

Lebanon: Cedar revolution, Summer War and state building

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In the summer of 2006 war was waged between Israel and Hezbollah, mainly on Lebanese territory. Most of the victims were coming from the population of that country. However, the state of Lebanon and its government were conspicuously absent. The conflict was one between the state of Israel and Hezbollah, a so-called non-state actor, an organisation with a politico-societal character and armed militias. Where was the Lebanese government? What was the reason for its apparent absence of the monopoly on the use of violence? Is Lebanon a fragile or a failing state? What is the role of Hezbollah in this? These are the questions which will be addressed in the present contribution.

As the article will show, it is indeed justified to call the Lebanese government fragile. Since its independence in 1943 numerous crises and conflicts have hampered the functioning of its political system. In 2006 – the year of the Summer War – the country was deeply involved in a process of state building after the Syrian troops had left Lebanon after a twenty-year occupation. There was talk of a Cedar Revolution and it attracted much international attention. A positive outcome of that process would project the unique position of Lebanon in the Middle East as a democratic, multi-religious country with a relatively generous freedom of speech, freedom of association and of artistic expression. Precisely in that period war broke out.

There are several explanations for the vulnerability of the Lebanese state system, which some view as springing from the opposition between Christian, Sunni, Shiite and Druze factions. Others see it as a political difference between those who stress the Arabic character of the country and advocates of close ties with Syria and Iran. A third explanation distinguishes between a moderate, democratic and pro-western camp, on the one hand, and a radical, authoritarian and Islamic camp, on the other. Finally, Lebanon is a side stage of the Israeli-Palestine problem, with all the consequences thereof for internal relations.

This article deals with state building in Lebanon and it focuses in particular on the role of religion because, as the course of the article will show, the membership of religious communities is relevant in Lebanese political relations. First, the concept of state

building will be dwelled on briefly, followed by an historical survey. The subsequent section will present a description of the communities exerting an influence on identity and state building in Lebanon, and will provide an insight into the constitutional and political system of the country. After this, the attention will be on international factors that have an impact on the internal relations, in particular the Summer War of 2006. Finally, an attempt will be made to assess the chances of successful state building in Lebanon in the period after 2006.

The article will attempt to discern relevant tendencies in the development of social phenomena and to show how they may be related. The author's ambition is to first understand this situation. Understanding is important, in view of the tensions and the rising distrust about and among the different religions.

The plea has been made before: "Comprehending the experiences, values, psychological anchors, broken moorings, soaring pride and debilitating fears of the 'other' is where accommodation begins."² Lebanon is worth a thorough study. In an age of Muslim radicals and moderates, of clashing civilisations and failing and fragile states there is every reason to study a country like Lebanon closer. Success or failure of the process of state building in this country, moreover, has consequences for national as well as international security.

State building

First-hand experience with and know-how on peace operations, reconstruction and state building is growing. Several approaches have been developed to view the failing of states and state building. In the first place, there is the international law approach. Here, a state is seen as an institution with a territory, a population and sovereignty. Any functioning government must have the power to make its authority felt over the territory and its population, to take those measures which are deemed beneficial for its inhabitants, and be free from interference by other states in its internal affairs.³

Secondly, there is also a politico-scientific approach of state building, in which not so much the exterior characteristics of a state are studied, but its inner features. According to Fukuyama, the ability to guarantee safety is one of the central functions of the state. It is in this that its fundamental and unique role appears.⁴ In case of a failing state the opposite is happening. When a state is in danger of failing, it is called fragile. In a recent study of the Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid - Advisory Council on

Government Policy (WRR) - failing states are characterised by the absence of a 'consolidated central power', a functioning legal system and good governance, and, apart from that, poverty. Finally, according to WRR, a failing state runs a great risk of the distrust between the various ethnic groups leading to an outbreak of conflicts.⁵

This latter element refers to a third approach, which stresses the relations between the ethnic groups within a state. They, too, are relevant for state building. The American *Fund for Peace* issues its annual *Failed States Index*, in which, apart from political indicators, it uses social and economic indicators to ascertain whether the state is in danger of failing. Some of these indicators are directly or indirectly related to the relations between ethnic groups.⁶ Among them are demographic developments, problems with refugees or displaced persons or dissatisfaction among groups in the society. With regard to economic indicators, the *Fund for Peace* refers to unbalanced economic development or economic deterioration, which run parallel to group boundaries. Political indicators are, among others, a weakening legitimacy of state institutions, violations of human rights, forming of factions among elites and interventions by other states or by external political actors in internal affairs.⁷

The present article pays attention to several of the above-mentioned elements in Lebanon: the ability of the government to guarantee safety for its inhabitants, the effectiveness of government power in the entire territory and the relations between the various ethnic groups. Such relations can be tense in a country, and there may even be violent conflicts, in which frequently, identity, be it cultural, linguistic, religious or other, plays a major role. There are also other loyalties, such as that of clan, economic position, ideology, financial interests and international networks. State building, the search for common values, the forming of social cohesion: dealing with the characteristics of the identity of ethnic groups has everything to do with them. In brief, state building can be defined as a political and societal process directed at a functioning legal system and good governance, fighting poverty and distrust between ethnic groups. On top of that, in Lebanon, religion is seen as a factor of significance for the political system, as will be made clear below. But first an historical and political survey will be given.

Historical background

For over 500 years the areas that constitute the present-day Lebanon made up part of the former Ottoman Empire. This was a vast multinational empire, dominated by a Sunni and Turkish dynasty, in which room for political or religious individuality was limited. Apart from the Sunnis, there were also other religious communities in the region:

Alevites, Christians, Druze and Shiite. Societies were primarily organised in clans led by a patriarch, who provided safety and prosperity to the clan members in exchange of their loyalty. Two communities were dominant in the central area of the present-day Lebanon, the so-called Mount Lebanon: Maronites and Druze. Intra-clan cohesion was strengthened by their religions that set them apart from the other clans. The Maronites had religious and commercial ties with European countries, such as France.

In the nineteenth century trade relations between Lebanon and Europe began to intensify, while simultaneously the Ottoman Empire was going into decline. In 1861 civil war broke out between the Maronites and Druze, and France, which, according to Salibi, saw itself as the protector of the former, landed troops in Lebanon.⁸ Eventually, the Ottoman Sultan had to recognise the autonomy of Mount Lebanon. A Christian governor was installed and the autonomy was protected by the large European powers. After World War I the Ottoman Empire was dismantled, and the entire region, encompassing the present-day Lebanon and Syria, became a French Mandate area under the League of Nations.

France expanded the central area of Lebanon to the present-day Lebanon and separated it administratively from Syria. In 1926 the French monitored the drafting of a first constitution. By creating the separate state of Lebanon, the French mainly had the protection of the position of the Christians, in particular the Maronites, in mind. With French help the latter were enabled to dominate the fledgling state politically, the Christians making up about half of the population at the time. Economically, Beirut became a centre of commerce and services. In comparison with the rest of the Middle East, Lebanon saw the rise of a strong middle class consisting of Christians as well as Sunnis.

In 1943 the Lebanese political leadership declared the country independent. An oral agreement was concluded - the National Pact – in which the key positions in the state system were divided between Muslims and Christians, giving religious identity political relevance. Christians retained their dominant position in the state institutions, with the Maronites controlling politics and the armed forces. The Sunday became the official holiday. In the parliament seats were assigned to Christians and Muslims in a proportion of six to five, a ratio which did not reflect the composition of the population. The last census had been held in 1932, but since then nobody had ventured an attempt to ascertain how large the size of the various religions in Lebanon really was.

The National Pact, however, could not prevent Lebanese politics from becoming infested with political instability and frequent violent conflicts once the country had gained independence. The main political bone of contention was that between the Arabic nationalists, mainly Sunni, striving for a political union with Syria, on the one hand, and the Maronite Christians, who stressed the special character of Lebanon and who sought stronger ties with the west, on the other. For the Arabic nationalists Lebanon's past had always been tied up with the history of Syria, and eventually with Arabic history as a whole. They were supported in this by the Syrian government. The Shiite minority in Lebanon constituted the poorest and least developed segment of the population and remained under-represented in public life. Although Shiites viewed themselves as Arabs, they felt more affinity with their Shiite fellow-believers in Persia/Iran than with the Lebanese Sunni. Under a thin veneer of democracy lay a basis of tribal and religious oppositions. It was in essence a clan society, with a strong patriarch at the head. Religious identity served as a binder within the clan and as a distinguishing feature vis a vis other families.

Soon after its independence Lebanon got involved in international conflicts. 1948 saw the establishment of the state of Israel, with hundreds of thousands of Palestinians fleeing to the neighbouring countries, including Lebanon. In the sixties these refugees began to organise themselves into the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO), which began to use bases in Lebanon from which to launch attacks on Israeli territory. The tensions this brought along in Lebanon itself formed one of the causes of the civil war that broke out in 1975, which was to last until 1990 with varying degrees of intensity.

This civil war began as a conflict between two factions. On the one hand, there was the Leftist Alliance, consisting of Druze, Sunni and the PLO. Opposing them was the group which was called 'right', the Maronite Christians, organised in the Falangist Party, the Kataeb. All groups had their own armed militias. In 1978 the Syrian army, with the approval of the Arab League, intervened to stabilise the situation and to prevent the Left Alliance from gaining victory. In the same year Israel invaded Lebanon from the south in order to drive the PLO out. The United States sent a peace force to Lebanon – UNIFIL (*United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon*) in which also Dutch soldiers took part. The peace force proved unable to bring an end to the hostilities.

In 1982 the Israeli ambassador in London was assassinated, which was a reason for Israel to occupy the south of Lebanon. Upon this, the PLO was forced to leave the country. Israel's hope was to establish a Christian vassal state in the south which would serve its interests.⁹ Christian militias there organised themselves in the so-called South Lebanese Army, which was armed and trained by Israel. In September 1982, under the

eyes of the Israeli, Christian militias massacred between 1,000 and 2,000 Palestinians in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps. Soon after this, a multi-national force, consisting of Americans, Italians and French, landed in Beirut. In late 1983 more than 300 American and French military were killed in a series of suicide attacks. According to Norton, there is little doubt that these attacks were carried out by Lebanese Shiites under Iranian leadership.¹⁰ Shortly after this the western troops were pulled out again. In the south, Shiite communities, organised in the radical Islamic organisation Hezbollah, had begun to resist the Israeli occupation. In 1985 Israel withdrew to a 10-mile wide buffer zone along the border.

The civil war flared up again in 1988, pushing Arabic governments to come into action and force a solution by bringing Lebanese politicians together in the city of Taef in Saudi Arabia. A new peace agreement was concluded and a new president elected. This Taef Peace Agreement redefined the power relations between the three main religious groups in Lebanon. A complex electoral system was set up, combining a constituency system with assigned seats for every religious community. Syria was to politically and militarily monitor law and order in Lebanon. In 1990 the civil war came to an end, having cost the lives of 150,000 Lebanese, with 17,000 people missing. The book of the war was quickly closed. There was no public process of dealing with the suffering of all those years of civil strife or attempts to reconcile the former warring factions

Supported by Saudi Arabia and Syria, Rafiq Hariri became prime minister, a post which he held from 1992 to 1998 and between 2000 and 2004. Hariri had made his fortune in oil and had excellent ties with the Saudi royal family. His government tried to strengthen the relations with western countries. In the nineteen-nineties Israel kept occupying the south of Lebanon, while Syria controlled the rest of the country. In 2000, Israel withdrew from Lebanon. The Syrian occupation was underlined in 1991 with an *Agreement of Friendship, Cooperation and Coordination*, which was interpreted by Syria as a license for an intensive interference with Lebanese internal politics. Police, judiciary and intelligence services were infiltrated by Syrian agents, and like Iran, Syria supported and armed Hezbollah.

But Damascus overreached itself when it tried to force the Lebanese parliament into extending by three years the constitutional term for pro-Syrian president Lahoud. Hariri put together an anti-Syrian coalition. On 14 February 2005, in the run-up to the parliamentary elections, Hariri was assassinated. There were rumours that Syria had been involved. During a large anti-Syrian demonstration on 14 March more than a million people showed up - a quarter of the total population of Lebanon. The pressure was

so great that within a month the Syrian troops withdrew from Lebanon. The parties which had organised the demonstration joined forces in what they called the 14 March Coalition. They won the elections and the new cabinet was led by Prime Minister Fouad Siniora.

The civil war had devastated the economy. The level of the Gross Domestic Product in 1990 was half that of 1975. The war had brought illegal arms trade, drugs trafficking and an extensive black market. The nineteen-nineties, however, were a period of relative political stability, which gave the country the opportunity to recover its economy and to develop itself. The economy was supported by commerce, tourism, agricultural and financial services. Lebanon became the financial centre of the Middle East. The large-scale reconstruction projects were financed by loans, which caused the national debt to rise. The wealth was concentrated in the Sunni and Christian families in and around Beirut, whereas the rest of the country and the Shiite Lebanese did not keep up with the growth in prosperity.

The role of clans and religious communities

The inhabitants of Lebanon derive their identity in the first place from their family and clan, their religious identity and only in the last instance from the national community. As the dividing lines between different clans and different religious communities generally coincide, there are also strong cultural differences. Over the years a regional concentration of clans and religious communities has taken place; in regions, villages, and residential areas. The various religious communities also have their own distinctive media, each presenting a slanted picture of what is happening in the country. There is only a weakly developed national sense of community in Lebanon.

Religious identity is officially recognised in the political system and political consequences ensue from this. The law categorises every citizen into one of the religious communities, and this gives everyone two identities: a national and a religious one. Moreover, every religious community has authorities in the area of religious and family law within the confines of the community, such as matrimonial and inheritance law. The religious communities have their own courts for this, which are recognised as forming a part of the judiciary. This gives Sunnis and Shiites legal space for their own interpretation of the *sharia*.

It is extremely hard to get access to reliable numerical data on the size of the various religious communities in Lebanon. As was said before, the last official census was held in 1932. According to the latest figures of the Institut du Monde Arabe in Paris, some 60 per cent of the 4.1 million inhabitants can be called Islamic. The institute states that the largest communities are the Shiites (32 per cent), Sunnis (21 per cent) and Druze (7 per cent). Around 40 per cent of the population is Christian. The numbers of followers of the largest denominations within that category are as follows: Maronite (25 per cent), Greek Orthodox (7 per cent), Greek Catholic (5 per cent) and Armenian (4 per cent).¹¹ Of the 400,000 Palestinian refugees living in Lebanon 90 per cent are Sunni Muslim and 10 per cent are Christian. In what follows, a brief description is given of the most important religious communities.

Sunni Muslims in Lebanon had always entertained close ties with the ruling Ottomans. They were economically active as traders and merchants on the Mediterranean coast. Nowadays they are concentrated in the cities of Beirut, Sidon and Tripoli. From a political perspective the Sunni Muslims mainly support the Future Movement, Saad Hariri's party. In these circles there are many worries about the emergence of Hezbollah and the Shiite Islam, a concern which is shared internationally by countries such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Jordan. Some parliamentarians of the Future Movement are rumoured to have ties with violent Sunni organisations which are building up armed militias under the guise of private security companies.¹²

Shiite Muslims distinguish themselves from Sunnis by the importance they attribute to the authority of the clergy – imams. During the Ottoman Empire they were considered second-rank citizens by the Sunni Muslims. They have traditionally maintained strong theological and familial ties with Iranian Shiites. The religious leader, Iranian born Sayyed Musa al-Sadr, was the first to strive for political emancipation and spiritual and material welfare of the Shiite community. On the one hand, this entailed a return to the origins of their religion, and, on the other, the build-up of their own social organisations. In the early seventies he established Amal, a resistance movement and political party for Shiites. Later Sayyed Mohammed Hussein Fadlallah became the leading religious leader within the Shiite community.

Important impulses for the emancipation of the Shiite community were the seizing of power in Iran by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini in 1979, and Israel's actions in southern Lebanon. Iran was transformed into an Islamic republic, based on Islamic law. Politics in this country came to be controlled by the religious authorities. In the years following, Hezbollah was to expand into the most influential and talked-about, but also the most radical Shiite organisation in Lebanon. According to the International Crisis Group

(ICG) the support among Shiites for Hezbollah is solid and the latter hold a strong grip on the Shiite community.¹³ It is mainly concentrated in southern Lebanon, the Bekaa Valley and the slums of South Beirut.

Over the past decades a new activism has emerged within Islam, spawning different movements and different degrees of radicalism. It is important to distinguish between radical-Islamic groups that strive for peaceful change and those radicals who are prepared to use violence to reach their objectives. Examples of the latter are Al-Qaida, Hamas and Fatah al-Islam. What binds most of them, however, is the return to the religious doctrines and practices of the early years of Islam. Radical Islamic organisations often spring from a discontent with the authoritarian and corrupt regimes, which abound in many countries in the Islamic and Arab world. In this respect, they are in line with a broadly-shared wish among the masses of these countries. Many of the radical-Islamic organisations have taken over tasks that were neglected by their governments, such as social security, health care, housing or education.

The relations between radical Sunni and radical Shiite organisations are complex. On a theological level there are fundamental differences and animosities, with a lot of mutual distrust between Shiite and Sunni Muslims. On a more practical level both camps are united in their struggle against the state of Israel and its ally the United States. Radical Islamic circles fight their struggle against Israel because of the eviction of the Palestinian Arabs from their homeland. Besides, they use religious arguments to the effect that the Jewish state was established on soil which Muslims consider sacred. Hezbollah declared its solidarity with the cause of Hamas, the radical organisation that rules in the Gaza strip and which shares with Hezbollah the ideal of the annihilation of the state of Israel.¹⁴ In spite of their theological differences, Hezbollah is admired by many extremist Sunnis as Israel's most important foe.

Founded in the eleventh century, the Druze, with their strongly mystical profession of faith, belong to the Shiite branch of the Islam. Their teachings had deviated so far from the other more accepted forms of Islam that they kept their religion secret. And even today, the Druze still form a closed community, within which a distinction is made between a minority of 'initiates', who have access to the holy scriptures and who produce the religious leaders, and a large majority of common believers, who produce the political leaders. They live in concentrations in the Shouf Mountains and in Syria. Orthodox Muslims consider Druze as heretics.

The Christians in Lebanon form a heterogeneous group. The Maronite Church finds its roots in the fifth century. Later it joined in with the Roman Catholic Church. It derives

its name from a Syrian monk, Saint Maron. The Maronites have always maintained close religious, cultural and commercial contacts with Europe. Then, there is the Armenian Church. The members of this community are descendants of the Armenians who fled Turkish persecution and genocide during World War I. A third community is the Greek Orthodox Church. Over the years the members of this church have always had better relations with the Sunni than with the Maronite community. During the civil war they sided with the Leftist Alliance.

Maronites and Druze formed close-knit clans in which tribal cohesion was strengthened by the religious institutions and customs; in the case of the Maronites this was the church, and, among the Druze, the councils of initiates. According to Salibi, the religious institutions were the depositories of the history of the clan.¹⁵ The patriarch of the Maronite Church Mar Nasrallah Sfeir, strives for a greater unity among the Christians in Lebanon. In 2001 he visited the Druze community in Mukhtara in the Sjouf Mountains, the tribal area of the Jumblatt clan, as a token of reconciliation between Maronites and Druze.

Political power in Lebanon is related to religious identity in accordance with the above-mentioned agreements. In this respect, it is significant that the relative number of Christians in the Lebanon is decreasing. For decades Christians have emigrated from Lebanon to France, the United States and Brazil. By now there is a world-wide Lebanese community outside Lebanon of between 5 and 10 million people and the majority of them are Christians. The fastest growing community, in absolute and relative terms, in Lebanon is that of the Shiites.

The political system

Religious diversification in Lebanon is politically accommodated through the assignment of political functions to the most important religious communities. The 1989 Taef Peace Agreement laid down that the president is always a Maronite Christian, the prime minister a Sunni Muslim and the Speaker of Parliament, the National assembly, a Shiite Muslim. All religious communities are represented proportionally in the higher public offices. The commander-in-chief of the armed forces, for instance, is a Christian. The system has a built-in right of veto for the president and the prime minister. The right of veto of the Speaker of the parliament is limited in that it depends on the majority in the National Assembly.

The National Assembly encompasses a single chamber with 128 MPs, elected for four years. Half of the seats have been assigned to Christians, the other half to Muslims. Within this main division the Maronite get 34 seats, the Greek Orthodox 14, Greek Catholics 8, Armenian Orthodox 5, Armenian Catholics 1, Protestants 1, and other Christians 1. Within the Muslim segment 27 seats are assigned to Sunnis, 27 to Shiites, 8 to Druze and 2 to Alevites. Elections are held on the basis of a district system with multiple seats per districts. Every seat is earmarked for the religious group it is assigned to. The voter has as many votes as there are eligible seats in his district. The winner in a district takes all, regardless of the actual number of votes. The intricate electoral system is liable to manipulation, amongst others with the size of the electoral districts. It invites electoral alliances prior to the elections, usually between the Christian parties and candidates, on the one hand, and the Sunni or Shiite parties on the other.

The political position of the Christians in Lebanon has deteriorated as a result of the Taef Peace Agreement. The president got less authority and the numerical proportion in the parliament changed. Instead of 40:60, the proportion between Christians and Muslims became 50:50. At the same time the electoral system invites party formation on the basis of religion. The political parties in Lebanon do not really base themselves on a political philosophy or political programme. They are rather a reflection of the patronage groups around the 'zaim', the patriarchs and their supporters in a certain region. Examples of this are the Chamoun, Gemayel, Karim and Jumblatt families.¹⁶ Such families or clans form the nuclei of networks of solidarity and loyalty. Political leaders are more focussed on guarding the interests of the clan than that of the commonwealth, if need be at the expense of other communities, and if the situation demands, with help from abroad.¹⁷ During the civil war all the clans had their own armed militias. The system of patronage has led to nepotism, corruption and illegal trade. Political ambition is limited to those public offices that have been assigned to a religious community. Thus, a Shiite politician cannot aim for a higher public office than that of Speaker of Parliament.

In the 2005 elections three major blocs emerged. The first was the 14 March List, the coalition that supported Rafiq Hariri, consisting of: *Tayyar al-Moustaqbal*, the Future Movement, the largest party in the coalition, led by Saad Hariri, representing the Sunnis; the Progressive Socialist Party, led by Walid Jumblatt, the Druze Party; the Lebanese Forces, the Maronite party, led by Samir Gemayel. The second was the Development and Resistance Bloc, consisting of the Shiite Amal, led by Nahib Berry, the Shiite Hezbollah, led by Hassan Nasrallah and the Syrian Social Nationalist Party. Finally, there was the Change and Reform Bloc, consisting of the Christian Free Patriotic Movement, led by Michel Aoun and a few smaller parties.¹⁸

After the civil war Syria dominated the political scene in Lebanon. Many Christian leaders went into exile or were incarcerated. After Syria's withdrawal from Lebanon in 2005 these leaders returned to the political stage. They became divided into two camps. In the one, the Lebanese Forces and the Falangists joined the 14 March Coalition, under the leadership of Saad Hariri, which worked towards a restoration of the independence of Lebanon with regard to Syria. On the other side, the Free Patriotic Movement of general Aoun went into opposition and joined the Hezbollah camp. It was Aoun's intention to politically unite the Christian community and to fight the corrupt establishment.

At the time this article was written, the Future Movement was the most important Sunni political party. Their leader is Saad Hariri, son of Rafiq Hariri, assassinated in 2005. According to Abdel Latif, the Sunnis have the feeling that their group is coming under increasing pressure, stemming from the murder of Hariri and the rise of the Shiite Hezbollah. Extremist Sunni elements get enough leeway to express freely their anti-Shiite sentiments, with which the Movement of the Future is trying to win the support of the Sunni community.¹⁹

The older of the two Shiite parties in the Lebanese parliament is Amal (Arabic for 'hope'). It was established in 1947 and in the second half of the civil war it got entangled in a fierce competition with the other Shiite party, Hezbollah (Arabic for 'the Party of God'). Since 1979 Nabih Berri has been the political leader of Amal. He and his party have become deeply involved in the political culture of patronage and corruption, which is a common feature of most other parties. At the time of writing of this article, Berri is Speaker of the Lebanese parliament, a function that is predetermined for representatives of the Shiite community.

Hezbollah is the other Shiite political party. Amal and Hezbollah are represented with roughly the same number of seats in the parliament. Apart from being a political party, Hezbollah is also a social organisation which has set up an extensive network of social services, education, media and health care for the Shiite community, whose interests had been neglected by the Lebanese government. Hezbollah stays away from the customary corruption and nepotism. Its leader, Hassan Nasrallah, is one of the most influential and popular political leaders in Lebanon. Hezbollah adheres to the teaching of the *wilayat al-faqih*, which means it acknowledges the authority of the highest religious leader in Iran, even though in practice it takes independent decisions.²⁰ Iran has given Hezbollah military and financial support since its establishment.

According to Shatz, Hezbollah's ideology is a blending of revolutionary Khomeinism, Shiite nationalism, glorification of martyrdom and a militant anti-Zionism which from time to time is accompanied by a blatant, neo-fascist anti-Semitism. Alagha describes how Ahmed Qasir, Hezbollah's first suicide terrorist, blew himself up on 11 November 1982 in the Israeli Headquarters, killing 76 Israeli servicemen.²¹ The long-term goal of Hezbollah is the establishment of an Islamic republic in Lebanon and the annihilation of the state of Israel.²²

Hezbollah sees Israel as the 'rapist, destroyer, terrorist cancerous entity which has absolutely no legitimacy or legal status'. For Hezbollah there are no innocent civilians inside the state of Israel, but only Zionists that must be destroyed. The perpetrators of suicide attacks against Israeli targets may be considered martyrs. The organisation seeks the dismantlement of the state of Israel and the repatriation of all the Jews who emigrated to the then Palestine and Israel after 1916.²³ Hezbollah is viewed by many, including the Dutch government, as a terrorist organisation. Within the EU there is no consensus on this issue. The British government, for instance, distinguishes between a political and a military branch and has added the latter to its list of terrorist organisations. The Dutch government does not make that distinction.²⁴

One of the strategic objectives of Hezbollah is the establishment of an Islamic state in Lebanon. According to the ICG, Hezbollah is aware that installing sharia rule by force will lead to war between the religious communities. Besides, Hezbollah seeks the political support of all Shiites and therefore has to steer a moderate course. Nevertheless, the ICG does not exclude the possibility that Hezbollah will choose a more radical stance in a situation of more polarisation.²⁵ Political leader Nasrallah has stated that an Islamic state will only be established in Lebanon if there is an overwhelming wish of the population to do so. That wish would have to be expressed by a large majority and not just 50 per cent plus one. That majority Nasrallah did not see at that moment, and he did not expect that it would ever come.²⁶ According to Alagha and Shatz, Hezbollah seems to have adopted a more pragmatic stance in the Lebanese political system. Hezbollah seeks alliances with other – even Christian – parties and does not seem to be involved anymore in terrorist attacks against western or Lebanese targets.²⁷

The main function of political parties in Lebanon is to represent the interests of the clans or religious communities. For none of the parties, except Hezbollah, does the religious foundation inspire a specific political doctrine. In fact, Lebanon can be compared to a confederation in which the religious communities are the supporting partners and in which each has a right of veto to an extent. The political system can only function when the political leaders of the Christian, Sunni and Shiite communities are prepared

to cooperate. It is also clear that apart from the division in clans and religious communities, there is another dividing line in the country's politics, i.e. the choice for or against a special relation with Syria. International relations, too, have an impact on the developments, as will be seen in the next section.

International involvement

There are many examples of foreign interference in the internal affairs of Lebanon: western interests and religious ties with Lebanese Christians, Syrian disgruntlement about the existence of Lebanon as an independent state, the foundation of the state of Israel and the Palestinian problem, the Islamic Revolution in Iran and Islamist fundamentalism. They all have consequences for the integrity and strength of the state of Lebanon, to which the 2006 Summer War added its share. Here, the western interest in Lebanon, the involvement of the United Nations, Syria's interference, the spill-over of the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, and, finally, the Summer War itself, will be discussed.

Western interest in Lebanon was mainly inspired by a special relation that was felt with the Maronite community in the country. It was based on religious affinity and commercial interests. Cultural relations go back as far as 1866 when the Americans opened a College that was later to become the American University of Beirut. In 1874 France founded the Saint Joseph University. Compared with the rest of the Arabic world, Lebanon is a free and democratic country. Besides, there is a large Christian majority, a fact which made western governments follow developments there with special interest.

In 1958 American troops landed in Beirut to support the then pro-western Lebanese government in a conflict with Pan-Arab nationalists. It was possible to work out a compromise, upon which the Americans withdrew. During the civil war (1975-1990) American, French and Italian militaries intervened again, albeit briefly. They became victims themselves of attacks and were not able to bring the hostilities to a close. After the attacks on New York and Washington in September 2001 the United States and its allies declared war on terrorism. Lebanon has become a front in that war. When the United States had ousted Saddam Hussein from Iraq within a few weeks, other tyrannical governments in the Middle East began to feel uncomfortable. At the same time Rafiq Hariri's government strengthened its relations with the United States and France. After the assassination of Hariri the 14 March Coalition received support from both countries, as well as from the Saudi royal family and the League of Arab States. America aided the Lebanese government by pledging \$250 million to shore up the armed forces. But in

the war against terrorism which, has been waged since 11 September 2001, Israel is the United States' most important ally in the Middle East.

The United States and France are striving for an involvement of the United Nations in Lebanon. In 1978 The United Nations deployed the UNIFIL peace force in Lebanon with the assignment to monitor the withdrawal of the Israeli troops, to restore peace and security and to assist the government of Lebanon in establishing its legitimate authority over the south of the country. From 1978 until 2006 UN troops were stationed right in the middle of the volatile south of Lebanon. They witnessed armed conflicts between the PLO, the Maronite South Lebanese Army, Hezbollah and Israel. UNIFIL was able to observe and help the local population, but, as was stated above, was powerless to end the hostilities.

More recently, the United Nations Security Council has passed successive resolutions with regard to the security in Lebanon. Resolution 1559 (2004) called for the withdrawal of all foreign troops, the disbandment and disarmament of all militias, and the establishment of the authority of the government over the entire Lebanese territory. This was an implicit hint that Syrian troops had to withdraw from Lebanon and that Hezbollah and the Palestinian factions that were still inside the country had to disarm. Security Council Resolutions 1614 (2005), 1655 (2006), 1701 (2006) and 1773 (2007) all reiterated the call upon the Lebanese government to extend its authority over the south of the country and to deploy its armed forces there.

In Resolution 1595 (2005) the United Nations Security Council condemned the murder of Rafiq Hariri and decided on the installation of an independent international investigation commission to assist the Lebanese authorities in the investigation into all aspects of what the Security Council called "this terrorist act". This was reiterated more forcefully in Resolution 1636 (2005), which stated that terrorism in all forms and manifestations constituted one of the worst threats for peace and security. This qualification placed the assassination of Hariri in the context of the war against terrorism. The Resolution – under Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter – called Syria by name in relation to the obligation to cooperate with the investigation commission. Resolution 1757 (2007) decided on the installation of a Special UN Tribunal for Lebanon, which was to carry on the work done by the investigation commission.

The Security Council resolutions relating to the investigation into the assassination of Hariri had a strong impact on the internal political climate in Lebanon. As was said above, Lebanese politics are strongly divided over the influence of Syria on the internal affairs. An international condemnation of Syria as the instigator of the murder of Hariri

would inevitably mean support for the 14 March Coalition. Secondly, the installation of the international investigation commission and later the UN Tribunal is a sign that the international community realises that the Lebanese government is not capable of successfully conducting an investigation into the murder and staging a fair trial and incarcerating the perpetrators.

Syria interferes intensively with the internal affairs in Lebanon. As was mentioned above, the country was created as a political entity by France. After the end of the civil war in 1990 Lebanon came in Syria's sphere of influence. The Syrian dictator Hafez al-Assad died in 2000 and was succeeded by his son Bashar al-Assad, who has a somewhat more tenuous hold of power than his father. According to Bilal Saab of the Brookings Institute, Assad's regime is involved in a continuous struggle for survival. If it loses its grip on Lebanon and if the anti-Syrian opposition becomes stronger, the internal Syrian opposition will also gain strength and the survival of the Damascus regime will be endangered.²⁸ This is the reason why Damascus tried to destabilise the Siniora government. Since the withdrawal of the Syrian troops from Lebanon this has mainly been attempted through clandestine operations. Syria was suspected of involvement in the murder of Rafiq Hariri, a claim which is very difficult to prove. In the meantime, the relations between Lebanon and Syria have normalised, with Syria accepting Lebanon as an independent state and both countries having exchanged ambassadors.

Lebanon serves as a front for many Arab nationalists in the struggle with Israel. In Lebanon there are still 400,000 Palestinian refugees, divided over 12 camps under the auspices of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA). This comes down to 10 per cent of the Lebanese population. According to a 1969 agreement, the Lebanese government has no jurisdiction inside the camps, which are impoverished and over-populated, with an unemployment running as high as 70 per cent of the population. There are particularly few prospects for the future and the camps are hotbeds of radical organisations.

Among them was Fatah al-Islam, a radical Sunni group which had its basis in the Palestinian refugee camp Nahr al-Bared near Tripoli. In September 2007 hostilities broke out between the Lebanese army and Fatah al-Islam. The conflict erupted when the Lebanese police were investigating a bank robbery and stumbled upon this organisation. According to a Reuters report, in a large-scale operation the army shelled the camp, killing 222 militant Palestinians, 163 Lebanese soldiers and 42 civilians.²⁹ The PLO denied any involvement. Fatah al-Islam is a relatively recent phenomenon: a radical Sunni Palestine organisation, supposed to have ties with Al-Qaida, which is believed to have strengthened its presence in the refugee camps during the Summer War. This organisa-

tion is thought to be active in the refugee camp Aïn Héloué, in Sunni territory in the Bekaa Valley and in certain impoverished residential areas of Beirut.³⁰

The Israeli interventions in Lebanon in the nineteen-seventies and eighties were inspired by the urge to take action against the PLO, which was conducting attacks on targets inside Israel from Lebanon. In the nineteen-nineties and the early twenty-first century it moved against Hezbollah for the same reason. After the Yom Kippur War of 1973 Lebanon was the only country from which attacks on Israel were conducted, and they came from the PLO. Israel reacted in 1978 and 1982 with an invasion of Lebanon. The second time the Israeli troops pushed as far as Beirut. They left the city again, but stayed in the south, where they supported a Christian rump state that was to serve Israel's interests. The integrity of the state of Lebanon came second.³¹ In 2000 Israel withdrew from Lebanon.

This was the beginning of the discussion on the so-called *Sheba Farms*, an area of 22 square kilometers between Lebanon and the Golan Heights. According to the United Nations, this bit of land is a part of the Golan Heights occupied by Israel, and, therefore, Syrian territory, so in the vision of the United Nations, Israel has fully withdrawn from Lebanon.³² Hezbollah claims that the area belongs to Lebanon and that its fight against Israel must be continued. Syria deems it opportune not to resolve this question and has informed the United Nations that *Sheba Farms* is indeed Lebanese territory and therefore still needs to be 'liberated'.

Hezbollah used the years after the withdrawal of the Israeli military from southern Lebanon to build up its arms arsenal and to prepare positions for possible attacks on Israel. The Summer War began on 12 July 2006 after a raid by Hezbollah during which several Israeli soldiers were taken prisoner. Initially, Israel responded with air raids against the rocket and guided weapons systems of Hezbollah. Then a ground offensive followed, during which large-scale devastation was wrought upon Lebanon by the destruction of houses, buildings and infra-structure. Jerusalem wanted to give off a signal to the Lebanese government that the latter was accountable for the actions of Hezbollah, as it operated from Lebanese territory. According to Norton, the Israeli policy was directed at punishing Lebanese civilians for the attacks of Hezbollah on Israeli soil.³³

In its turn, Hezbollah attacked targets in northern Israel. In spite of its military might, Israel failed to defeat Hezbollah. The organisation had some ten to fifteen thousand rockets and guided weapons, most of which had been dispersed over caves, cellars, houses and mosques. Iran and Syria probably took care of the re-supply of expended stores. On 11 August the United Nations Security Council called for a cessation of hostilities

(Resolution 1701). Three days later a cease-fire was indeed concluded and in December 2006 the last Israeli troops had left Lebanon.

According to a report of the United Nations Secretary-General almost a million people had lost their homes, 1,200 had been killed and thousands wounded, most of them women and children. An estimated 15,000 houses had been destroyed and 140 bridges had been hit.³⁴ On 13 July Israel had also bombed Beirut airport, making use of cluster bombs during the attack. According to United Nations representatives more than a million unexploded munitions were left behind. A quarter of the population of Lebanon was displaced. The damage to the Lebanese economy was an estimated \$7 billion.³⁵

In Resolution 1701 (2006), mentioned above, the United Nations Security Council did not only call for a cease-fire. It also laid down that the situation in Lebanon was a threat to international peace and security. Besides, the Resolution strengthened the mandate of UNIFIL, which had been deployed in southern Lebanon since the beginning of the Lebanese civil war. The number of troops was to be increased to 15,000, and they would have to operate in cooperation with the Lebanese armed forces. UNIFIL's mandate now also incorporated, "to take all necessary action in areas of deployment of its forces, and as it deems within its capacities, to ensure that its area of operations is not utilized for hostile activities of any kind".³⁶ Relevant is UNIFIL's task, as mentioned above, to accompany the Lebanese armed forces and to support them in their deployment in the south of the country and in the prevention of import of weapons and related materiel without the authorisation of the Lebanese government. About 13,000 troops are stationed on land and on vessels in the territorial waters of Lebanon. Since the reinforcement of UNIFIL no armed militias – with the exception of Hezbollah – have been active and the Lebanese army has extended its area of operations to southern Lebanon.

The Summer War was the last in a series of invasions into Lebanon, this time directed against Hezbollah. At first, Israel still enjoyed the sympathy of Saudi Arabia, Jordan and the United Arab Emirates, a support that melted away after the large-scale Israeli bombardments on targets in Lebanon. For the public opinion in Lebanon it was not a conflict that Israel was fighting out with Hezbollah, but with the country as a whole. Hezbollah's prestige had increased enormously, and criticism on America had grown, also among the Christian community. In Lebanon the United States was seen as a power that would always give prevalence to the interests of Israel. This was a setback for the pro-western Siniora government.

For the American administration support to Lebanon's democracy depends on the relations with Israel and the war on terrorism. According to Mearsheimer, the American government supported Israel unconditionally during the Summer War. Thus, Washington succeeded in putting off the conclusion of a cease-fire between the belligerents as long as possible, so that Israel could complete its military operation against Hezbollah.³⁷ After all, in the west Hezbollah is seen as a terrorist organisation of the first order, financed and supported by Iran. And not without reason: after Al-Qaida, Hezbollah comes second with regard to the number of Americans killed in terrorist attacks.³⁸ Thus, one of the aims of the western support for the 14 March Coalition is to keep Lebanon out of the sphere of influence of Syria and Iran and to take the wind out of Hezbollah's sails.

Of all things, the Summer War took place in a period in which Lebanon was in the middle of a process of finding back its political independence. The Siniora government, formed a year before, suffered heavily from the war and the period of instability that followed it. The following section will focus on the development of the political situation in Lebanon after the Summer War.

Developments after the Summer War

In the years after the war the internal politics of Lebanon were tormented by political violence, paralysis of the government and a damaged economy. Parliamentarians were assassinated, street fights broke out in Beirut and there was a three-month battle with a terrorist group in the Palestinian Nahr al-Bared camp (see above). Hezbollah embarked on a campaign to expand its political power and oppositions sharpened. Hezbollah entered into a coalition with Michel Aoun, the leader of the largest Maronite party, the Free Patriotic Movement. With five Shiite and one Christian ministers resigning, this bloc quit the government in November 2006. The remaining parties did not draw the conclusion from this that the cabinet as a whole should step down and a period of political stalemate ensued.

The oppositional bloc claimed to be fighting corruption and to be listening better to the wishes of the voters. In early 2007 Hezbollah organised strikes, which in Beirut ended in armed clashes. It campaigned for early elections, the formation of a government of national unity and for a political right of veto. Besides, Hezbollah was convinced the government was collaborating with the west. When in November 2007 the constitutional term of office of the president expired, Hezbollah boycotted the election by the parliament of a new head of state.

In May 2008 a major crisis erupted, which brought the country on the brink of civil war. The occasion was the decision of the government to confront Hezbollah and to bring up the matter of the armed militias of this organisation. The government did this by announcing its intention to replace the head of the airport security in Beirut and to start an investigation into a glass fiber network which was in Hezbollah's hands. The head of the airport security was suspected of passing on information on the comings and goings of high-ranking Lebanese citizens at the airport to Hezbollah. The glass fiber network was part of Hezbollah's command and control system, having formed a link in the communication network during the war against Israel in 2006.

Hezbollah reacted sharply. Together with Amal and the Syrian Nationalist Socialist Party it occupied West-Beirut, the residential area where the governmental buildings are situated and the traditional Sunni supporters of the Future Movement live. In the fighting 80 people were killed. The army, incidentally, remained neutral. A solution was finally reached when the government gave up its plans and the Hezbollah militias left their positions in the city. It was a significant moment: this time Hezbollah had committed its armed militias in deciding internal differences. Hezbollah leader Nasrallah explained this with the argument that it had been done to 'defend our weapons with our weapons'.³⁹

Just as in 1989 it took a renewed diplomatic intervention from one of the Arab countries to call the Lebanese politicians to order. Under the auspices of the Emir of Qatar the government and the oppositional bloc of Hezbollah and Aoun managed to conclude an agreement, the first result of which was the election of the commander-in-chief of the army, General Michel Suleiman, as president of Lebanon. As commander of the armed forces, Suleiman had led the operation against the Palestinian Nahr al-Bared camp in 2007. In general, he enjoys the confidence of the Lebanon population. A new government of national unity was formed, consisting of 30 ministers: 16 of the 14 March Coalition, 11 from the opposition and 3 appointed by the president, the opposition having a blocking minority in the new government.

At the same time it was agreed that a new electoral system would be set up, which was to come into effect for the parliamentary elections in the spring of 2009. This system would be more favourable for the Christian candidates, which would allow them not to seek alliances prior to the elections with Sunni or Shiite parties. Finally, a so-called national dialogue would be set up on the consolidation of the authority of the state over the entire territory. The problem of Hezbollah's armed militias and the monopoly on violence was deferred to later negotiations.

On the one hand, the concerns among Sunnis about the rise of political power of Hezbollah must have increased. According to Abdel Latif, the Future Movement is making an all-out effort to unite the Sunnis behind its banners, also with the help of prominent religious leaders within the Sunni community.⁴⁰ According to a report of the ICG, the Sunni community became anxious about the government's ability to resist Hezbollah and Amal. More fundamentalist Sunnis were rubbing shoulders with the Future Movement.⁴¹

In its turn, according to the ICG, Hezbollah has manoeuvred itself into a situation in which it has created a profile of itself as an interest organisation for the Shiite community. The organisation still has an extensive weapons arsenal, and many Lebanese fear that Hezbollah keeps this store as a preparation for a possible civil war.⁴² According to Bilal Saab of the Brookings Institute, the aspirations of the Shiite community are frustrated. It has been a long time since censuses were held in Lebanon, but it is likely that the Shiite community is the largest in the country. The Sunnis and the Christians are thwarting reforms out of fear that Hezbollah will become the majority party and jeopardise the democratic and secular character of Lebanon.⁴³

Hezbollah owes its prestige, amongst other things, to the manner in which it makes an effort for the emancipation of underprivileged ethnic communities, the Shiite community in particular. What must be taken into account here, is that the socio-economic contrasts are still very great in Lebanon. The Summer War of 2006 and the recurrence of internal violence following it again meant an economic setback. The national debt is about twice the volume of the GDP; unemployment is 20 per cent and 28 per cent of the population are living below the poverty line, the Shiite community being afflicted the hardest. 89 per cent of the Lebanese population live in urban areas. The capital Beirut has 1.8 million inhabitants, almost half the population of the country. The per capita GDP was around \$10,400 in 2008, with an economic growth of 0.3 per cent. There was a structural budget deficit.⁴⁴

The Fund for Peace put Lebanon eighteenth on its 2008 Index of failing states, at the same critical level as Nigeria. This ranking is based on social indicators, such as the number of refugees and displaced persons, the political violence and the dissatisfaction among the Shiite segment of the population. What is economically relevant is the unequal development, with the Shiite lagging behind the rest of the population. In a political respect, there was the failure of the parliament to elect a president. On top of that, the government proved to be unable to keep order in the south of the country.⁴⁵ The government does not have a monopoly on violence and there are ethnic communities which distrust the state and each other.

In the period after the Summer War of 2006 Lebanon went through two years of political instability, which in May 2008 culminated in a crisis that seemed to bring the country on the brink of civil war. The agreement that was subsequently concluded amounted to a strengthening of the position of Hezbollah, but at the same time had a calming effect on the internal relations. Simultaneously, analysts observed a sharpening of religious and political differences. On 7 June 2009 elections were held for Parliament. On the eve of the polls, there was a fear that Hezbollah would gain a large victory. Like in 2005, however, the elections resulted in a majority for the 14 March Coalition of 71 seats, whereas the Hezbollah led opposition got 57 seats. It was generally seen as a victory for the Hariri government. Hezbollah leader Nasrallah declared that Hezbollah accepted the election results, but “the arms of the Resistance are not up for discussion. They are present because of the people's will, and will be left for the dialogue table.”⁴⁶

Conclusion

This paper has presented an analysis of the political system and the social cohesion of Lebanon, defining three important moments in the recent political developments. The first was the departure of Syrian troops from Lebanon and the leeway this offered for political development. The second was the Summer War of 2006, which seriously disturbed this process. The crisis of May 2008 was the third, marking the beginning of a new phase in the democratic development of the Cedar Revolution.

Strengthening the legitimacy of the government and its institutions is a necessary element in state building. Mostly the government of Lebanon is the weak party, especially in those areas where Hezbollah has the upper hand,⁴⁷ where the latter has often taken over the tasks the former neglected, such as health care, social security or culture. The absence of the state is an important reason why non-state actors, such as Hezbollah, have taken over the functions of the state.

The weakness of the state especially relates to the failure of the government to establish its monopoly on violence in the entire country. The intention to do precisely that has been reiterated regularly by the government and the international community. It was an explicit policy of the United States in 1982, and it was part of the Taef agreement in 1989. It has been laid down in Security Council resolutions time and again. In 2007 the government did indeed act tough against the armed Palestinian groups in the Nahr al-Bared camp. The 2008 compromise, however, demonstrates that the attainment of the objective still lies far into the future. Militarily speaking, with the support of Iran, Hezbollah is a match for the government. This also illustrates the complexity of the prob-

lem: the internal problem is an element in the international tensions between Sunnis and Shiites, between the Arab/Islamic world and Israel, between the United States and Iran. It is clearly too early to predict whether the June 2009 parliamentary elections have led to a strengthening of the position of the government vis a vis Hezbollah.

As was stated above, fragile states are also characterised by oppositions between ethnic communities, which erode social cohesion. In Lebanon there is the distrust which still exists between the different clans and religious communities, one of which, from a socio-economic perspective, finds itself in an underprivileged situation. Where does this distrust of the religious communities in Lebanon stem from? There are several reasons, such as anxiety about the continued existence of the own community, the dominant political culture and the support requested from foreign powers.

The first relates to the fear, present in each of the communities, that their way of life is threatened. In order to protect it, the political system is built upon the principle of power sharing, the most important positions having been divided over the three major religious groups. The electoral system frustrates dynamism in the political relations. Care for the interests of the clans or religious groups is deeply rooted in the political system, which, however, has not prevented the outbreak of conflicts and long periods of instability.

The dominant political culture is the second reason for the distrust between the various ethnic groups. The political leaders do not invest so much in the functioning of the structures of the state than in the interests of their religious supporters and their clan, of which corruption, nepotism and byzantine decision making are the main features. It is a political culture that goes at the expense of social cohesion. Apart from the civil war there were at least three times – 1958, 1989 and 2008 – when intervention from abroad was necessary to make the country governable again.

The distrust between the various ethnic groups, finally, is strengthened by the fact that they all appeal for support from foreign powers: European countries and the United States, Syria, Iran and Israel. Such support is not given for free. Lebanon has become a puppet in the war on terrorism. The country would be much better off with a coordinated international effort that makes the interests of the integrity of the state and its inhabitants paramount, i.e. international support for Lebanese aspirations to shore up democracy and to come to a stable political system, in which the different religious identities of the population will be respected. Transparency, accountability and the fight against corruption are necessary elements in this. It also takes ways of international support that help rebuild the country in such a way that it leads to a strengthening of

the position of the government. That this is necessary, is what this contribution set out to demonstrate.

Notes

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 25. *Hezbollah and the Lebanese Crisis* (2007), p. 18.
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