

# THE ROUTLEDGE HANDBOOK OF CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS

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# BUILDING AN INTEGRATED MILITARY IN POST-CONFLICT SOCIETIES

## Lebanon

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### Introduction

Militaries are often viewed as crucial instruments in post-conflict stabilization and reconstruction. Yet throughout much of the developing world—particularly in conflict-ridden societies—these militaries are crippled by fractionalization. The multiple ethnicities, religions, regional and identity affiliations that make up the state have not been integrated into the military. Instead, further inhibiting post-conflict reconciliation, the armed forces were often dominated by one or another group, crippling the ability of the military to play a positive role in society.

Lebanon is a case of an extremely divided society and military, one whose military prior to the end of the long civil war was viewed as representative of one religious group. While Lebanon is a country with deep-seated cleavages and a political system based on religious confession, it succeeded in forming a military that is now popularly accepted as national—not the purview of any one group. The military is now the one institution in Lebanon that is respected across all sects, while the state and its other institutions are viewed with disdain or as sectarian preserves.<sup>1</sup> Building a national, representative military in Lebanon did not occur either by accident or by gradual demographic changes, but was the result of a conscious but little-noticed overhaul undertaken by the military during the Syrian occupation. The new policies were the result of institutional learning by the military, particularly through lessons learned when the military disintegrated during the long civil war (1975–90). Yet effective reorganization could only be implemented while the military was politically insulated from sectarian politicians.

As a case of post-conflict military reconstruction, Lebanon challenges common assumptions of civil-military relations. While the major paradigm in civil-military relations holds that civilian control is an unqualified good, here positive integration of the military took place against the will of civilian politicians and separate from them. Lebanon also highlights the problems of control in multi-ethnic societies, where both the military and the civilian authority are divided. With numerous and overlapping conflicting actors, it is not clear who the civilian authority is

that is entitled to issue orders to the military. For most of Lebanon's history, the military was not a unified actor, but composed of separate groups with diverse goals, often answering to differing authorities.

This chapter describes the process of integration that Lebanon's military went through successfully beginning in 1991. I first provide background on Lebanon and the Lebanese military. I then delve into attempts to transform the army.<sup>2</sup> Attempts at reorganization were present during the civil war,<sup>3</sup> but none bore fruit until after the conflict ended. The military then took the lead and implemented a plan against the will of civilian politicians. The key element, I argue, was the buffer provided by Syria between the military and sectarian-oriented politicians. Such insulation was necessary to avoid political influence from the diverse sects on the military. Political influence can lead to appointments and promotions motivated not by merit but by favoritism, which in turn would make allegiance to such influential persons rational on the part of soldiers. This thwarts the goal of a military oriented to the nation and loyal to the chain of command, not individuals outside the military. I then review the performance of the military since its reorganization. In conclusion, I draw the implications of the Lebanon case for democratic civil-military relations theory and note continuing problems that could halt the continuance of unity in the Lebanese military.

### **The Lebanese domestic political structure**

A brief outline of the Lebanese domestic political structure is necessary in order to understand the context within which the military operates. Lebanon is a multi-confessional society, with numerous ethnic or religious (confessional) groups, often called sects, formally recognized by the state. The country's democracy and all its political institutions were based on such confessions or religious identities. Each major group has veto power over state decisions. The diverse groups are all allotted specific proportions of state positions, divided according to a complicated formula based on the country's only census in 1932. This type of government is called consociational.<sup>4</sup> The main effect of this structure is to maintain the status quo, since it is difficult to achieve agreement on how to change decisions, and this solidifies the role of religious identity in daily life.

Lebanon is based on a compromise between the two major groups: Christians and Muslims. The major groups reached an informal understanding at independence that Lebanon would not lean either Eastward or Westward: it would not bind itself to the West as the Christians wanted, nor to the Arab world as the Muslims wanted. The communities agreed to disagree. Electoral rules return politicians to office who are elected on the strength of their religious ties and identity, and many political posts are inherited.

Two main trends arose from the divisions embodied at independence in 1943. Out of the Christian, pro-Western side, the trend of "Lebanists" emerged, those wishing to side openly with the West and eschewing their Arab heritage and connections. They insisted on Christian domination of Lebanese politics. The early institutional manifestation of this political trend was the right-wing Phalange or Kata'ib political party, later a militia, inspired by the fascist parties of Europe in the 1930s. This trend became identified as separatist, wanting to split a portion of Lebanon off from the Muslim rest of the country.

The second, looser grouping has been more typical of the Muslims and often pro-Arab, siding with the Palestinians and Arab nationalists at different times. Despite the apparent religious nature of the divisions, these political trends were not divided along religious lines but cut across them. The Phalange with its overtly Christian philosophy was overwhelmingly Christian, but Christians were present in large numbers in other anti-Phalange political and military groups. Lebanon's conflicts were not about religious dogmas or hostility toward other religions *per se*,

but were battles for control of the country that largely fell along the differing perspectives of the religious groups. The sides are more aptly described as rightist versus leftist. As the conflicts progressed, polarization along religious identity did occur, and massacres and ethnic cleansing were directed at religious and ethnic groups in themselves. The result was the long civil war (1975–90) pitting first the two sides against each other, then numerous other militias, with both sides fighting major battles against their own supposed side at points during the war.

Israel invaded twice during the war, and Syria began occupying parts of the country in 1976. The Syrian presence was extended and legitimized by the treaty ending the civil war (the Ta'if Accords), which instituted the Arab Deterrent Force to disarm the militias. This force was mainly Syrian. Israeli occupation of Lebanon mainly ended in 2000 following continued battles with Hizbullah, although Lebanon argues that Israel still occupies a strip of land called Sheba'a Farms. Syrian occupation ended in 2005 after massive peaceful demonstrations against Syria.

The end of the Lebanese civil war began with the Ta'if Accords signed in Saudi Arabia in 1989, as the sides accepted a somewhat modified government formula. The agreement changed the system slightly, decreasing the balance of Christians to Muslims from six to five, to equal numbers of both in parliament. Syria was a strong player in this accord, and led the new peacekeeping body in Lebanon, the Arab Deterrent Force. The accord did not give a final date to Syria's military role in Lebanon. The head of the Lebanese army, General Michel Aoun, vehemently disagreed with this treaty and waged a "war of liberation" against Syrian occupation. In 1990, when Syria agreed to take part in the first Gulf War against the Iraqi Saddam Hussein's invasion and occupation of Kuwait, the US remained silent on Syria's actions in Lebanon.<sup>5</sup> Syria dispensed with Aoun's war and extended its forces throughout Lebanon with the exception of the border area occupied by Israel and the South Lebanon Army, a private army supported by Israel, until 2000.

### **History and structure of Lebanese Armed Forces**

The Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) both reflect the societal divisions of Lebanon and attempts to transcend them for the sake of an (ideally) unified nation. In the name of this Lebanese nation, encompassing the diverse sects, the Lebanese military has at times played the role of a political actor, defying the orders of some civilian authorities, including the Lebanese President. The positions it takes are consistent with the Lebanese military's view of itself as the peacemaker, as representing a nation above sectarian divisions. Its actions follow the country's majority opinion, even if civilian policy-makers do not agree with this view.

The Lebanese military was perceived for most of its history as a Christian stronghold, aligned with the dominant Christian political power. Following the division of government positions by sect, the LAF was also divided as half-Christian and half-Muslim. The commander of the LAF would be a Maronite, and partly due to the history of the military, most officers were Christian.<sup>6</sup> Brigades were religiously and geographically uniform: Christians from a particular region served in the same brigade, as did Shi'a from the south and Sunni from the north. This crippled any power of the army to thwart the influence of sectarian notables and politicians. Such influence, impeding the development of the rule of law, is an ongoing problem in Lebanon.

The LAF's relation to civilian control is complicated. Formally, the LAF's role was to serve the Constitution, that is to be subordinate to civilian authorities and uphold the power of the president.<sup>7</sup> But focusing on the question of civilian control misses the crucial problem. Briefly, problems with civilian control over the military in Lebanon include the rivalry between the Commander of the LAF and the President, a divided government that only functions by consensus, the lack of civilian national security priorities (the military has set its own priorities

for national security), the rival influence of neighbors and international actors, and a sectarian system that pervades all Lebanese institutions. The LAF and the President of Lebanon are rivals, as the commander of the LAF has often been elected president, and the military is called to step in when civilian leaders are unable to form a new government. Lebanon's military has technically been under civilian control, yet often refused to act at the behest of a government. The LAF functions only when there is national agreement for it to act, but civilian orders are not clear-cut.<sup>8</sup> Although the military is by law subordinate to the President, the President's authority to use the military is subject to the Council of Ministers, which includes competing leaders. In effect, instead of a single boss of the army commander, there are at least three: the President, the Prime Minister, and the Speaker of the House, each representing a major sect. The military council, an advisory board composed of six sectarian representatives, further complicates the question of who has the power to order the LAF.

There is no current threat of a military coup against the government, but the LAF has not always supported individual governments against their oppositions either. Numerous times in its history the LAF has refused to follow civilian orders. Prior to its reorganization, this occurred most starkly in 1952 and 1958. Both times the commander of the military (General Fu'ad Shehab, also spelled Chehab) refused to use the army to support the President against opposition demonstrators, causing the fall of the government. The country was split, with a significant portion opposing the sitting government.<sup>9</sup> At the end of the 1980s, the military envisioned itself as the solution to the civil war and outlined a plan to take over temporarily.<sup>10</sup>

Composed of multiple ethnicities, the military more often than not stayed on the sidelines. The mixed nature of the military meant that commanders feared that soldiers would flee or refuse to follow orders that contradicted their own politics and the political stance of their ethnic group. Indeed, during the country's long civil war (1975–90), a large portion of the military disbanded or fought on the side of rival militias. Rebellious soldiers created new armies, and soldiers left to serve with their ethnic group's militia, often taking their supplies with them (depending on their position in the chain of command). Among the armies created were the Arab Army of Lebanon, the Army of Lebanon, and the Army for the Defense of South Lebanon.<sup>11</sup> Disbanding in favor of a militia was facilitated by the ethnic homogeneity of entire brigades. The Sixth Brigade, entirely Shi'a, left the LAF wholesale to serve with the militia Amal, for example. Many Christian forces also served with their militia. In 1990, the army split and one faction created its own rival government, joined with a leading militia, and then fought both a foreign country and that militia.<sup>12</sup>

The military's desire to avoid disintegrating into competing ethnic and religious groups is only one facet of the LAF's history of inaction. The military sees its role as acting above the diverse sects and representing the national good, or, as one observer puts it, enforcing the least worst outcome for all the communities. The military considers itself the institutional embodiment of consensus—the super-peacemaker—and therefore acts only when cross-sectarian agreement exists.<sup>13</sup> This came about in part through institutional learning, for when the LAF attempted to do otherwise, it fell apart or risked rebellion in the ranks. The LAF came to regard its mission as domestic peace: not as upholding the Constitution or civilian orders, if one or more community disputed those orders. Despite the consociational nature of Lebanese government, which should theoretically entail power-sharing and veto power for all the communities, some orders to the LAF have not had the support of all the communities but only the President, the Prime Minister, or a faction of the ministers. In these situations the LAF does not act.

Complicating the military's role are the changing demographics in Lebanon, decreasing the number of Christians relative to Muslims, and diminishing the number of Christians interested in joining the LAF. Precise numbers are not known; no census has been held since 1932 due to

the political sensitivity of demographics. However, the numerical dominance of Muslims (combining the sects, both Shi'a and Sunni) over Christians is not seriously disputed. The Central Intelligence Agency put the figures at about 60 percent Muslim and 39 percent Christian.<sup>14</sup> Christians emigrate more, intermarry with Muslims, and have slightly fewer children. Due to their generally higher economic status than many Muslims, they choose careers other than the military. Demographic pressures decreasing the number of Christians certainly affected the potential for the LAF to be balanced, but it did not dictate the wholesale reorganization of the military to mix religions and regions. By themselves, demographic changes could not transform the LAF into an integrated institution.

The military's relationship to the various militias or private armies in the country follows the same formula as its peacemaker role.<sup>15</sup> Lebanon can be classified as a quasi-sovereign state, in that it does not have the monopoly of armed force in the country. Rather, private armies (regionally referred to as militias, even though they are not attached to the state) exist. Unless there is unanimous agreement (from all sects) on disbanding the militia, the LAF will not move against it. With the exception of militias that fought the LAF itself at the end of the civil war, other private armies are allowed to exist.

### **Post-war reorganization**

The post-war reorganization and integration of the LAF were initiated and completed by the military itself, against the will of many if not most civilian politicians. The state was absent during this initiative, except to register protests against the reorganization with the occupying Syrian army. The specific actions reflected institutional learning, and in some cases, trial and error. They were enacted by a group of high-ranking officers and generals close to the commander of the LAF, who had the backing of the Syrians. While state officials did not wish the military to be weak and prone to disbanding, each had their own separate ideas of the LAF's proper role. These diverse opinions on the LAF's role stemmed both from sectarian perspectives—differences of opinion on the proper role of the state toward external and internal actors—and from individual political incentives. Having friends in the LAF in important positions aids politicians, while weakening the LAF and its chain of command.

The LAF learned through the experience of splitting during the civil war that it must remain united and strong in order to keep order, and further, it learned that to remain united, it must be integrated. By the early 1980s, numerous proposals, laws, and measures attempting to reform the military had taken place, some heavily supported by the US. Support from the United States included advice, funding, and equipment to bolster the power of the LAF. One part of this US support that continues is training of Lebanese officers, since in the United States' estimation, lack of leadership was a significant problem with the Lebanese military.<sup>16</sup> There was broad national support for strengthening the military and turning it into a national, government-supporting institution. Reform efforts did not succeed and the army split again in the early 1980s and in 1990.

During the reorganization attempts in the 1970s and 1980s, significant changes occurred. The army commander was replaced, and older officers were retired. The traditional sectarian appointment for some commanding posts was altered, and it became possible to appoint a Sunni commander in a Christian area, for example. The army itself increased in size, and a military draft was instituted. The conscription law or the Service to the Flag Law was passed in 1982, mandating one year of service for young males, but it would have to wait until the war's end to be implemented. The New National Defense Law was promulgated in 1979, creating the Supreme Defense Council and the Military Council. The latter is an institution in Lebanese



politics that comes and goes, and it embodies representatives from the various sects from the military to implement security decisions.

Reorganization during the civil war was unsuccessful for several reasons. First and foremost, the new policies were attempted during ongoing hostilities, when political power was still unstable and contested. Second, the attempts did not reorganize the military at the individual level, as the final successful reorganization after the war finally did. Third, the military was still subject to sectarian politicians and their influence; the isolation that the Syrian occupation after the war provided was absent, and thus any efforts to remove local and sectarian politics from the military failed.<sup>17</sup>

What did successfully, and permanently, change was the sectarian breakdown of the military. Recognizing the disparity between demography and the impression of Christian control over the military, leaders attempted to bring the military in line with social reality. Christians dominated the officer corps, although retirements, deliberate appointments, and demographic realities succeeded in leveling the proportion of Christians to Muslims in the officer corps in the years of the war.<sup>18</sup>

After the long civil war, the task before the Lebanese Armed Forces was huge: militias had to be dismantled, their weapons confiscated, and the military had to be re-unified. In the long term, General Emil Lahoud, the army commander, would completely change the sectarian and geographic structure of the LAF. In the short term, the challenge of disarming the militias was substantial, since some had more arms, soldiers, and money than the LAF.<sup>19</sup> The LAF would have to fight the Lebanese Forces, a Christian militia, and then deal with a rebellious faction of the LAF under the command of General Michel Aoun. Syrian military participation was necessary to route General Aoun.<sup>20</sup> Lahoud had to wait for Aoun to be defeated before initiating his reunification program.

The Ta'if Accords of Fall 1989 signaled the willingness of most parties to end the war, although fighting would not cease for another year or so. The accords legitimized continued Syrian influence in Lebanon through the Arab Deterrent Force, an Arab League initiative dating from the beginning of the civil war. The Ta'if Accords incrementally made the proportion of Muslims equal to those of Christians in parliament, and decreased the power of the presidency while elevating the Prime Minister (a Sunni). The power of parliament and the Council of Ministers was similarly increased. Overall, the Christians lost power relative to the pre-war period. Ta'if began defining the mission of the LAF, specifying that the military was to protect against external aggression by Israel. If carried out, this provision would re-orient the LAF from a primarily internal role to an external focus; however, that has not been the LAF's experience for most of the post-war period. Several confrontations with Israel have occurred, and these are problematic for Lebanon internationally.

Top officers in the LAF around General Lahoud shared a vision of the military. The LAF should be integrated and not confessional. Lahoud believed that an army that is not mixed cannot keep order.<sup>21</sup> This army, the officers felt, must be prevented from becoming a military of political parties or of local powers. The effort would entail a re-education campaign to create nationalistic solidarities within the military. A good officer was a national officer, not limited by sect, village, or party. Trainees were taught the benefits of a national military.<sup>22</sup> Ultimately, the LAF was to be the bulwark of the state that would prevent political antagonisms escalating into institutional collapse or war.<sup>23</sup>

Initial attempts to integrate the military failed because they only involved moving companies, and a small number of companies at that. Effective reorganization necessitated breaking up the company level with its attendant long-standing loyalties.<sup>24</sup> Those first attempts were also not accompanied by the intense information campaign that would aid the later integration policies.

Operation Global Integration began effectively in 1992, and occurred in three stages during the next two years. It was accompanied by a public relations campaign explaining to the populace the necessity of what the military was doing. Resistance came from political elites and the militias, both of whom saw their privileges about to wane due to a strong military insulated from the effect of influence and clout.<sup>25</sup> Complaints were waged with Syria, the *de facto* power broker and ruler in Lebanon, but Syria did not heed the complaints and continued to allow Lahoud free rein.

The military had to be gathered under a single, united leadership, and the militias disbanded. The battalions were then mixed confessionally, where previously one sect or another had dominated the battalions. Lastly, the battalions were moved from their local, home regions to regions in distant parts of the country. Divorcing the LAF from the regions of their origin ensured that the LAF was no longer subject to the local power holders with whom the soldiers shared an ethnicity and common networks. This moving of battalions helped to decrease the regional identification and separatism of some communities. Since hiring and promotion had been linked to confessional influence, the files of existing officers were reviewed. Some were demoted and others were promoted. Having served in a militia that fought the LAF did not prohibit promotion, as Lahoud stuck to the Lebanese formula of "no victor, no vanquished."<sup>26</sup> Information and re-education programs implementing a new educational system in the military academies backed up these moves. The education program introduced the nation as the primary allegiance over religion or political ideology.<sup>27</sup> The program aimed at creating a new Lebanese soldier attached to the nation and a national army that was above sectarian differences. A new curriculum was developed specifically for this purpose.<sup>28</sup> Another facet of Lahoud's program was to reward top officers—generals—handsomely in their severance package as an incentive to stay clear of corruption and confessional politics, which are even more financially rewarding.<sup>29</sup>

Militiamen who were interested in joining the LAF were integrated into the military. It is estimated that about 6,000 were integrated, some into civil service jobs. About 1,000 militia leaders were put through the academy, but some did not make it; those most strident in their ideological beliefs usually did not enroll. A few were fired from the academy, including some with influential relatives. Many of the Lebanese Forces (Christian) did not join the military because they insisted on serving in separate, all-Christian battalions. When they learned the specifics of the new policy, many militiamen decided not to join and remained in the private sector (private security was a popular employment).<sup>30</sup>

The size of the military was increased through the 1990s to balance the number of soldiers coming from the former militias, and the draft was implemented in 1993 to obtain the confessional balance necessary. The draft period declined first from one year to six months, then was terminated entirely in 2007, apparently due to the problem of brain drain in Lebanon: faced with the draft, young talented men left the country. Currently the LAF is about 56,000 men, having decreased from over 70,000 after the end of the draft.<sup>31</sup> This number represents a large increase from the LAF's numbers prior to the civil war, which were about 20,000. Equal numbers of Muslims and Christians could not be achieved due to demographics and the lack of willing Christians, so the distribution of Muslims to Christians varied. Overall, about one-third of the army is Christian. Most brigades are about 70 percent Muslim to 30 percent Christian (a few are close to 50–50), and the special forces units and the military police are 50–50.<sup>32</sup> Parity among the upper ranks is maintained.<sup>33</sup>

Reorganization and reeducation were the means to reorient soldiers from divisive political allegiances to hierarchical discipline in a national military. Integrating the military thoroughly by mixing regions and religions has increased the homogeneity of thought and action in the ranks. Preliminary analysis suggests that the numerical composition of the LAF by the different



religious groups is less important than their placement within the military and the degree of their homogeneity in the military as an institution. Overall percentages of Christians and Muslims seem to matter less than whether Muslims and Christians serve together in areas other than their home regions, and that both groups have faith that the military will include them. The specific percentages of each religion do not need to be precise or uniform throughout. A public education campaign greatly adds to the ability to integrate the military and achieve popular recognition for these efforts.

For the sake of maintaining an image of the military as national, above sectarian politics, this rocky episode of reorganization and unifying the military is referred to by former LAF commanders as relatively simple. They state that the populace saw the necessity of it and wanted an integrated military. In reality, the process was difficult and politically charged. Some refused to serve in areas where the majority ethnic group had fought and killed members of their family during the war, for example.

### **Performance since Syria's departure**

The change to a positive popular opinion of the LAF occurred during military occupation, when the Syrians ruled. While Lebanese ire at the Syrians was apparent, culminating in a 2005 "independence intifada" forcing the Syrians to leave, the LAF continued to be held in high regard. The success of the military's integration is demonstrated by both its status as the one respected state institution in Lebanon and its continued unity through difficult circumstances. Some scholars claim that only through the LAF's presence as a multi-sectarian force was Lebanon able to withstand the rocky times after the Syrian departure without a return to civil war.<sup>34</sup> The LAF continues to be seen as non-sectarian. Lebanese citizens have confidence in their military, believe it should be deployed throughout the country, and in general have little faith in state institutions (differences among communities exist in the latter opinion).<sup>35</sup> Arguably, the military is the one truly national institution in Lebanon.

The LAF remained united through external and internal confrontations including protests against the Syrians in 2005; a wave of assassinations that targeted military personnel and civil society leaders; moving into the south to take over territory traditionally held by Hizbullah in 2006; a battle against a terrorist group in the north in 2007 (Fatah al-Islam in Nahr al-Barid refugee camp); and a battle between rival non-state militias in 2008 (Hizbullah versus the pro-government "Future" movement and Druze forces), among others. The LAF was deployed at hot spots during local and national elections to keep the peace. Finally, the LAF exchanged fire with the Israelis in 2010, which brought the ire of the US and suspended US financing of the LAF.

Despite having been under Syrian occupation for 15 years, with Syria controlling top appointments, the LAF established its Lebanese credentials by refusing to act against demonstrators who were protesting the Syrian occupation in 2005, against the orders of the Prime Minister.<sup>36</sup> This action belied the denigration of the LAF as Syrian-controlled, and at the same time it affirmed the LAF's tradition of remaining neutral through non-action when the country is deeply divided. This position furthered the public image of the LAF, to which it is sensitive, as a national institution unmarred by sectarian politics.

The end of the 2006 war between Israel and Hizbullah saw the LAF expand its domain into the south, into lands traditionally occupied by Hizbullah's militia. The LAF was not a consideration for Hizbullah's militia during that war, and the Lebanese military did not participate in it, but the ceasefire agreement entailed Hizbullah ceding military jurisdiction on the ground to the Lebanese military. The transfer of power occurred without incident, again demonstrating the LAF's increased prestige.

In 2007, the Lebanese Army acted against a small group of Islamist terrorists called Fatah al-Islam operating out of a Palestinian refugee camp in Northern Lebanon. The action had wide public support, even from Hizbullah, as the target of military action was viewed as foreign, not Lebanese, and not affiliated with the Palestinian cause or the residents of the refugee camps. Yet the military action was itself difficult, as the LAF lacks sophisticated weapons. The US, afraid the weapons would be passed to a non-state actor (Hizbullah) or worse, used directly by the LAF against Israel, refused such weapons to the LAF.<sup>37</sup>

During the Hizbullah-Sunni militia clashes in May 2008, the LAF remained absent from the fighting, refusing to support the government. Sunni and Druze militias filled that role instead. Hizbullah easily trounced these militias, then pulled back and allowed the Lebanese army to take over. For its part, the army reversed the governmental decrees that sparked the conflict.

The only confrontations on Lebanon's borders have been with Israel. The LAF was engaged in a border clash with Israel most recently in 2010, although there are reports of the LAF involved in actions performed by militias during the Syrian occupation and at least one border clash after it. In the beginning of August 2010, the LAF and Israeli forces exchanged fire. The incident involved the Israeli army cutting a tree that overhung and was mostly on the Lebanese side of the border, save its roots. Two Lebanese soldiers and one Israeli were killed. The response was for the US to suspend aid to the LAF and threaten to end aid altogether. Congress protested that its aid should not be used against Israel. The Lebanese, even politicians the US would consider allied to the West, responded defensively. A fund was established to finance the LAF from alternative sources, and Lebanese officials stated they would not accept aid with the condition that the LAF not fight Israel.<sup>38</sup> Aid was resumed three months later, in part justified by the threat of the non-state actor Hizbullah.<sup>39</sup>

### National security policy and the LAF

The LAF's major confrontations after the Syrian occupation highlight the question of LAF capabilities and its mission. Both a formal national security policy and the ability of the LAF to fulfill its own stated national security priorities are lacking. There are no formal national security policy directives from the civilian government. There is no consensus in the government as to what the LAF's role is or should be, either in the abstract or in particular situations.<sup>40</sup> This absence of consensus among government leaders translates into an inability to fix a national security policy among civilian leaders. In that absence, the LAF has identified its own priorities. Yet the LAF is ill-equipped to fulfill these goals, which would also risk it running afoul of the international community.

The LAF's stated mission is:

- Facing the Israeli occupation and its perpetual aggression in South Lebanon and West Bekaa, and supporting the steadfastness of Lebanese citizens to ensure the complete withdrawal of the Israeli forces to internationally recognized borders.
- Defending the country and its citizens against all aggression.
- Confronting all threats against the country's vital interests.
- Coordinating with Arab armies in accordance with ratified treaties and agreements.
- Maintaining internal security and stability.
- Engaging in social and development activities according to national interests.
- Undertaking relief operations in coordination with other public and humanitarian institutions.<sup>41</sup>

This prioritization of the LAF's mission is the result of the Ta'if Accords and the LAF's own past and continuing confrontations.

The LAF is a defensive military, unable and unequipped to act against foreign countries, hostile neighbors, or even powerful non-state actors within Lebanon. With few lethal weapons, the LAF is capable only of acting against domestic actors. Generals complain that the militias have more and better arms than the LAF, and weapons from the West are non-lethal and incapable of matching either their needs or the weapons of non-state actors. Moreover, responding to external aggression can lead to international problems for the LAF, as the 2010 exchange of gunfire with Israel suggests. Following this incident, the US Congress withheld aid for the Lebanese military on the basis that the LAF could be a threat to Israel.

The role of non-state militias is also a problem for the LAF. Although asked by international actors to disband Hizbullah, doing so would be unthinkable given the LAF's image of itself as a consensus institution. The LAF is able to maintain order, but it is not capable of fighting a major faction in Lebanon, according to observers and participants. This is due not only to a lack of combat capacity, but also because the LAF depends upon consensus and the agreement of all major parties in Lebanon; only then does it act. Hizbullah has a good working relationship with the LAF, although the LAF has in the past both acted against Hizbullah and sided with them.

It appears that the relevant actors are not willing to actively support a strong Lebanese military for their own individual reasons, and the LAF lacks both funding and training. The Lebanese government has not apportioned significant funding for the LAF, and some state that a strong military would thwart the existing political system of traditional influence and patronage.<sup>42</sup> The US has aided the LAF and continues to do so, although primarily with nonlethal equipment for fear that lethal weapons would fall into the hands of private militias or be used against the Israelis.<sup>43</sup> This has led to complaints by generals that even during the Nahr al-Barid campaign against the Islamists, the US did not provide lethal weapons and the LAF was working with makeshift weaponry.<sup>44</sup> The LAF's heavy equipment is mainly provided by Syria.<sup>45</sup>

### **Lessons learned**

It can be argued that a national military, viewed as representing the nation and not one facet of it, is a prerequisite for effective action by the military and the prevention of internal conflict. An integrated military may not by itself create national unity or build a state; however, state-building and national unity are hampered without a respected and representative military. As one retired general stated, "If the Lebanese army is divided along sectarian lines, this will allow sectarian strife or a new civil war. A national army constitutes a safety valve for the country."<sup>46</sup> A national military can be an instrument of national reconciliation after domestic hostilities and can aid in state-building. The experience of Iraq demonstrates that when state security forces are viewed as controlled by a sect in a contentious ethnic, conflict-ridden society, democracy and the functioning of that military across all segments of the state are compromised. The dangers of a divided military encompass the potential disintegration of the army, with the possibility of passing the weapons, training, and organization of the army to sectarian or sub-national militias.

Traditional civil-military theory is ill-suited for deeply divided societies emerging from war or building state institutions anew, where strong networks of political influence and patronage pervade society and the state. The Lebanon case challenges not only civil-military relations theory, but democratic theory also. It demonstrates that in this case, post-conflict Lebanon, political control over the military would have led to greater conflict. More research is needed to determine the circumstances that would cause such a conclusion to hold. In what situations are political peace and stability aided by a military that is separate from politics and civilian control? Post-conflict reorganization may be a special case, or, at the extreme, deeply divided societies may spur a reevaluation of some key aspects of civil-military theory.

Civilian control of the military must be qualified by analysis of the content of the civilian and democratic command structures.<sup>47</sup> In this quasi-democratic country, the military leads the country in reconciliation politics, refusing civilian orders that would threaten the country's precarious stability. This refusal of civilian authority has generated stability and avoided a return to civil war.

This study has shown that reorganization and integration can be accomplished, with the necessary cost being the insulation of the military from political influence. Despite its ongoing and significant limitations, the LAF has shed its long-standing image as a bastion of Christian minority power and is viewed as truly Lebanese and representative of the country in its entirety. The implementation and success of reorganization policies were contingent on the military's removal from sectarian politics and the influence of politicians and notables pushing for politically motivated appointments. Syria provided this insulation, as it was concerned crucially with security and high-level foreign policy; internal sectarian matters were not as important to the Syrians. In Lebanon's case, occupation ironically played a positive role for its military.

Indeed, how can the LAF stay united and non-sectarian without an occupying force? The LAF's high reputation is due to its non-sectarian composition and consensus actions, yet sectarian politicians are actively chipping away at these characteristics. Indications exist that sectarian influences have already begun affecting the LAF as brigades become more local than the previous rotating system would have allowed. The current commander is no longer insulated from sectarian pressures as the previous one was, and thus sectarian pressures have infiltrated the military and military appointments. By the 2007 confrontation with Fatah al-Islam in Northern Lebanon, it was apparent that the policy of not allowing soldiers to serve in their home regions was being abrogated, and a disproportional number of Sunni soldiers from the north died in that confrontation. The successful integration of the LAF could be threatened if this policy continues. Whether the new military education can thwart sectarianism and inculcate a national, Lebanese identity to the soldiers over the long term is unclear. Observers argue that the LAF must still function in a sectarian society, where all institutions and social participation are conditional upon sectarian identity; thus necessarily the LAF must function accordingly.<sup>48</sup>

While the military must be separate from sectarian or sub-national political groups, that does not mean that ignoring sect and group is a viable method of reorganizing the military in divided societies. The LAF deliberately integrated by paying attention to sect. A formula guided the leaders, guaranteeing to all sects that balance would be achieved. This experience indicates that turning a blind eye to sect and religion when constituting a military will be counterproductive. Given prior realities, where often one group held more power than another, it is unlikely that all groups will be equally interested in joining the new military. Military domination by one group would result, without a formula to guide recruitment and posts. However, this poses a long-term problem. Will instituting specific group proportions in the military merely solidify societal divisions? Solidifying group divisions is a distinct possibility, yet ignoring those groups will not result in long-term peace.

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### Notes

- 1 This does not mean that Lebanon's military is effective in its internal or external security tasks, or that it has resolved its complicated relationship to civilian politicians.
- 2 The Lebanese military is mainly composed of the army, with an extremely minimal navy and air force. In common parlance, army and military are used interchangeably to signify the Lebanese Armed Forces.
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