

The 2006 war temporarily or permanently displaced roughly one-fourth of Lebanon's population, and caused enormous damage to homes, businesses, and infrastructure (ibid). The country, which was already seriously indebted, suffered roughly $5 billion in damages and financial losses (ibid). The international community provided massive humanitarian relief, plus substantial aid for economic reconstruction and reform, with $940 million in aid pledged at a donor's conference in Stockholm, and $7.6 billion in pledges announced at a Paris conference in 2007. The cessation of hostilities after this major war, posed the question: Can renewed conflict in Lebanon be averted?

Preventing Renewed Conflict in Lebanon

UN Security Council Resolution 1701 achieved a surprising degree of consensus. All the relevant parties comprising Israel, Hezbollah and the Lebanese Government, as well as key regional and other international actors accepted the UN Security Council as the arbiter in the conflict. The parties also

agreed for the deployment of Lebanon's Army south of the Litani River, the expansion of UNIFIL with a strengthened mandate in the same area, and the need to build up Lebanese sovereignty over its own territory. The core stumbling blocks to peace in Lebanon were securing the release of abducted Israeli soldiers and ending Hezbollah's armed presence in the south. A UNSC resolution was passed at a time of high tension, and after a sustained and vigorous diplomatic effort. It was widely accepted only because all sides needed a face-saving end to the war. Both Israel and Hezbollah became conscious of the limits of their military power and were reluctant to continue hostilities. Israel had insisted both that it would not stop fighting until its abducted soldiers were returned and Hezbollah was disarmed. However, its appetite for continued confrontation was quenched in the wake of a war, that revived anxiety about the capacity of Lebanon to accept both political and military control over its territory. It therefore chose to invest cautious hope that the presence of international and Lebanese forces in the south would rein in Hezbollah, and that UN mediation would free its abducted soldiers.

Hezbollah's perceived victory in the 2006 war may have emboldened the organization without assessing its performance and constraints it encountered during the war. With over 1,000 civilian deaths in the war, the destruction of thousands of homes and the damage done to basic economic infrastructure, initiating another round of violence would be deeply unpopular with its own constituency, not to mention the country as a whole. The Lebanese Army's deployment to the south for the first time in over three decades and strengthening UNIFIL in the area that had hitherto been a Hezbollah sanctuary, were a major obstacle to any aggressive intentions by Hezbollah. However, based on the prevailing security situation it was a price worth paying to end the fighting, avoid exacerbating domestic tensions and as much as possible, preserve the status quo, including its presence in the south.

The international community and the US in particular, were left with little choice. By allowing the war to rage for weeks, and faced with an increasingly hostile Arab and Muslim public's reaction, the

international community's reputation had been severely damaged. The US in particular, had claimed from the onset of the war that only a solution that dealt with the root of the conflict, that is Hezbollah's armed presence in southern Lebanon, was worth pursuing. In the end, it settled for far less, namely, the presence of the UN and Lebanese forces in the south.

Palestinianization of the Conflict by Hezbollah

Since its establishment in the early 1980s, Hezbollah has defined itself as a staunch opponent of Zionism and the state of Israel. It maintained that "even if Israel withdraws … it will remain an occupier in our eyes and the duty to liberate Palestine will remain incumbent upon us" (Hala, 1997). But as crucial as these aspirations are to Hezbollah, the impossibility of militarily defeating Israel is readily acknowledged. Its leaders have repeatedly stressed that they will embark on a scheme to liberate Jerusalem, only if a range of favourable and unlikely regional circumstances were to prevail. The aim of liberating Palestine, it is believed, may therefore, take generations to fulfill. Accordingly, its armed operations traditionally were concentrated on Israeli troops stationed in South Lebanon. Hezbollah however began to focus its support to the PLO with Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon, re-emphasizing its mission to liberate Palestine. In October 2000, Hezbollah dedicated its first attacks on the Shab'a Farms to "the martyrs of the Al-Aqsa Palestinian uprising," which had broken out a month earlier, and offered to release three Israeli soldiers captured in this raid in exchange for not only Lebanese prisoners in Israel, but all Palestinian detainees. At the annual "Day of Jerusalem" commemoration in 2001, Hezbollah expressed the party's full support for the intifada,[15] justifying suicide attacks against Israeli civilians.

Hezbollah's Palestinian focus appears have been motivated by several factors. In particular, it compensates for the party's virtual loss of the original reasons of its formation - the liberation of

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[15] Intifada is an Arabic word which literally means "shaking off", though it is popularly translated into English as "uprising", "resistance", or "rebellion".

Lebanon from Israeli occupation. Many of its leaders were concerned that without a military dimension, it would lose its special status among Lebanese, and be forced to compete for clients with its Shi'ite rival, Amal. In those circumstances, Hezbollah became eager to retain the unique role it had carved for itself during its confrontation with Israel, when it was uncertain about how to cope with the transition toward a more conventional role on the Lebanese political scene. Hence it thrives on the idea of permanent conflict with Israel.

The focus on Shebaa Farms helped defer questions about Hezbollah's future. As time went on, Shebaa increasingly lost its value. Hence, the resort to other potentially more provocative attacks in the name of Palestinian solidarity. This new strategy includes the enlistment of Palestinian militants as Hezbollah's own proxies. Hezbollah further wanted to show that it was not a sectarian, Shi'ite-only movement, and that it was fighting for Sunni Palestinians, as well. However, insignificant of the support, Hezbollah's "Palestinianization" has added a dangerous dimension to the conflict in southern Lebanon. It may well provoke Israeli retaliatory actions or it may be used to justify such actions. Moreover, Hezbollah's discovery of the Palestinian cause focus of its armed operations, constitutes a serious escalation because it suggests that the organization's strategy goes beyond the Shebaa equation; it threatens to destabilize the current precarious peace.

Impoverished South Lebanon

The absence of any serious economic reconstruction in Southern Lebanon and especially, poor basic socio-economic conditions in border villages and towns helps to keep the conflict going (Author's Field Notes, 2 January 2007). Should the inhabitants enjoy improved socio-economic conditions, it is likely the inhabitants in south Lebanon would lobby against Hezbollah's military operations in their vicinity, to avoid punitive Israeli reprisals and the destruction of socio-economic infrastructure that follows. As

long as the area remains impoverished and largely deserted, Hezbollah and the Israelis have at their disposal a shooting range where they can operate more or less at will. Unfortunately, more than ten years after the Israeli withdrawal, Southern Lebanon still holds very little attraction to those who aspire to return home. Poverty and unemployment are prevalent; and the provision of basic services and entrepreneurial activity is below the national average (ibid).

Principally, the responsibility for the failure to improve socio-economic conditions in Southern Lebanon lies with the inability of the Lebanese government and the international community to initiate sufficient development projects. With consistent annual budget deficits and constant low Gross Domestic Product, the government can hardly afford a major reconstruction program in the south (Author's Field Notes, 2 January 2007). In 2007, the state's Council of the South had been allocated a substantial sum of money which was spent mainly on subsidies for private individuals to rebuild homes (Ibid). Greater involvement of the international community had been seriously hampered by the alleged rampant corruption, and by political rivalries regarding the apportionment of public funds (Ibid). Finally, local municipalities are unable to secure substantial funds from the government, thereby preventing them from carrying out routine socio-economic activities, let alone initiating community development projects (ibid). The government has been criticized for failing to set clear targets, for fighting corruption, and for spending relatively large sums of money on projects of symbolic, as opposed to practical value, such as ceremonially removing bunkers and compounds left by the occupying forces instead of building new roads (ibid).

International donors have been equally reluctant in allocating funds for re-construction. A principal reason lies in the demand made by most Western donors that the Lebanese government should first take full control of the border area, mainly by deploying its army in accordance with UNSC Resolution 425 (Erskine 1989). Furthermore, most European donors limit bilateral development assistance to the

world's poorest countries (Theodor 1993). Since Lebanon is classified as a (low) middle-income country, it is not eligible for substantial aid from international donors. Therefore, the few funds that did reach the south, appear to have had much less impact on the communities in the area than would have been the case with better prioritization, coordination, and enforcement mechanisms to ensure efficiency.

Conclusion

Following the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, Lebanon became home to more than hundred thousand Palestinian refugees who had been expelled from the newly created states of Israel and Jordan. Additional Palestinian refugees moved into Lebanon after the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. Their intention was to attack Israel from Lebanon, which was politically and militarily weak. Palestinian militias of various affiliations began to use southern Lebanon as a launching pad for attacks on Israel. In response, Israeli forces invaded Lebanon in 1978 and 1982, and established a security zone in Southern Lebanon. UN Forces were deployed in Lebanon under UN Security Council Resolution 425 of 1978, to oversee the withdrawal of Israeli forces.

Over the years, it was observed that the UNSC Resolution was not the proper framework for resolving the underlying issues in the Israeli-Lebanese relationship, and it must not be construed as such. The resolution was inherently ambiguous, allowing for different interpretations, offering vague timelines and covering conflicting long-term goals behind similar wording of clauses. For example, strengthening Lebanese sovereignty would mean neutralizing Hezbollah for some, and defence against Israel for others. It did not address Lebanon's domestic political situation. It placed disproportionate emphasis on the question of Hezbollah and offered nothing to the other parties (Syria and Iran) that had considerable interest and the means to obstruct any peace effort. Like its predecessor, Security Council Resolution 1559 (2004), Resolution 1701 unwisely seeks to internationalize the issue of armed Hezbollah without regionalizing the solution like addressing the broader Arab-Israeli conflict or the growing US-Iranian

differences. The continuous attack by Hezbollah on Israel, led to a major war with Israel in July 2006, which led to massive destruction and loss of lives. The UN Security Council passed Resolution 1701 with the deployment of additional UN forces as part of the peace efforts in Lebanon. It is in line with this that further research will be carried out on the UN peacekeeping activities in Lebanon with specific attention to the role that the GAF played to help resolve the conflict.

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