

## The Christians of Lebanon in the Context of a Syrian-Israeli Political Relations

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The author details the findings of a significant opinion poll surveying the attitudes of Lebanese Christians to the relationship of Lebanon with Syria and Israel, and the possible impact on Lebanon of any peace agreement that could eventually be reached between Syria and Israel. The poll was conducted in 1999, but writing in August 2001 he endeavors to assess possible changes of opinion that may have taken place up to the present time.

**Key Words:** Arab/Israeli conflict, Lebanon, Syria, Israel, Palestine, Palestinian refugees, Lebanese Christians, Maronites, Druze.

A comprehensive study of Lebanon's relationship to the Middle East peace process requires a fundamental canvas of the political opinions and sentiments of the diverse confessional groups making-up the country's shaky political structure. Primary to that structure has been the place of the Christians whose contribution to Lebanon 's political life has been essential. The Christians played a determining role in the formation of the modern state in the 1920s, in its independence in the 1940s, and in its renewal. Despite the large number of works dealing with the Lebanese Christians, and especially with its most important sub-group the Maronites, most of these works are historical and descriptive in method<sup>2</sup>. In fact most of these works are centered on internal group mechanism and communal political behavior. Hardly any attempt at investigating the basic political orientations of Lebanon's Christian groups – from a behavioral perspective – with regard to relations with Syria, Israel and views on

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<sup>2</sup> See for example Joseph Abou-Khalil, (1990) *Kissat al-Mawarina fi al-Harb: Sirat Zatiat*. (Beirut, Sharikat al-Matbouat li al-Tawsik wa al-Nashr); Walid Phares (1995) *Lebanese Christian Nationalism: The Rise and Fall of an Ethnic Resistance* (London: Boulder); Habib Malik (1997) *is there Still a Lebanon?* *Middle East Quarterly*, 1997,4/4,19-27.

peace are found in the literature. This gloomy observation is not intended to obscure the value of some meritorious works namely Hilal Khashan's studies on Arab Attitudes Toward Israel<sup>3</sup>. In the former Khashan based his study on an empirical inquiry into Arab respondent's attitudes toward Israel and Peace in the period from March 1993 to April 1995. Although the study included few Christians, the bulk of the data came from highly religious Muslim interviewees. In the latter, the data for which was collected between February and March 1999, did not include Christian respondents in the sample.

### Statement of Objective

Utilizing comprehensive survey data, this study attempts to examine Lebanese Christian respondents views on issues central to national politics and to the Middle East peace process. The present study differs from Khashan's in some respect: first, the respondents' religious affiliation; it is based solely on a cross-sectional survey of Christian participants while Khashan's sample was limited to Lebanese Muslim respondents. Second, the objective of the study; Khashan's aim was to test Arab general attitudes toward peace. Accordingly, views on issues pertaining to Lebanon's domestic and regional politics or the impact of peace on Lebanese Christians were not included. This study seeks to examine what average Lebanese Christians think about the ongoing conflict in South Lebanon, their country's relations with Syria and Israel and their views concerning the prospects of an eventual peace deal with the Jewish state. In part, the author intends to determine if Lebanese Christians register any significant attitudinal change with regard to the conflict with Israel since the opinion poll was conducted before the Israeli withdrawal from Southern Lebanon in May 2000<sup>4</sup>. Previous results have shown that Christian Lebanese respondents rather discouragingly expressed overall negative views about their government policy approach to peace with Israel. The majority opposed the coupling of the Syrian-Lebanese peace tracks; the continuation of Hizbullah military operations and the launching of Palestinian

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<sup>3</sup> Hilal Khashan, Partner or Pariah? Attitudes toward Israel in Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan", The Washington Institute, Policy Papers, No.41, 1996 and "Arab Attitudes Toward Israel on the Eve of the Millennium ", The Journal of Social, Political and Economic Studies, Vol.25, No.2, Summer 2000, pp.131-229.

<sup>4</sup> Simon Haddad, " Lebanese Christians Perceptions of Peace with Israel", Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, Vol.24, No.3, Spring 2001, pp.13-33.

commando raid against Israeli targets and strongly supported the deployment of the Lebanese army to control the international border. Apart from revisiting the previous findings, the present study aspires to establish the likely impact of peace on the sizable Christian community of Lebanon.

### Review of Literature

#### *Syria and Lebanon: compulsory sisterhood*

Lebanon's civil war came to an end in the autumn of 1990, when, with tacit approval from Washington, Syrian forces crushed the rebellion of General Michel Aoun who had resisted implementing the Ta'if Accord of 1989. The agreement was aimed at regulating the Lebanese political system and set out steps to impose the central government's sovereignty throughout all of Lebanon. Unfortunately, nearly ten years after the agreement to end the war was signed in Ta'if, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon is still racked by problems, especially because Lebanon continues to be a site for the Arab-Israeli conflict. Syria's influence on Lebanon has grown tremendously since the late 1980s. No major political decisions are made without consulting Damascus.

Ever since the creation of Greater Lebanon in 1920 – mostly from Syrian territory – Damascus has perceived her relations with the new political entity as special. After the independence of the two countries in 1943, Syria has consistently refused to exchange diplomatic missions with Lebanon, arguing that the populations of the two states constitute one people. Sentiment aside, Damascus has always had security grievances against Lebanon; plans for most of Syria's attempted or successful coups d'état originated in Beirut.<sup>5</sup> For years, even before the Syrian army entered Lebanon in 1976, the ruling elite in Damascus sought influence in Lebanese politics. This issue is so important for Syrians to the extent that it enjoys national consensus, irrespective of who predominates politically in Syria. Since opportunity presented itself for the late President Asad to establish Syria as the major power broker in Lebanon, it has become the policy of Damascus to maintain sectarian and conflicting elites' balance in Lebanon. To the extent they succeed in maintaining the balance among Lebanon's sectarian groups and

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<sup>5</sup> It needs to be noted here that successive Lebanese governments never took part in any scheming against Syria. It just happened that Syrian opposition groups and foreign collaborators took advantage of Lebanon's liberal social and political life to orchestrate their intentions against the regime in Damascus.

centrifugal forces, Syrian ruling elite believe they can indefinitely preserve their predominance on the divided country. As a matter of fact, since 1991 Syria has apprehended Lebanon politically and diplomatically. A network of agreements and pacts tie the two countries and serve to legitimate Syrian meddling in Lebanese affairs. These range from a Treaty of Brotherhood, Cooperation, and Coordination and a Pact on Defense and Security, signed in 1991, to bilateral agreements on agriculture, social and economic affairs, health, and the movement of individuals and goods, signed in 1993. The common denominator is that each agreement has served to bring Lebanon closer to the hold of Syria.

Early in his tenure as prime minister, in February 1993, Rafiq al-Hariri outlined the parameters for negotiations with Israel: "Lebanon is willing to sign any agreement with Israel, short of a peace treaty, based on United Nations Security Council Resolution 425, the 1978 resolution that calls for the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Lebanon. Hariri rejected any association with Resolutions 242 and 338, which deal with the Arab-Israeli conflict and the principle of land for peace, since the occupation of southern Lebanon by Israel is unequivocally rejected in Resolution 425, and where, unlike Resolutions 242 and 338, there is no suggestion of a principle of territorial adjustment. Finally, he announced his refusal to wait for progress by other parties negotiating with Israel. Hariri's independent position did not survive the spring, and by October 1993 Lebanon announced a policy of total coordination with Syria. Lebanese officials unanimously echo the Syrian position on the symbiosis of the two countries peace tracks with Israel. They vividly remember former Lebanese president Amin Al-Jumayyil's botched program to seek a separate peace treaty with Israel, often referred to as the infamous 17 May 1983 Agreement. The Lebanese government has apparently understood the implications of concluding a peace treaty with Israel without Syrian consent. Syria punitive response at the time was to curtail the Lebanese government authority in most Lebanese regions. In view of the demise of the 17 May Agreement, it is probably safe to assert that cannot conclude a peace agreement with Israel without Syrian overlordship.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> The linkage between the Syrian and Lebanese tracks has been a constant in the position of Damascus and Beirut as suggested by Prime Minister Rafic Hariri who ruled out any step by his government to revive stalled Arab-Israeli negotiations, declaring that the Lebanese will never make peace with Israel until the Syrians do. Hariri made it clear

### **The Role of the United States**

Diplomatically, Lebanon has been relatively isolated on the international level since 1993, when it became clear that Beirut had tied its fate to Syria in the peace process. In the United States, it became increasingly common for officials to presume that Lebanon's "zip code" was the same as Syria's. The United States has continued to emphasize its continuing commitment to the territorial integrity of the country, to the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Lebanese soil, and to the reestablishment of peace and security. Nonetheless, U.S. Middle East policy under President Bill Clinton was remarkably partial to Israeli perspectives, and especially so in southern Lebanon, where Washington often offered unconditional support for Israel's actions. This penchant was clearly demonstrated in April 1996, during Israel's "Grapes of Wrath" operation. Despite the fact that Israel's presence in the south was in clear violation of Resolution 425, which the United States sponsored, President Bill Clinton accepted Israel's assertions that it was acting only to protect its own security and took no action except to emphasize its support for Israel.

### **Syria's Negotiating Strategy**

The absence of a well-articulated U.S. policy on Lebanon beyond general declarations of good intent has served to isolate Lebanon and arguably have further pushed Lebanon into Syria's brotherly embrace. This has become clearly understood by Israeli officials, who pulled-back their troops unilaterally from southern Lebanon in May 2000. That move is meant to deprive Syria of an important bargaining chip in negotiations with Israel. For the Syrians, Israel's withdrawal is interpreted as an indication of success. Even if Asad were entirely successful in peace efforts, Lebanon is still important for Syrian protection, and Asad will not abdicate Syrian influence there as part of a settlement with Israel. It is the special relationship between Damascus and Hizbullah that makes the former's position in Lebanon so overwhelming and encourages American acquiescence to Syrian over-lordship in Lebanon. Syria has helped Hizbullah become the preeminent military force in Lebanon, unsubmitting even to the

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that his government will follow where Syria leads, asserting that the differences between Israel and Syria must be addressed first because they "are much more important and much more strategic" than the issues that separate Lebanon and Israel: "Neither Syria nor Lebanon will sign a peace treaty with Israel without the other," Hariri said.

national army. In fact, Syria has placed Hizbullah sympathizers in key positions in the Lebanese army, thus forestalling the possibility that the latter might turn against the former.<sup>7</sup> The end product of Syria's Hizbullah policy can be summarized in convincing the U.S. and Israel that the fate of this group, much-maligned to both of them, lies squarely in the hands of Damascus; hence, the need to treat her as a regional power. The Hizbullah card plays well into the hands of Syria by making a case for maintaining its military presence in Lebanon. In connection with Syrian policy, Hizbullah continue to target Israeli objectives under the banner that the Israeli withdrawal from south Lebanon in May 2000 left many unresolved issues in the border area between Israel, Lebanon and Syria. In reality, when Israel pulled out of Lebanon, it kept the tiny Shebaa farms area. The reasons behind this decision is that this small piece of land will help protect the Golan Heights, which Israel took from Syria in 1967 but has promised to return<sup>8</sup>. On two occasions, Israeli warplanes attacked Syrian military positions in Lebanon in retaliation for Hizbullah operations. After these attacks, the limited conflict in the Shebaa Farms has the potential to explode into an unwanted war between Syria and Israel and the specter of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict becoming a regional one is raised once more. In connection with Syrian strategy, Lebanese authorities are forced to acquiesce to an unabated Palestinian armed presence: Lebanon contains substantial Palestinian refugee camps whose members are anxious to become involved in the intifada. The Lebanese government has so far prevented them from participating, but that could end. Syria could also provide more support for Hizbullah to widen its area of operation.

### **Lebanon's Place in any Peace Process**

The strength of the Syrian position in Lebanon has not masked crucial Lebanese concerns, which appear to solicit extensive public

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<sup>7</sup> The, Syrian army units position near the centers of decision-making in Lebanon: presidential palace, ministry of defense and other strategic establishments. The extent of Syrian military deployment in Lebanon has angered the Council of Maronite Bishops who, on 20 September 2000, issued an appeal condemning Syrian trespassing on the "symbols[s] of national unity." The text of the appeal is available at <http://www.claao.com/article119.html>.

<sup>8</sup> For Lebanon's Prime Minister Rafic Hariri, Israel continues to violate UN Resolution 425 and illegitimately occupy the Shebaa Farms, which Syrian President Bashar Assad reaffirmed, was Lebanese territory (Daily Star 29/6/2001).

support, primarily among members of Lebanon's Christian community. Simon Karam, former Lebanese ambassador in Washington, conveyed to the public the gist of private discussions in the local, political and economic circles on what they want for their country from peace with the Jewish state. First of all, the Lebanese insist that the internal balance of their country be restored to enable its competent business class to assume a vital role in the growing Middle Eastern economy commensurate with its capabilities. Apart from economics the Lebanese expect (1) full Israeli withdrawal from Lebanese territory, (2) the consolidation of Lebanese independence by extending their sovereignty over the entire country—an allusion to Syria's control of most of it, (3) the release by Israel of 151 detainees (4) the recovery of Al-Wazzani and Al-Hasbani sources of water, two important tributaries to the Jordan river, and (5) opposition to the permanent settlement of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon.

As soon as Israel pulled out its troops from Southern Lebanon in May 2000, Lebanese leaders began to re-examine their agenda by voicing demands that enhance the Syrian negotiating position such as that Lebanese army will not be deployed in the occupied area, a decision part of Lebanese-Syrian coordination that refuses to grant Israel any security guarantees concerning its northern border<sup>9</sup>. They also added to their agenda new items. Initially, Lebanese Prime Minister Selim al-Hoss announced in December 1999, that seven villages on the other side of the 1949 demarcation line rightfully belonged to Lebanon and that their recovery "remains a Lebanese demand."<sup>10</sup> As Israel's preparations for a pullout continued unabated throughout the spring of 2000, the Syrians realized that a more viable pretext for the continuation of paramilitary attacks was now needed to discourage an Israeli withdrawal. This new territorial claim had never before even been mentioned by a representative of the Lebanese government: the Shebaa farms.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> The Lebanon Daily Star, July 6, 2000.

<sup>10</sup> However, it soon became clear that Israel was willing to settle for the mere cessation of hostilities. Since the seven villages mentioned above are internationally recognized as Israeli territory, Israeli officials were confident that the Syrians and Lebanese would not try to use this claim to legitimize continued Hizbollah attacks.

<sup>11</sup> Israeli forces seized a piece of Lebanese territory during the 1967 Six Day War called the Shebaa Farms, a 25 square kilometer area consisting of 14 farms located south of Shebaa, a Lebanese village on the western slopes of Mount Hermon.



Lebanese scholar Joseph Maïla concedes that the permanent settlement of the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, the vast majorities of whom are Sunni Muslim, could be fatal to Lebanon's delicate social mosaic. The Palestinians could turn to become a new independent community, a development unprecedented in Lebanon. The kind of linkage between these Palestinians and the Palestinian Authority is likely to create tremendous problems for the Lebanese in the coming years<sup>12</sup>. The current negotiating process, which began in Madrid in 1991, addresses the Palestinian issue in two ways. First, because the matter affects all Arab states hosting Palestinians, one track of multilateral talks is devoted to the issue. Secondly, it was placed on the agenda of the "final status" negotiations between the Palestinian Authority and the Israelis. What most frightens Lebanon is the likelihood that its own Palestinian population will be neglected in both tracks of the negotiations. Beirut would like the various peace talks to provide for the Palestinians' departure, but it doubts that will happen and it lacks the leverage to accomplish its goal. For example, Lebanon has no presence in the talks between Israel and Syria that bode to reshape its neighborhood. Lebanon is absent from the multilateral talks' Refugee Working Group, chaired by Canada, since that group's main objective is to improve the conditions of Palestinian refugees without considering their repatriation, an approach also unacceptable to Syria, the main power broker in Lebanon. Syrian officials have argued that the multilateral talks, which deal with the environment, economic development, security, water, and the issue of refugees, serve to lend legitimacy to Israel, conferring the prizes of peace before Israel has earned them by withdrawing from occupied Arab territory. It also withdrew from the bilateral talks between itself and Israel when Israel's Prime Minister Ehud Barak ruled out the return of hundreds of thousands of refugees to Israel, suggesting instead "a solution for them should be found in the countries where they are now living"<sup>13</sup>. Beirut similarly expressed its complete disagreement and has made the return of the refugees a precondition for peace with Israel.

At the time of the outbreak of war in 1975, which set the stage for Lebanon's current situation, Washington officially supported "the sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity of Lebanon" and

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<sup>12</sup> Al-Nahar, 25, February 2000.

<sup>13</sup> The Economist, August 28, 1999.



even went so far as to call for the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Lebanon's borders. But when Syria failed to live up to its repeated promises to comply, some American officials indicated their tacit acquiescence in the continued Syrian role in Lebanon<sup>14</sup>.

While many Lebanese privately express their distaste for Lebanon's cheek to jowl relationship with Syria, others argue that Lebanon has little choice. Were Lebanon to try to make its own way, independent of Syria's wishes, it would not only provoke Syria, but would also be in a weaker position vis-à-vis Israel. Accordingly, both the United States and Israel have turned a blind eye to Syrian excesses in Lebanon in an attempt to seduce Syria into a peace treaty. Addressing Syrian hegemony in this context led Asad to hope that he might not only avoid reprisal but also win tangible gains such as Western economic aid, Israeli departure from the Golan Heights, recognition of his regime and possibly even acceptance of the Syrian presence in Lebanon. While addressing a special meeting of parliament, Israel's Prime Minister Ehud Barak appealed to Lebanese President Emile Lahoud to use the Israeli withdrawal from south Lebanon as a springboard for peace.<sup>15</sup>

### **Methodological Aspects of The Study**

#### *Research Variables*

In the present study, conducted one year after the Israeli withdrawal from Lebanese territories, a total of 30 items were included in the questionnaire, which were all actually used. In developing the instrument, an initial pool of items from relevant studies was constructed from two sources. Approximately half of the items were adapted from existing instruments<sup>16</sup> and the remaining items were

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<sup>14</sup> During a meeting in Cairo with Syria's foreign minister, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright did not raise the issue of Syria's occupation of Lebanon; in public, she praised it: "Syria has played a constructive role as far as Lebanon is concerned. We hope that they will continue to do so" although she did say that "all foreign forces should depart."

<sup>15</sup> The Jerusalem Post, July 22, 2001

<sup>16</sup> Simon Haddad. "Lebanese Christians Perceptions of Peace with Israel", *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol.24, No.3, Spring 2001, pp.13-33. "; Khashan, H., Arab Attitudes Toward Israel on the Eve of the Millennium ", *The Journal of Social, Political and Economic Studies*, Vol.25, No.2, Summer 2000, pp.131-229. David Pollock, "The Arab Street: Public Opinion in The Arab World", *The Washington Institute, Policy Papers*, No.32, 1992; Mark Tessler and Judy Nachtwey (1999) "Palestinian Political Attitudes: An Analysis of Survey Data from the West Bank and Gaza", *Israel Studies*, Vol.4, No.1, pp.22-43.

Table 1

Gender	Male	62	Sect	Maronites	61
Age	Female	38		Greek-Orthodox	16
	18-27 years	48		Greek-Catholic	18
	28-37 years	19		Armenians	5
	38-47 years	15			
Social status	48 years-up	18		Eastern Beirut	85
	Upper class	25	Residence <sup>16</sup>	Security belt	9
	Middle class	39		Other	6
	Working class	36			

developed anew by the investigator. In order to examine Lebanese Christian views towards Israel and peace, the following variables were considered:

- 1) Attitudes toward the Lebanese government
- 2) Support for Hizbullah's operations against Israel
- 3) Support for Syrian-Lebanese coordination
- 4) Predisposition towards Peace and Desired Scope of Relations with Israel
- 5) Attitudes toward peace on the Lebanese-Israeli track
- 6) Position on the Palestinian refugees issue
- 7) The role of the United States in promoting peace
- 8) Expected impact of peace on Lebanon

The opinions reported in this study represented those of 1,000 Lebanese Christians. The breakdown of respondents (Table 1) does not constitute a ratio corresponding to the proportional demographic distribution of the Christian population in Lebanon. But, since representative sampling is a very complicated procedure, especially with the lack of statistical data and the absence of urban planning in Lebanon, quota sampling was preferred to random sampling. The sample included five sub-groups, selected on the basis of quota sampling necessitated by the fact that representative selection is not possible due to lack of accurate demographic data pertaining to the characteristics and the urban distribution of the population. The author sought to broaden the representativeness of the sample by including 20 professions which were regrouped into five sub-groups for reasons of data manageability: 1) professionals, proprietors, managers and officials; 2) semi-professionals, clerical and sales; 3) skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled; 4) college students; and 5) working, non-working (unemployed, retired, disabled, housewife, etc.).

Non-response rates did not exceed 8 per cent of all attempted interviews. Twenty-five well-trained students at the Notre-Dame University collected the data. They were told to be objective during the administration of the questions and not to attempt to influence the responses. The responses of the respondents were entered on the questionnaire forms by the interviewers themselves but sometimes the choice of a self-administered instrument was adopted due to various considerations. Lebanese people in general are cooperative but have deep concern about their security. They suspect that most of such

surveys are conducted to serve government objectives or a deceitful political organization. In responding to questionnaires, they suspect that what they think or write could be used against them. Therefore, if the questionnaires are anonymous, frankness and honesty may be encouraged.

The author maintained close contact with the field workers during the entire period of data collection (including random reviews of completed questionnaires) and personally supervised the stage of data processing (coding and entry), including tabular preparation and presentation.

Given the precarious nature of survey research in a conflictive environment, three reliability test measures were imposed on the data: pre-testing, internal consistency and response bias. Consequently, proper additions, deletions, and adjustments were made on the final version. In general, respondents attested that the questions were easily understood and measures indicated they are highly reliable.

### **Analysis of the findings**

In Lebanon, Civil society continues to distinguish the country from its Arab neighbors. Malek<sup>17</sup> attributes this to "the presence of a vibrant, creative, and relatively secure Christian community without which the country would quickly turn into a monochromatic version of Syria." Lebanon's pre-war state was not a Western-type democracy, but it enjoyed something close to it. Lebanese society was the freest in the Arab world. For freedom to flourish, both diversity and sovereignty had to be maintained in an atmosphere of tolerance and openness. But, however impressive, Lebanon's civil society is today under increasing pressure. Lebanon today lacks those attributes of a free society, a sovereign state, and a functioning democracy. Lebanon's delicate communal balance means that the political neutralization of one segment of society will undermine its very *raison-d'être* in a neighborhood of authoritarian regimes and religious radicalism and intolerance. In a question on assessment of the performance of their government (Table 1), the overwhelming majority of respondents say they were unhappy about it.

Support for the political leadership is as low as 10%, as shown in

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<sup>17</sup> Habib.C. Malik (1997) is there Still a Lebanon? Middle East Quarterly, 1997, 4/4, 19-27.

Table 1. Khazen<sup>18</sup> holds that one of the most pressing problems for the Christians is the absence of a credible and effective political leadership. The power struggle, which took on various political and military forms among Christian leaders during the war years, was self-destructive. Today, politicians who either lack a power-base or who have no mainstream legitimacy represent Christians. Christian politicians in power in postwar Lebanon are, with few exceptions, restricted to those with close ties to Syria. Under different circumstances, some of the most visible Christian politicians would not be in office. Having cleared the stage of radical right-wing Christian leaders, more moderate Christian figures were promoted for leadership, such as Elias Hrawi, a seasoned Lebanese statesman, to the presidency in 1991. A Syrian loyalist to the end, Hrawi managed to keep the Lebanese scene under control. Striking a delicate balance between his Maronite origins and Syrian requirements, Hrawi appealed to the disgruntled Maronites as "one of them," while remaining loyal to the Syrian establishment<sup>19</sup>. Hrawi's successor, General Emile Lahoud, failed by all measures to match Hrawi's achievement. Lacking any power-base within the Maronite community, Lahoud was snubbed by his co-religionists from day one. Unlike Hrawi, whose political career dated back to the 1960s, Lahoud was a newcomer to the scene, and could play only by Syria's rules – thereby losing any form of legitimacy within radical Christian circles<sup>20</sup>.

Nearly 84% of the respondents do not feel that their ruling elites work in the best interest of the people. As elsewhere in the Arab

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<sup>18</sup> Farid el-Khazen, Lebanon –Independent No More, Middle East Quarterly, Winter 2001 vol.8, issue 1 p.43.

<sup>19</sup> Sami Moubayed. Lebanon Dodges Bullets of Another Civil War. Washington Report on Middle East Affairs, May 2001 v.20 i4 p.21.

<sup>20</sup> Hariri's formation of his fourth cabinet subjected him to a barrage of criticisms, mainly from the Maronite opposition. This happened despite his extreme care in proportionately representing the main political forces—as displayed by their parliamentary seats—in the new cabinet. Even the outspoken patriarch Sfeir seemed generally satisfied with the Maronite slots. Parliamentary deputy Pierre Gemayel, son of former president Amin Gemayel, gave the new government a vote of no confidence. Fully cognizant of the political environment dictating Hariri's action, deputy Gemayel still insisted on describing the new cabinet as a "political disaster... and a national tragedy." Harith Shihab, chairman of the Maronite League's Executive Council, protested against excluding Maronites from key ministerial portfolios and charged "excluding Christians, and Maronites in particular, from political ministries, is something taking place for the first time since independence and an expression of persistence in following a policy of marginalization."

World, palm-greasing and kickbacks are a way of life, and Lebanon is no exception; it is listed first among countries in terms of corruption. Accordingly, Paul Salem<sup>21</sup> identifies a number of problems in post-Taif Lebanon: the absence of self-government, given the wide Syrian influence on the political process in Lebanon; the lack of accountable elected officials, whereas in most cases former militia leaders and communal leaders are manufacturing support for themselves through pressure, influence and money; the lack of separation of public from private interests among top officials, given the deep involvement of key public servants in massive real estate deals, government contracts and the like; the absence of clean government whereas the reality in Lebanon is that, from the highest to the lowest levels of government, there is no serious program to combat it.

Rampant corruption and abuse of power caused General Emile Lahoud, who assumed the presidency in November 1998, to announce a major campaign against corruption and to pledge to reform the bloated and inefficient Lebanese bureaucracy. In response to the president's promise to cut off the hands of all corrupt bureaucrats, a disbelieving observer remarked befittingly: "If he [Lahoud] stuck to his pledge... no civil servant or politician would be able to applaud his diligence"<sup>22</sup>.

Lebanese Christians' perceptions of their government is negative to the point where even less than 11% of the respondents accept the maintenance of the existing political system in its present form. In this regard, Khazen<sup>23</sup> remarks that: "Rather than broaden the base of Christian support for Ta'if, Lebanese government authorities opted for the opposite course of action: no national unity governments were formed, administrative decentralization stalled, many displaced persons did not return, and elections were neither free nor fair." As a result, Picard<sup>24</sup> maintains that "some Christian leaders who once supported

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<sup>21</sup> Paul Salem. "Democracy in Lebanon: Between Political Science and the Elections of 1996". *The Parliamentary Elections of 1996 and the Crisis of Democracy in Lebanon*. Beirut: Center for Lebanese Studies, 1998. pp. 521-522.

<sup>22</sup> *The Economist*, vol. 352, no. 8132, 14 August 1999, p. 37.

<sup>23</sup> Farid el-Khazen. *Lebanon – Independent No More*. *Middle East Quarterly*, Winter 2001 v.8 i.1 p.43.

<sup>24</sup> Elizabeth Picard, "The Dynamics of the Lebanese Christians: From the Paradigm of the 'Amiyyat to the Paradigm of Hwayyek," *Christian Communities in the Arab Middle East, The Challenge of the Future*, ed. Andrea Pacini (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), pp. 200-221.

Ta'if are now critical of it and question its utility. Lebanon today is not a reassuring place for Christians. While disenchantment is widespread across all of Lebanese society, the most affected, and thus most vocal in expressing dissatisfaction, are the Christians." Resentment and frustration of the Christians with the role assigned to the community under the Taïf arrangement are not discrepant with reality. They feel politically underrepresented, alienated and excluded both from the government and from the Christian parties that have accepted the new order but dissented on details. They consider that none among the ruling elites, even the president, is a true representative of the community. Cabinet ministers are Syria's allies and militant leaders of the opposing faction are controlling the political institutions. Syria's military presence serves to maintain the actual balance of power, which does not allow Maronite past political supremacy.

Prior to Israel's pullout from Lebanon, Lebanese Christians were most of the time willing to acquiesce in Hizbullah's operations as long as they were under the banner of ridding the country of a foreign armed-presence, despite their damaging repercussions on Lebanon. In fact, Israel's massive military retaliation against civilian targets on Lebanese soil has created enmity. Israel's calculated strikes against power stations in late June 1999 and February 2000 in the Christian area of Mount Lebanon sent waves of shock and disapproval, not only against Israeli heavy-handedness but also against Syria's war-by-proxy approach as well. Hizbullah showed that the IDF withdrawal is not the end of the conflict with Israel, but the Shi'i movement's intentions are to take disputes over issues such as the Shebaa Farms, release of Lebanese detainees in Israel and the repatriation of Palestinian refugees as excuses for continued attacks against Israeli borders.<sup>25</sup>

However, being seen as a defender of Syrian military interests in Lebanon may yet backfire on Hizbullah's domestic popularity. The Shebaa Farms campaign does not enjoy the same support as the resistance to Israel's occupation of south Lebanon, with only 4% of the respondents calling for continuing operations against Israel. To the contrary, Hizbullah would find itself blamed by most Lebanese if its attacks against Israeli targets in retaliation for the destruction of Syrian military positions led to a wider conflict that set back Beirut's attempts to revive the moribund economy: "Hizbullah has committed itself to the

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<sup>25</sup> The Lebanon Daily Star, June 30, 2000.



liberation of this territory," says Augustus Richard Norton, a professor of anthropology at Boston University who has followed Hizbullah and Lebanon closely since the early 1980s. He says: "I am personally doubtful that this was a wise strategic step. To the contrary, I think the party has sacrificed some of its broader credibility in Lebanon, as well as significant segments of its domestic Shi'ite constituency."<sup>26</sup>

Hizbullah's premise for launching the Shebaa Farms campaign came unstuck with the Israeli air strikes in mid-April and June 2001 against Syrian radar bases in the Bekaa region. These attacks, which apparently took both Hizbullah and Syria by surprise, effectively introduced new rules to the conflict.

In agreement with Syria, Lebanon has resisted international pressure to deploy its troops along the Israeli border, leaving Hizbullah fighters in *de facto* control. As attested by the findings (Table 2), the majority of Christian respondents (94%) call for dispatching the army in Southern Lebanon. Lebanese authorities, prompted by Syrian tactics, promised that the government would only be present through UN Forces until Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights was completed. This official position was heavily criticized by Christian opposition leader General Aoun,<sup>27</sup> who lashed out at the government. The most expressive came from the Maronite Council of Bishops, who protested that the Lebanese government "has yet to secure its presence there and reassure citizens. It has left the matter to policemen who are unable to impose security;" meanwhile, armed political parties, who claimed they were providing security, entered people's homes and detained individuals "as if there were no state, rulers or anyone holding people accountable."<sup>28</sup>

The Christian respondents' opinion with regard to the issue of special and all-encompassing ties with Syria was surprising. In fact, there is some sympathy for Lebanese-Syrian special ties, but its extent is not commensurate with Syria's ubiquitous presence in Lebanon. Syrian military presence on Lebanese soil, as well as their manipulation of the country's political life and siphoning off of a significant portion of its meager economic resources has resulted in large-scale aversion among many Lebanese groups. Syria has consistently sought to preserve her interests in Lebanon by seeing to it that the country's divisions do

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<sup>26</sup> The Lebanon Daily Star, 5 July 2001.

<sup>27</sup> The Lebanon Daily Star 27 May 2000.

<sup>28</sup> The Lebanon Daily Star July 6 2000.

Table2: Support for the Lebanese Government

Q1: How would you describe the overall performance of the Lebanese government? (N=990)	%	Q2: Essentially, ruling elites in Lebanon work in the best interest of the people; (N=997)	%	Q3: Do you support the Lebanese political leadership? (N=996)	%	Q4: The Lebanese political system should be: (N=992)	%
Very good	1	Strongly agree	1	Strongly agree	2	Maintained in its present form	11
Good	3	Agree	5	Agree	8	Modestly reformed	20
Fair	18	Disagree	27	Disagree	45	Substantially reformed	68
Poor	78	Strongly disagree	58	Strongly disagree	46		
Unsure		Unsure	10	Unsure			

(\*) Here and in all tables "N" represents the number of respondents; figures are in percentages and columns may not add up to 100 because results were rounded to the nearest whole number.

not taper off. The opening salvo was on March 23, 2000, when Gebran Tueni, chairman of the board and managing director of the *An-Nahar* newspaper, wrote "An Open Letter to Dr. Bashshar Asad" in which he frankly informed the heir-apparent in Syria that "many Lebanese are neither at ease with the Syrian policy in Lebanon, nor the Syrian 'presence' in Lebanon" and then boldly declared, "We are not a Syrian province." Various religious figures spoke their minds. Patriarch Sfeir stated that if Lebanon "wants to control its future ... and for the Lebanese to regain their liberty, the Syrian troops must leave."<sup>29</sup>

More surprisingly, Archbishop Elias Audi of the usually docile Eastern Greek Orthodox Church spoke up on behalf of the student protestors to his congregation in a Palm Sunday sermon. In November, politically disaffected Druze leader Walid Junblat joined the Christian crusade to evict the Syrian army from Lebanon.

However, the acrimonious debate that raged during the spring of 2001 concerning the Syrian presence in Lebanon immediately polarized its already fragmented society, on yet another issue, along sharp sectarian lines. Muslims who suddenly felt threatened by Sfeir's pan-Christian tone began speaking out, defending Syria – or, more specifically, defending their own existence. To Lebanon's Muslim religious and political leaders, the only balancing force keeping the Christians at bay and preventing them from subordinating Muslims were the Syrians. Their departure would mean a return to a Maronite dominance of Lebanon. This point was explicitly raised by Sunni clerics such as Sheik Taha al-Sabounji, who spoke out against the Christian mobilization. "If there is need for Muslims to make their presence felt," he said, "they will do so and the Lebanese public will stand up to those who are determined to stir up sectarian conflict once again." Hizbullah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah echoed Sabounji's claims, saying, "Those who are asking Syria to leave only represent themselves and not all of Lebanon." A staunch Syrian supporter, Nasrallah added, "If Syria decides to pull out of Lebanon, we will tell her that it is wrong." Nasrallah, by far Lebanon's most charismatic leader, appealed to his fellow Shi'i and launched a 300,000-man demonstration in Beirut defending Syria's stance. Other pro-Syrian factions, such as the Amal Party of parliamentary speaker Nabih Berri, the Future Youth of Prime Minister Rafiq al Hariri, and the pro-Damascus Syrian Social Nation-

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<sup>29</sup> "We Are Not a Syrian Province". *Middle East Quarterly*, June 2000 v.7 i2 p.91-93.

Table 3: Support for Hizbullah's Operations against Israel

Q5: After Israel has pulled out its troops from Lebanon, should Hizbullah: (N=991)	%	Q6: Should the Lebanese army control the international border? (N=971)	%
Continue its attacks against Israeli targets	4	Yes	94
Maintain status quo	32	No	6
Cease operations	64	Unsure	

alist Party (SSNP), immediately supported Shi'i claims.<sup>30</sup>

For many Christians, special ties with Syria are interpreted to mean, as Daniel Pipes puts it, the permanent colonization of Lebanon and may incur damaging repercussions on Lebanon's Christian community:

Perhaps most significant for the long-range future, the Asad regime has opened the doors for Syrians to move to Lebanon, seek work there, settle there, and sometimes bring other family members to join them there. With time, this emigration may profoundly alter Lebanon's population by increasing the proportion of peasants and Muslims. Such changes have the additional virtue, from the Damascene point of view, of making the Christian population, and especially the Maronites who are the heart of independent Lebanon, feel less welcome in their own homeland. Cardinal Nasrallah Butros Sfeir,<sup>31</sup> the Maronite patriarch, has accused the Syrians of attempting precisely this. Lebanese Christians already have a century's legacy of emigration; continued Syrianization of their country makes them prone to leave their ancestral home in ever-increasing numbers.

### **The Principal Positions**

While the respondents' opinions on the issue of special relations with Syria are surprising, their response to the question of whether they approve of the coupling of the Syrian-Lebanese peace tracks is more surprising. Unexpectedly, almost one-third of the respondents support a united peace track in the Peace Process negotiations. The inseparability of the two tracks is a solid commitment that falls in the context of the non-negotiable. This point was made clear during the Arab summit in Amman when Syrian officials insisted that the final communiqué point out explicitly that "Syrian and Lebanese peace tracks are inseparable and they are linked with the Palestinian track." It is precisely Lebanon's absence from negotiations with Israel that

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<sup>30</sup> Sami Moubayed. *Lebanon Dodges Bullets of Another Civil War*, Washington Report on Middle East Affairs, May 2001 v.20 i4 p.21.

<sup>31</sup> The Maronite Patriarch urged on many occasions the two countries to establish straightforward diplomatic relations like all sovereign and independent countries with free decisions because the current Syrian hegemony is causing Lebanon to fade away, little by little, from the international arena. Lebanon has no decision, no sovereignty and no independence. (The Lebanon Daily Star/14/11/2000)

**Table 4: Support for Syrian-Lebanese coordination**

Q9: Do you approve of privileged ties between Lebanon and Syria? (N=975)	%
Strongly agree	6
Agree	46
Don't agree	26
Strongly don't agree	22
Unsure	

**Table5: Principle position toward peace on the Syrian –Israeli peace tracks**

Q17: In your opinion, the main obstacle to peace is: (N=983)	%	Q12: Should Lebanon sign a unilateral peace agreement with Israel? (N=971)	%
Lebanon	10	Yes	66
Syria	24	No	34
Israel	66		
Syria and Israel			
Q10: Do you approve of the coupling of the Lebanese and Syrian peace tracks? (N=983)	%	Q11: If no, what do you prefer? (N=549)	%
Strongly agree	3	Separation of the tracks	90
Agree	28	Coordination between both countries	10
Don't agree	40		
Strongly don't agree	30		
Unsure			



causes Lebanese Christians to think that Syria does not want Lebanon to be a sovereign country and that the price of its accepting a settlement with Israel is keeping Lebanon as a satellite country under its dominance. According to Gibran Tucini (2000), the owner of An-Nahar, Lebanon's leading newspaper:

This is not acceptable and will not be accepted by our people after twenty years of war and sacrifices". This point is further reiterated by Simon Karam, former ambassador to the United States, who blamed Lebanon's non-participation in peace negotiations on the lack of internal agreement on significant issues among the actual political leadership: "Syria is behaving according to its national welfare, so let us, too, search for our benefit.

Lebanese officials unanimously echo the Syrian position on the symbiosis of the two countries' peace tracks with Israel. They vividly remember former Lebanese president Amin Al-Jumayyil's botched program to seek a separate peace treaty with Israel, often referred to as the "infamous 17 May 1983 Agreement." The Lebanese government has apparently understood the implications of concluding a peace treaty with Israel without Syrian consent. Syria's punitive response at the time was to curtail the Lebanese government's authority in most Lebanese regions. In view of the demise of the 17 May Agreement, it is probably safe to assert that Lebanon cannot conclude a peace agreement with Israel without Syrian over-lordship. Farid Abboud, Lebanon's ambassador to the United States, explained his government's position on the matter of negotiating peace with Israel:

Negotiations toward a settlement, as far as Lebanon is concerned, should be conducted in close coordination with Syria, which remains faithful to the same principles. Lebanon already embarked on a road to a separate deal with the Israelis in 1983, with catastrophic consequences for Lebanon and for Israel and will not take it again."<sup>32</sup>

The Madrid-track talks seemed to offer a chance for peace; but the talks stalled in February 1994. During the period 1991-94, Lebanese

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<sup>32</sup> Middle East Insight, September 1999.

**Table 6: Predisposition towards Peace and Desired Scope of relations with Israelis**

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Personally, do you want peace with Israel? (N=983)	%	If you want peace with Israelis, what kind of relations would you like to see between them and the Lebanese? (870)	%
Yes	90	Close cooperation on a neighborly basis	26
No	10	Regular cooperation	56
Unsure	—	Little cooperation	6
		No cooperation	13

and Israelis completed 18 rounds of talks before they came to an abrupt conclusion. But the most telling sign of Lebanon's lack of independent decision-making came in the opening session of direct talks with Israel when Syria's negotiating team arrived to begin their own session with Israeli delegates. Meekly, Lebanese diplomats filed out to make room for the Syrians so that the real business of the day could begin<sup>33</sup>. However, the Lebanese-Israeli issue was obviously resolvable, since Israeli negotiators told the Lebanese delegation they had no claim on Lebanese territory. The real issue for Israel has to do with security. That issue could be resolved, given a peace agreement with Syria. Ever since, the Syrians have been emphasizing the unity of the Lebanese and Syrian tracks as a strategic option. While technically there is a Lebanese track, peace negotiations that resumed in December 1999 between Syria and Israel left Lebanon out, assuming instead total coordination with Syria<sup>34</sup>.

Conventional Arab thinking is that Arab publics continues to view with aversion the prospect of peace with the Hebrew state. Elias Saba<sup>35</sup> wrote that "Lebanon and any other Arab country should seek a peace with Israel that only ends the state of war." On several occasions, Lebanon refused to participate in the multilateral talks of the Middle East peace process designed to promote normal relations between the Arabs and Israel. Lebanon insisted that their territorial and political disputes with the Jewish state have to be settled first. But empirical evidence suggests that at that time less than one third of Arab respondents (and 30% of Lebanese Muslims who were interviewed) approve of peace.<sup>36</sup>

Against this backdrop, Lebanese Christian respondents reveal more than 90% in favor of peace with Israel. Certainly, Lebanon's internal problems and their repercussions on the sizable Christian community contribute to this attitude, as expressed by the following plea for peace issued by the Maronite Patriarch in May 2000:<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Robert Satloff "A Madrid Post-Mortem", Middle East Insight, Volume 8, No.3, January/February 1992,p.7.

<sup>34</sup> Richard Haas and Shibley Talhami "The Middle East After Barak's Election: Ripe for Peace?" A Brookings Press Briefing, July 13, 1999.

<sup>35</sup> Elias Saba, Lebanon and the Arab-Israeli Conflict, Dar al-Jadid, 2000.

<sup>36</sup> Khashan, *ibid.* pp.176-177.

<sup>37</sup> The Lebanon Daily Star, May 5, 2000.

**Table 7: Economic Cooperation with Israel**

What is your position on starting economic relations between Lebanon and Israel? (N=960)		Q30: Who would benefit more from economic relations between Lebanon and Israel? (N=990)	
	%		%
Support	76	Lebanon would benefit more	66
Oppose	18	Israel would benefit more	20
Unsure	7	Unsure	14

Alas, the peace process is on hold right now. But we hope the world community and instrumental decision makers will help reactivate the stagnant peace process. We need peace in order to ease our troubles and live in tranquility.

The Christians' responses to the far more stringent question in Table 6 on the kind of relations desired between Israel and Lebanon seem to indicate a positive attitude in favor of bilateral cooperation in the future. More than 80% of the respondents support substantial collaboration between Lebanon and Israel. Since 1975, high-level contacts started to take place between Israeli officials and Christian right-wing leaders. These contacts developed into full-scale cooperation following the Camp David Accords. Egypt's disengagement from the Arab-Israeli conflict and the inauguration of diplomatic relations between Egypt and Israel in 1979 have encouraged many Lebanese Christians to demand that similar arrangements be concluded between Lebanon and Israel to end the state of belligerency between the two countries.

Almost nine years after the Middle East peace process was launched, many Arabs believe that the process, though slow and stumbling, is the only way out of the age-old conflict; but many other Arabs express disbelief in the prospects for peace, at least on the economic level. They point to Israel's plans to extend economic hegemony over its Arab neighbors after its military territorial expansionism came to a halt as a result of the 1973 Middle East War. Elias Saba, a prominent Lebanese economist and politician, belongs to the latter group. The following excerpts summed up his ideas:<sup>38</sup> "Israel still adheres to its old goal: to extend its dominance and hegemony over the Arab world...but the means for realizing this goal have switched from staging wars to imposing economic normalization.... Should Lebanon's talks with Israel be resumed, the economic aspect will be the most important in the negotiations." These aspects are crucial for the future of the Lebanese economy and consequently for the economies of Syria and the Arab world in general.

In soliciting the respondents' personal reaction to an official inauguration of Lebanese-Israeli economic relations, three-fourths of them supported this possibility. These findings seem to concur with the

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<sup>38</sup> Elias Saba, *ibid.*

opinion of economist Michael Young:

The Lebanese are not expected to be intransigent on the nature of peace, though domestic opposition to Israel remains high in some quarters. Most probably, Lebanon will be the main connecting point in the Syria-Israeli-Lebanese triangle, permitting controllable economic forays into Syria, while allowing the Syrians to deflect too much Israeli interest in developing bilateral relations. Lebanon would become a potentially lucrative safety valve.<sup>39</sup>

Since the 1973 war between Egypt and Syria in the one camp and Israel in the other, Young continues, "the myth of Israel's unbeatable army has been discredited." The Jewish state switched to a new policy to win collaboration from the Arab powers:

By trying to convince the Arabs to swap occupied territories with normal economic relations, Israel is actually seeking to invade the Arab world economically... Arab countries should counter Israel's plots by boosting economic relations among each other... true peace in the Middle East cannot be achieved as long as Israel is economically superior to the Arabs.

As is clear from the table, two-thirds of the respondents expressed an opinion that economic cooperation will be more beneficial to Lebanese than to Israelis, and this is a renunciation to Saba's view. Saba describes Arab-Israeli peace agreements, whether already reached or expected to be forged in the near future, as "mere settlements that cannot lead to true peace as long as Middle Eastern economic factors remain in favor of Israel."

The stillborn security agreement reached between Lebanon and Israel in 1983, the popularly called May 17 Agreement, was "too dangerous" for Lebanon. The agreement, annulled after a successful uprising against the government of then-President Amin Gemayel, "was particularly perilous because it stipulated further economic normalization talks between Lebanon and Israel".

The fate of the Palestinian refugees residing in Lebanon since 1948 is the most stubborn negotiating item pertaining to the Lebanese track.

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<sup>39</sup> Michael Young, *The Lebanon Daily Star*, January 8, 2000.

Of all the countries hosting Palestinians, Lebanon probably confronts the most sensitive and serious problems. Fearing that the Middle East peace process will try to implant Palestinians in Lebanon against the will of the Lebanese, Lebanese authorities continue to deny the Palestinians basic social and economic rights in order to discourage them from remaining there. As a result, Lebanon hosts the highest percentage of Palestinians living in camps<sup>40</sup> (55 percent or 200,000 people). Formally, Lebanese officials reject the prospect of permitting Palestinians to become naturalized Lebanese because this "would constitute a negation of the Palestinian right to return to their homeland."<sup>41</sup> The authorities constantly repeat the mantra of former Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri, uttered in 1998, that "Lebanon will never, ever integrate Palestinians. They will not receive civic or economic rights or even work permits. Integration would take the Palestinians off the shoulders of the international agency which has supported them since 1948."<sup>42</sup>

But as indicated in Table 5, Lebanese Christians have other motives for resisting this prospect: they see citizenship for Palestinians, most of whom are Sunni Muslims, upsetting the delicate confessional balance in the country's political structure based on demographics. Reflecting the complete lack of popular support for Palestinian citizenship, Interior Minister Michel al-Murr recently announced that a new clause has been added to the naturalization draft law to prevent Palestinians from gaining citizenship.<sup>43</sup> Most Christians have always been hostile to the Palestinians, due mainly to Palestinian exploitation of the internal tensions of Lebanese society for their own ends, and blame them for providing the fuel for the civil war that laid waste to Lebanon from 1975 to 1990. Permanently settling Palestinians in the country would unhinge Lebanon's delicate sociopolitical balance, which is upset by even the slightest change of one of its components.

But then Lebanon's worries stem also from the continued presence of these armed Palestinians in the camps, because they represent a potential for instability, threatening to reenact the civil war days unless a solution for the Palestinians is found: "If Palestinian refugees in

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<sup>40</sup> Steven Edminster, "Trapped on All Sides," *The Marginalization of Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Committee for Refugees, 1999), p. 14.

<sup>41</sup> *The Lebanon Daily Star*, November 27, 1999.

<sup>42</sup> *International Herald Tribune*, December 21, 1998.

<sup>43</sup> *An-Nahar* (Beirut), July 28, 1999.



Lebanon were not given the right to return home, they will become a time bomb."<sup>44</sup> The permanent presence of Palestinians in Lebanon worries a substantial portion of the Lebanese population, especially Christians. The Lebanese government's involuntary acquiescence in the presence of armed Palestinians in the refugee camps exacerbates this view.<sup>45</sup> The pro-Arafat and Palestinian rejectionists refuse to hand over their weapons in the absence of a clear understanding with Lebanese authorities about the camps: "Weapons may be needed to cope with particular instances," says Shafiq al-Hut, the PLO's former representative in Beirut. Fear and a sense of equal treatment lead Christians likewise to hold on to arms. The net result: a high degree of expectation exists that the launching of Palestinian commando raids would have adverse effects on Lebanon and could mean a new civil war, as expressed by 55 percent of the respondents, or Israeli devastation of Lebanese territories.

The claim that foreign plots exist to impose the settlement of Palestinians on Lebanon has increased worries among Lebanese about the probability that Palestinian refugees may stay in the country indefinitely.<sup>46</sup> There is a widespread impression that the future of the Palestinians should be decided by the United States if ever Arab-Israeli peace process should reach a decisive stage. In fact, U.S. proposals to settle refugees in Arab states have so far proven unworkable. They were met with official rejection in the case of Jordan's King Abdullah: "Everybody wants to solve this problem but it will not be at the expense of Jordan."<sup>47</sup> The Gulf States also rejected the proposals as a potential danger to political stability.<sup>48</sup> As permanent status negotiations resumed, the Palestinian Authority has shown no enthusiasm for taking the Palestinians in Lebanon into a future Palestinian state. Like Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan, the Palestinian Authority considers itself one of the countries hosting refugees.<sup>49</sup> Arafat seeks to keep pressure on Israel to allow the Palestinian refugees

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<sup>44</sup> President Emile Lahud, *The Daily Star* (Beirut), Apr. 26, 2000.

<sup>45</sup> Ililal Khashan and Simon Haddad, "The Coupling of the Syrian-Lebanese Tracks: Beirut's Options," *Security Dialogue*, Vol.31, No.2, June 2000, pp. 201-214.

<sup>46</sup> *An-Nahar*, November 9, 1999; *International Herald Tribune*, Dec. 13, 1999.

<sup>47</sup> *The Scotsman* (Edinburgh), Oct. 7, 1999.

<sup>48</sup> *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin*, January, 2000.

<sup>49</sup> As'ad Abd ar-Rahman, chairman of the PLO Refugee Department, news conference, Ramallah, Feb. 28, 1999.

**Table 8: Position on the refugees issue**

Q20: Palestinian refugees residing in Lebanon are the responsibility of: (N=964)	Q22: Palestinian refugees in Lebanon should be :(N=983)	%	Q6: Should armed Palestinians conduct cross-border operations in order to affirm their right of return? (N=972)	%	Q7: If no, why? :(N=681)	%	
Lebanon	3	Granted citizenship	1	Yes	5	It will result in the resumption of the civil war	55
Arab states	31	Granted immigrant status and allowed to stay	6	No	96	Operations should be conducted from other Arab countries	6
Israel	18	Permitted to emigrate	93	Unsure	-	This issue will be settled through negotiations	39
International community	48						

**Table 10: Likely impact of peace**

Q32: Do you think that peace will benefit Lebanon? (N=984)		Q33: If your answer is yes, how? (N=485)		Q21: if your answer is no, what are the issues that worries you the most? (N=457)	
	%		%		%
Yes	51	Restore Christian preponderance	59	The Palestinian refugee issue	28
No	30	Through regional cooperation	8	Regaining Sovereignty	48
Unsure	20	It will encourage Christian emigrants to return	32	Economic recovery	23

**Table9: The Role of The US in promoting Peace**

Q23: How do you see the role of the united states in promoting peace between Syria /Lebanon and the Israelis? (N=989)		Q24: Should the US continue to involve itself in the peace process? (N=990)		Q25: In your opinion, what should be the role of the US in the peace talks : (N=928)	
	%		%		%
The US performs as an honest mediator	8	The US should continue	88	Pressure Syria	13
The US is more on the side of Syria /Lebanon	3	The US should not continue	8	Pressure Israel	24
The US is more on the side of the Israelis	75	Unsure	4	Pressure both	63
Unsure	16				

the right of return to their original homes in light of the economic obstacles facing those who want to relocate to the West Bank and Gaza Strip. An alternative solution has been proposed: that the Palestinian refugees should be resettled in Western countries. That would suit Israel and would probably also be popular among the population at large. To date, Canada, amongst others, has offered to absorb 15,000 Palestinians.

The Lebanese know about America's interest in a secure and peaceful Israel. That interest derives from many factors, including historical ties dating back to America's early support for the creation of the state in 1948 and shared Judeo-Christian religious sensibilities. Israel enjoys the strong and emotional support of a large segment of the American population. This support extends beyond the influential U.S. Jewish community, although that community's ties with the Jewish state are especially close. When the respondents were asked to assess the role of the U.S. in mediating the peace talks between Syrian/Lebanese and Israelis, only eight percent said the U.S. performs as an honest broker, but with only three percent arguing that the U.S. is actually on the Syrian/Lebanese side.

Israel's long-term security requires a stable peace with its neighbors, rather than simply continued American military and technological support. The Oslo Accords enabled Jordan to sign a peace treaty with Israel, led to negotiations between Israel and Syria, and for a while emboldened Arab states in the Gulf and North Africa to forge closer ties with Israel. The deadlock in the peace process in the past year has halted any possible further normalization of relations between Israel and the Arab world and has intensified opposition to normalization by the general Arab public and its intellectual elites, putting strains even on the peace agreements with Egypt and Jordan. Although Syria's own calculations about peace with Israel are primarily bilateral, the Syrian president's assessment of any agreement with Israel may well be affected by what happens in the Palestinian conflict.

The Syrian-Israeli track remains central to the establishment of a comprehensive peace in the region. Movement on this track, however, is not as urgent as on the Palestinian track, even though there is a low-level proxy war between Syria and Israel along the southern border of Lebanon. The Syrian-Israeli border is stable, and there are no imminent hardships looming for either side as a consequence of delay. The shape of a possible settlement is well known to both sides, and its absence is more a function of political will than effective bargaining.

Both states have significant leverage to bring to bear on the negotiations for a final agreement.

The unfavorable assessment of the U.S. role has not convinced most respondents that Washington should cease to involve itself in the peace talks on the Syrian/Lebanese track. This remains essential for the establishment of a comprehensive peace in the region, according to Nassif Hitti.<sup>50</sup> The biggest concern on this track in the short term is an unintended conflict that might begin with a crisis in Lebanon. Israel and Hizbullah are painfully entangled in south Lebanon.

Achieving a peace deal between Lebanon and Israel has different implications for the Christians, as shown in Table 10. A weak majority sees various benefits ensuing to Lebanon from a successful conclusion of the process: increased pressure on Syria to leave, encouraging Christian emigrants to return home, and cooperation with neighboring countries. A second group, however, fears that a finalized Israeli-Syrian /Lebanese peace deal will definitely come at Lebanon's expense, in the sense that no one will care any more whether Syria leaves Lebanon after agreements have been signed. The permanent settling of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon worries a substantial number of respondents, besides Lebanon's economic problems.<sup>51</sup> Such an outcome of peace negotiations could only constitute a recipe for future insecurity and disorder as openly expressed by Maronite patriarch Cardinal Nasrullah Sfeir:

The peace that is being promised may have adverse consequences. If the resettlement of Palestinians in vast underpopulated Arab countries is not acceptable, then the effect on a small-overpopulated country like Lebanon would be even more dire.<sup>52</sup>

### **Conclusion and Implications of the Study**

The Arab-Israeli conflict antedates the fairly recent history of Lebanon, and throughout its existence Lebanon has struggled to contain the effects of its involuntary involvement in this protracted

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<sup>50</sup> Peace Negotiations: Across The Past and Towards The Future in The Independence of the Lebanese State and the Probable Peace Talks, The Cultural Movement Antelias (Lebanon), The Works of The National Congress in 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> of November, 1999, p. 26.

<sup>51</sup> It was deemed unnecessary by the author to go into a detailed analysis Lebanon's economic problems, which are outside the scope of this paper.

<sup>52</sup> Al-Hayat, March 13, 2000.

conflict<sup>53</sup>. Lebanon's role in that conflict was determined primarily by its sectarian composition. Syria and Israel have influenced Lebanon's political system, and each continues to be inextricably involved in Lebanon's internal affairs. Much of the country's anguish lies in its inability to strike a delicate balance between its two powerful neighbors: Lebanon's dilemma lies in the fact that it cannot please one side without antagonizing the other. The new regional power configuration, in turn, accentuated divisions within Lebanese society and culminated in Syria's dominant presence in Lebanese politics, which persists even today.

A major repercussion of Syrian policy is that Lebanon's position on the peace process with Israel became more reflective of the Syrian line. Not only the Syrian-Lebanese peace tracks of negotiations with Israel are intertwined but also there is rather a single Syrian-Lebanese peace track involving simultaneous signature of peace treaties. Many Lebanese, and notable the Christians, feel that Syria intentionally tries to keep them busy with domestic turmoil to justify its continued presence in the country and even subsequent to a peace deal and to exclude the Lebanese from presenting their views in the talks<sup>54</sup>. During the first week of August 2001, Lebanese security forces rounded up more than 200 loyalists and senior leaders of exiled Christian rebel leader Michel Aoun and members of the banned Lebanese Forces<sup>55</sup>. Lebanon's highest Christian religious leader, Maronite Patriarch Nasrallah Sfeir who has been leading the campaign to end Syria's stranglehold on Lebanon, said force would not make young Christians change their convictions<sup>56</sup>. Officially, the crackdown on anti-Syrian activists was justified under the pretext of Christian involvement in an Israeli conspiracy where Christian forces would take advantage of probable political changes linked to the peace process in the region<sup>57</sup>.

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<sup>53</sup> Ghassan Salame, "Lebanon: How 'National' Is Independence?" Beirut Review 6 (Fall 1993): pp.1-5.

<sup>54</sup> Interview with Elie Kheir, researcher at The Institute for Social and Economic Studies in Paris, An-Nahar, February 25, 2000.

<sup>55</sup> Leaders of Lebanon's Maronite Christian community have been among the most vocal critics of Syria's presence in Lebanon, which still includes some 20,000 troops despite a June pullout from Beirut seen as a concession to Christian discontent.

<sup>56</sup> An-Nahar, August 8, 2001.

<sup>57</sup> Lebanese authorities banned two Christian groups opposed to Syria's role in Lebanon from any political activity Both have been campaigning to oust Syria's 20,000 troops and

Figures from across Lebanon's political spectrum have denounced the security crackdown as a sign of creeping authoritarianism in what is generally viewed as one of the Arab world's most liberal countries.

The Christians of Lebanon remain unimpressed, and rather confused, by the political changes that any prospective peace deal with Israel could bring. They favour peace with Israel and support a privileged relation with Syria but are not reassured regarding Syrian policy in Lebanon. It is true that the future of the Lebanese will not solely depend on Syria and Israel, but coming to a comprehensive understanding with the Syrian leadership is vital to the future of the community and the country.

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end its political and military influence in Lebanon.

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## The Ethos of Global Intervention

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Despite the presence in the world of a great many particularist movements that would split societies into smaller units, there is also a powerful drive toward consolidation, powered primarily by an international leadership that has adopted an ethos of global meliorism. In effect, the philosophy is that "everyone's business is our business." Important voices in the United States have expressed a desire for some constraints, but even these have called for a wide scope of world intervention. All of this is very much at odds with the traditional American foreign policy that prevailed until 1898. Now that the Cold War is over, the author says, it is time for a serious reexamination of the premises underlying both the new and the traditional policies.

**Key Words:** International affairs, American foreign policy, world intervention, global meliorism, Davos culture.

Powerful opposing forces – some centrifugal and others centripetal – are contending for preeminence in the world today.

In their recent book *Beyond Westphalia?: State Sovereignty and International Intervention*, Thomas Weiss and Jarat Chopra interpret this as a continuation of the anti-colonial breakup that followed World War II: "The decolonization process that began in Africa and Asia continues not only in the former Soviet empire but also within newly independent states, as ethnic particularism and subnationalism surface...."<sup>1</sup> They would almost certainly agree, however, that the fragmentation goes far beyond what can be attributed directly to the breakup of the earlier colonial system.

A centrifugal flying-apart into fragments occurs in movements that in many places passionately seek local autonomy, often even secession from the larger entity to which they have belonged. A short list of the areas in which local peoples are asserting themselves in a great many

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Weiss and Jarat Chopra in *Beyond Westphalia?: State Sovereignty and International Intervention*, Gene M. Lyons and Michael Mastanduno, eds. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), p. 92.