

LOYALTIES AND GROUP FORMATION IN THE LEBANESE OFFICER CORPS

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The Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), which experienced several major splits during the long civil war of 1975–1990, continues to reflect the communal and political cleavages of broader Lebanese society. This is clear from the patterns of post-1990 group formation among officers. But while these splits are typically attributed to sectarian dynamics, they owe as much to political affinities (which sect often colors), generational bonds, and the army’s identity as a professional body.

Before 1990, the main driver of group formation in the Lebanese officer corps revolved around Christian-Muslim identity politics. But the civil war, which ended with the defeat of predominantly Christian LAF units by the Syrian army in October 1990, led to a change in the balance. Over the following decade, Christian officers lost their prior dominance. This was most evident in relation to officers who had served under General Michel Aoun, LAF commander between 1984 and 1990 and caretaker prime minister who was appointed by outgoing president Amine Gemayel in 1988. Aoun led what he called a liberation war against the Syrian garrison in Lebanon in 1989–1990, and so when the rebuilding process began, the LAF command had to deal with Aounist officers

who had taken part in the campaign against the Syrian troops. These officers, who considered themselves the heart of the Lebanese army, shared a group identity built on struggle—and, subsequently, marginalization in the armed forces.

Generational and professional ties are also considerably more important to officers than is commonly acknowledged. These are first built at the Military Academy, where future officers from different sects and political orientations spend three years training together. For many of its graduates, “The military uniform changes a person. Military training is a training in nationalism,” as one retired general explained, and their allegiance is therefore meant to be reserved only for the institution.¹ The officers’ shared professional development, coupled with the subsequent experience of serving in the army, has made loyalty to the military institution a powerful, often overriding factor.

But professional ties have also been shaped by the political era in which officers join the LAF, with significant differences in culture and attitudes between those who joined under General Fouad Chehab’s command in 1945–1958, during the

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1975–1990 civil war, or under Syrian tutelage in 1990–2005. These different types of affiliation, whether generational or political, are also flexible, and they typically overlap with each other in myriad ways.

The delicate balance that successive commanders have sought to preserve among these various affiliations explains why, since being freed of Syrian oversight and regaining institutional autonomy in 2005, the LAF has been able to overcome crises that potentially jeopardized its cohesion. But while the army has certainly avoided becoming a failed institution, it remains vulnerable to the risk that officers' political or sectarian affiliations supersede their loyalty to the institution and its commander in chief.

THREE MILITARY GENERATIONS

Living in barracks, training together, and engaging in combat creates bonds between soldiers. Officers may be trained to be patriotic, but they still fight firstly for their unit and not for abstract notions like the nation or the state.² These military cohorts often determine group formation in the army and officer corps as a result. In the LAF, there are three main generational groups: those formed under Fouad Chehab, the war generation of 1975–1990, and Military Academy graduates from the Syrian era (1990–2005).

Ties within these military generations have often been cross-sectarian, binding officers from different sects, social backgrounds, and political camps. This starts at the Military Academy, where for three years, future officers build professional ties that tend to be preserved throughout their careers. Graduating officers consider the academy as the school of the nation, where they transcend sectarian identities. As one officer noted: “When the army split during the civil war [in 1989–1990], there was no gunfire or genocide between the two armies. Officers who graduate the same year cannot shoot at each other.”³

The first generation was shaped by Chehab's response to severe political crises in 1952 and 1958, when then president Beshara al-Khoury and his successor Camille Chamoun faced strong domestic opposition and sought the army's support to quell dissent. But Chehab refused to involve the army in partisan politics, and he became a popular candidate for the presidency as a result, holding office from 1958 to 1964. In the view of one officer: “Chehab protected the Lebanese entity and the unity of the army, [and] he had earned the right to be president.”⁴ Chehab's subsequent reliance on the Directorate of Intelligence (Deuxième bureau) to spearhead his nonpartisan approach to state building was opposed by many politicians, including Christian leaders Camille Chamoun, Raymond Eddé, and Pierre Gemayel, who formed an anti-Chehabist parliamentary alliance.

The election of Suleiman Frangieh to the presidency in 1970 marked the end of Chehabism, and intelligence officers were put on trial on abuse of power charges. Nonetheless, Chehabism remains a powerful school of thought among the LAF officer corps, combining a broadly patriotic outlook and professional pride in the military ethic with a negative view of civilian politicians. Indeed, his legacy lives on especially among Maronite Christian officers who want to follow in his footsteps and become president—starting with his successor as LAF commander, Emile Bustani, and continuing ever since.

The second military generation was formed in the final phases of the civil war. In particular, junior officers who were company commanders under General Aoun's leadership in 1988–1990 played an important role. Although Aoun relied on them more than on senior officers—whom he did not trust—he harmed the institutional chain of command in the process by encouraging direct loyalty to him.⁵

Finally, for post-1990 graduates of the Military Academy, accepting the Syrian order was necessary. Between 1991 and 1994, 261 officers were sent to Syria for training, in comparison to 171 who went to the United States and 75 to France or

other European or Arab countries.⁶ Although some Lebanese officers were skeptical about the training program in Syria, for many it was pointless to resist the new order. Officers acquiesced because undergoing foreign training led to a salary increase, while the cost of living in Syria was lower than in Lebanon and the proximity meant that they could return home frequently. Most importantly, the LAF command favored officers who had trained in Syria, which benefited their career advancement. The approach apparently worked for Christian officers as well, many of whom remained in the army and avoided directly challenging its new pro-Syrian orientation.

SECTARIAN COMPOSITION AND CHANGING DYNAMICS

Sectarian identities have been a permanent, at times paramount element of group formation in the LAF. From the Lebanese Republic's establishment in 1920 until the outbreak of civil war in 1975, Christians formed the majority of the officer corps. Christians dominated the military's ranks even though recruitment was not based on overt sectarian criteria. This was due to several factors, including the tendency for Maronite Christians to identify more with Lebanese state institutions, which they also historically dominated.⁷ But the number of Maronite officers declined over time: from an average of 70 percent of the officer corps before 1945, to 65 percent between 1945 and 1958, to 55 percent between 1958 and 1975.⁸

The gradual decline in the proportion of Christian LAF officers was partly a result of wider shifts in Lebanese society, as Christians lost their demographic majority. It was also partly due to the increasing number of Muslims applying to the Military Academy. The numerous attempts to achieve a more equitable balance of sects when the army was rebuilt during the 1975–1990 civil war (in particular during the mid-1980s) and again in the early 1990s led to a further decrease in the number of Christian officers. The purge of Christian officers after Aoun's defeat in 1990 and the rising number of Muslim officers led to eventual religious parity. The introduction,

after the civil war, of an informal 50-50 quota of Christian to Muslim cadets enrolling at the Military Academy has since preserved this balance.⁹

Sectarian dynamics in the LAF remained important in the 1990s but have since evolved in significant ways. Aoun's submission to the Syrian intervention, on October 13, 1990, severely disappointed his co-religionist followers. Many Aounist officers did not agree with battling the Lebanese Forces, a Christian militia, and the Syrian army in 1989–1990.¹⁰ For some, the Lebanese Forces was not the enemy, and fighting it could only weaken the Christian position. Nonetheless, Aoun's defeat was a key turning point that led to the LAF's overhaul, occurring amid wider shifts in the domestic and regional political contexts.

Maronites lost their former dominance, and their leaders were excluded from the political arena after 1990. Aoun sought exile in France, and Samir Geagea, the head of the Lebanese Forces, was arrested in 1994. Feeling alienated from the new post-1990 political order, Christians massively boycotted the 1992 legislative election, the first to take place after the war. Their entry into state institutions—especially the army—declined thereafter, with the LAF having difficulty recruiting rank-and-file Christian soldiers ever since.¹¹

The new command was aware of the need to reintegrate Aounists into the army, but it wanted to secure Aounists' unwavering loyalty first. Although recalcitrant officers were sent to Syrian prisons to set an example,¹² a more permanent solution was needed. That came via law number 27 passed on November 17, 1990, which allowed officers from the army, the police, General Security, and State Security to take early retirement without incurring financial penalties. The result was government decree number 1111 issued on April 20, 1991, which accepted the resignation of 221 officers—60 Muslims and 161 Christians.¹³ Separately, Aoun and some Aounist politicians like ministers Issam Abou Jamra and Edgar Maalouf were forced into exile in France.

Aounist officers who joined the new LAF command explained their choice in nonideological, pragmatic terms: Aoun had been defeated and the new Syrian order was now a *fait accompli*. These officers explained their loyalty in institutional terms: soldiers follow their commander's orders. Some former Aounists even followed LAF commander General Emile Lahoud to the presidential palace when he was elected president in 1998, as a means of preserving their standing and securing promotion. The final category of Aounist officers included skeptical officers who had been junior officers serving in combat roles during Aoun's command. Although they stayed on after 1990, they disagreed with the political orientation of the new LAF command and were subsequently marginalized as a result.

Lahoud sought to ensure that institutional dynamics prevailed over extra-institutional allegiances, especially sectarian or political ones (such as loyalty to Aoun). He rebuilt the army in a way that would shield it from recurring sectarian divisions. Lahoud achieved this, with Syrian backing, by giving officers privileges to strengthen military corporatism and loyalty to the institution. He also surrounded himself with officers from different sects to convey the impression that he did not favor any one sect over the others. But many Maronite officers thought Lahoud did not trust his co-religionists, and they refused to work with him after Aoun's defeat.

Lahoud's favoritism toward non-Maronite officers was largely personal politicking. Only Maronites can hold the positions of commander in chief and president of the republic as per the 1943 National Pact, and Lahoud sought to marginalize potential presidential rivals from within the LAF. One officer recalled that when the Syrian army opened up four positions for high-ranking Lebanese officers to participate in a training session in Syria, Lahoud refused to send Maronites, fearing that they would develop ties with the Syrian regime that would benefit any officer with presidential ambitions.¹⁴ According to the same source, Lahoud instead sent non-Maronite Christians, particularly Greek Orthodox ones, as they would not pose a political threat to him personally.

Political loyalty also played a role. Lahoud chose officers he trusted and who shared his pro-Syrian outlook. In this new political environment, LAF officers were supposed to give total allegiance to the new command and the Syrian presence in Lebanon. Lahoud and his allies perceived Shia officers as natural partisans of the army's new alignment. Their loyalty was never doubted, and they were seen as a crucial link to the Shia group Hezbollah. Over the years, the number of Shia officers in the LAF increased significantly, reaching 26.8 percent in 2004 (up from 15.3 percent in 1958). By comparison, the number of Sunni officers only increased from 15.3 to 16.1 percent during the same period.¹⁵

This helps explain why in 2011 one Sunni officer described developments in the LAF under Syrian tutelage as a "Shia expansion" (*madd shii*).¹⁶ A case in point is Jamil al-Sayyed, a Shia officer who was appointed deputy director of intelligence (the position of director is always held by a Maronite). Sayyed, widely considered to be Syria's man in Lebanon, was one of the architects of the post-1990 process of rebuilding the army. He regarded himself as nonsectarian (*lâ-tâifiy*) and backed Hezbollah on political, rather than sectarian grounds.

Relations With Hezbollah

The growing influence of Shia officers in the LAF went hand in hand with the army's blooming relationship with Hezbollah. In the post-1990 period, Lahoud sought to impose a partisan military ideology based on identifying Israel as the country's principal enemy and the Syrian army and Hezbollah as crucial allies in the fight against it. The Syrian army's April 2005 withdrawal from Lebanon weakened this approach, but it was partially revived when General Aoun returned to Lebanon from his exile in May and subsequently struck a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with Hezbollah. Aounist officers still formed a crucial constituency in the army, and so his new alliance made it easier to get the LAF officers corps to at least tacitly accept the pro-Hezbollah and pro-Syria strategy.

The MOU was signed in February 2006 between General Aoun and Hezbollah's Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah. Neither Syria's role in Lebanon nor relations between Iran and Hezbollah were mentioned, eliding key differences.¹⁷ Aoun justified his new approach to his supporters by explaining that his feud with the Syrian regime ended once Syrian troops withdrew from Lebanon. But many officers—including Aounists—were and remain critical of the alliance. Some accepted it for ideological or pragmatic reasons, but others rejected it because they perceived Hezbollah as a threat.

Aounists opposed to the MOU still say they do not understand why Aoun—who led the army to fight against all militias in 1989–1990, including Christian ones toward the end of the civil war—would then choose a militia as an ally decades later.¹⁸ One officer expressed his dismay over Aoun's new-found pro-Hezbollah and pro-Syria orientation: "We fought a war against the Syrian army, we were marginalized under Syrian rule, and now it is all over."¹⁹ These officers did not agree with the new alliance given Hezbollah's dominance, seeing it as unlikely to improve the Christian position within the state.

Many Aounists who accepted the MOU viewed it as necessary due to the regional context: they saw Christians and Shias as natural minority allies in a region that was predominantly Sunni. On a more pragmatic level, many Aounists thought the army simply could not oppose Hezbollah because the ministerial council's inaugural policy statement (known as *al-bayan al-wizari*) designated it a legitimate resistance movement. According to these officers' thinking, the army could not ask for Hezbollah to be disarmed in the absence of a consensus on national defense.

In any case, the Aounist label was no longer an obstacle to officers' advancement after 2005. For example, one Aounist was appointed to command the LAF brigade sent to southern Lebanon as per United Nations Security Council Resolution 1701, which put an end to the July 2006 war with Israel. In this instance, the officer did not agree with Aoun's strategy and his alliance with Hezbollah, but he kept quiet.

THE RECURRING QUESTION OF SUNNI LOYALTY

The deepening, if tacit, acceptance of the LAF's relationship with Hezbollah has revived old questions about Sunni loyalty and, in turn, the army's cohesion. Traditionally, Sunni officers in the LAF have not held a clear group identity or a sense of sectarian solidarity. Sunnis in Lebanon generally have not perceived themselves as a marginalized community or even a minority because they form a majority in the broader region. Historically established in affluent urban and coastal centers, including the populous cities of Beirut and Tripoli, they tended not to join the officer corps as an avenue for social or political upward mobility. That habit, coupled with the French strategy of recruiting minorities (as in neighboring Syria), kept Sunni enrollment in the army disproportionately low following the creation of the Republic of Lebanon.²⁰ This legacy remains powerful decades later, as one retired officer explained, "I am from Beirut, it was not a very natural act for me to apply to the military academy. No one in my family was in the army."²¹

Sunni officers therefore do not tend to organize on a sectarian basis. However, their loyalty has been repeatedly questioned since the defection of the Sunni junior officer Ahmad al-Khatib, who broke away from the army's ranks in 1976 to create the Lebanese Arab Army in support of the Palestine Liberation Organization during the civil war. Sunnis were again suspected of disloyalty following the signing of the Defense and Friendship Pact in 1992, which gave the Syrian regime suzerainty over Lebanon's defense and foreign affairs. The regime of then Syrian president Hafez al-Assad was perceived as representing Alawite minority rule in Syria, and it was wary of the potentially destabilizing effect of Sunni officers in the LAF.

Hostility between the LAF commander Emile Lahoud and Sunni politician Rafik Hariri, who became prime minister in 1992, contributed to the marginalization of Sunni officers in the LAF. The two men had different visions for the reconstruction process: Lahoud favored a security-based

approach whereas Hariri focused on economic growth, a difference that Druze leader Walid Jumblatt wittily summed up as “Hanoi vs Hong Kong.”²² Lahoud particularly disliked Hariri’s informal annual cash payout of \$500,000 to the LAF during the civil war, which the LAF commander insisted should be made through official channels once he took office.²³ Lahoud also believed the prime minister would seek to increase his influence in the army through Sunni officers, perceiving them by definition as Hariri’s men.

Sunni officers felt otherwise. A retired Sunni general insisted: “Hariri did not know what was happening within the institution. They [Lahoud and the Syrian regime] wanted to isolate him and to keep him away from the army. They did not let him place his men. They marginalized Sunni officers that they considered close to him.”²⁴ Another retired Sunni officer explained that he had remained politically neutral throughout his military career, at first out of conviction (he did not favor any politician) but later to avoid making enemies in the army.²⁵ For his part, Lahoud took care to have Sunni generals accompany him whenever he met with Hariri, in order to dispel the belief that he was marginalizing them.

Tensions between Lahoud and Hariri were political, not sectarian, and continued after Lahoud was elected president and General Michel Suleiman replaced him as LAF commander in 1998. But Sunni loyalty was in any case tested on several occasions following the 2005 Syrian troop withdrawal from Lebanon. The first was the 2007 war between the Sunni radical group Fatah al-Islam and the Lebanese army. It took the army three months and repeated campaigns to weed militants out of the Palestinian refugee camp Nahr al-Bared in northern Lebanon. Notably, there were no Sunni defections from the LAF during this period, even when the army’s actions led to the camp’s destruction. As an officer put it, “It is much more difficult for the army to face internal problems than to deal with groups like Fatah al-Islam.”²⁶ The LAF passed the test in part by labeling such groups as terrorist organizations and defining

them as enemies of the state. Doing so allowed the army to portray itself as being above sectarian or political struggles. In May 2008, Sunni loyalty was again tested after Hezbollah and its allies seized large areas of western Beirut. Hezbollah justified the move as a response to what it perceived as hostile measures by the government of then prime minister Fouad Siniora; these procedures included dismantling Hezbollah’s private communications network and dismissing a senior security officer at Lebanon’s international airport who was allied to the party. The army was deployed as a buffer force in the capital, but its stated neutrality was criticized by the Hariri-aligned March 14 leaders, who accused it of effectively siding with Hezbollah.

The May 2008 events illustrated the increasing sectarianization of Lebanese politics that began in 2005. But instead of the traditional Christian-Muslim split, tensions were intra-Muslim and ran between Sunnis and Shias. This Lebanese and even broader regional configuration was inevitably reflected in the LAF officer corps. Some Sunni officers felt that their community had been humiliated, and, to protest the army’s inaction, they submitted their resignations. Colonel Ghassan Balaa, a high-ranking Sunni officer close to Siniora, was the first to resign, followed by General Abdel Hamed Darwish, military commander of the north. General Ashraf Rifi, then director of the Internal Security Forces and himself a Sunni, portrayed the resignations as a message to LAF commander Suleiman. Rifi said the resignations highlighted the LAF’s need to take action to protect all Lebanese citizens, Sunnis included.

But the same episode also revealed the showmanship often found in Lebanese politics. According to Hariri, in a discussion with the U.S. ambassador to Lebanon that was released by WikiLeaks, the resignations of these 100 or so Sunni officers were merely symbolic.²⁷ For his part, Suleiman claimed that the officers had been encouraged to resign by politicians, but in fact none had followed through.²⁸

The outbreak of the Syrian crisis in 2011 has only worsened mounting Sunni-Shia tensions. The LAF has intervened to preserve internal security and public order in Lebanon continuously since then, mainly against Sunni jihadist groups. But Hezbollah's involvement in the Syrian conflict against a popular uprising alongside the regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad has triggered strong opposition from some Lebanese parties, especially the Sunni political leadership. Radical Sunni preachers have gone further, increasingly accusing the LAF of only acting against Sunni groups in Lebanon, to Hezbollah's benefit.

The first serious crisis between Sunnis and the army was the killing of a Salafi sheikh at a military checkpoint in Akkar in May 2012, which led to violent reactions against the LAF in this northern Lebanese region.²⁹ A year later, in June 2013, the army faced off for two days with partisans of Sheikh Ahmad al-Assir, a Salafi cleric known for his virulent stance against Hezbollah, in the southern port city of Sidon.³⁰ And on August 2, 2014, the army arrested Imad Ahmad Jomaa in Aarsal and accused him of pledging allegiance to the self-proclaimed Islamic State, triggering clashes with jihadi fighters.³¹ About 35 soldiers and policemen were kidnapped by members of the Islamic State and a Syrian-based al-Qaeda affiliate, the Nusra Front,³² and they in turn demanded the release of Islamists being held in Lebanese prisons. The army again confronted Islamist fighters in the old souks of Tripoli that October,³³ for the first time moving the conflict from the respective Sunni and Alawite neighborhoods of Bab al-Tabaneh and Jabal Mohsen to the city center.

Notably, only four Sunni soldiers have defected from the LAF since the beginning of the Syrian war. The official position of the Sunni political group Future Movement has been crucial in bridging the gap between the army and the Sunni community, with party leader Saad Hariri affirming his support for the LAF against jihadi groups. Although many Sunni officers do not agree with the command's strategy, they remain loyal. As one officer explained: "Sunnis only have the institutions and the state, where would they go if the state failed?"³⁴

THE POLITICIZATION OF MILITARY APPOINTMENTS

Political activity is officially banned in the LAF. Officers and enlisted personnel are not allowed to discuss politics, join a political party, or vote. But according to one officer, "We all know each others' opinions."³⁵ Politics and ideology are influenced by context and by personal connections and opportunities, and it is often these factors that determine the positions officers take on crucial issues, including the army's relationship with Hezbollah. In other words, political patronage—rather than ideological affinity or professional neutrality—has become a deciding factor in civil-military relations.

At the same time, the politicization of senior appointments and promotions in the LAF has increasingly subjected it to the vagaries and paralysis of the Lebanese political system. For instance, the post of chief of staff, the highest position to be customarily held by a member of the Druze religion, has to be approved by Walid Jumblatt, the Druze community's paramount leader. Conversely, Maronite officers who seek to become the LAF commander in chief need the approval of all political parties, since the position is regarded as a stepping stone to the presidency of the republic, and so they must often disguise their political views in order to be seen as acceptable by all. The deleterious consequences have intensified since the end of Syrian tutelage in 2005. Some command positions have on occasion been left vacant for months on end, as the lack of political consensus has prevented them from being filled.

The threat this gridlock poses to military cohesion was illustrated by the impasse over the appointment of a new LAF commander in chief in 2014–2015. General Jean Kahwagi was supposed to retire in September 2014, but because the Council of Ministers was unable to agree on a successor, it delayed his retirement for a year and then did so again for an additional year starting September 2015. The delay was opposed by Aoun, who lobbied for his son-in-law, Brigadier

General Chamel Roukoz, to replace Kahwagi. Roukoz, commander of the elite Commando Regiment, was widely seen in the LAF as a competent leader and professional officer, but he was also due to retire in October 2015.

The dispute was entirely political and gave rise to new forms of jockeying. A proposal was made to extend Roukoz's term in the army by promoting him to the rank of major general, which comes with a later retirement age. However, this rank is reserved for the five members of the Military Council, the LAF's highest body, who customarily represent the Sunni, Shia, Druze, Greek Catholic, and Greek Orthodox communities; Maronites are represented by the commander in chief who has the highest military rank, army general, and so Roukoz could not be made a major general. The 1983 National Defense Law determined that the Military Council should be composed of five major generals and presided over by the commander in chief, but Aoun argued that the law was inapplicable because the necessary implementing decrees were never published. Aoun used this to argue instead for application of the previous law from 1979, which set the number of major generals in the LAF to eight, allowing Maronites to be promoted to the rank.

Both Kahwagi and former LAF commander Michel Suleiman, whose presidential term ended in May 2014, opposed promoting officers as a solution to a political problem because it would undermine the LAF command structure. Another option that was mooted mainly by the director of General Security, General Abbas Ibrahim, was no less problematic. This envisaged pushing back the retirement age for all senior officers so as to allow Kahwagi, Roukoz, and others to remain in active service and to defer resolving the political dispute. But the LAF already has too many brigadier generals: over 500 in an army of around 60,000 men, which, by way of comparison, is twice the number of generals in the much larger French army that has 200,000 in active service. According to the LAF's organizational chart, it should have no more than 160, but constant political interventions and poor promotion policies have weakened the application of this guideline.

Moreover, the impasse over appointing a new commander in chief reflected a much wider problem. Three positions in the Military Council have been vacant since 2013: director general for administration (held by a Shia), inspector general (a Greek Orthodox), and a position with no specific function (a Greek Catholic). The chief of staff (a Druze) and the secretary general of the Higher Defense Council (a Sunni) were due to retire on August 7 and September 21, 2014, respectively, but their tenure was renewed twice (in 2014 and again in 2015) in order to avoid similar vacancies.³⁶ The director of intelligence (a Maronite) retired on September 22, 2015, but he was immediately recalled to service for an additional six-month term until his successor could be agreed upon. His retirement had already been delayed three times. This highly dysfunctional system is not meritocratic and is also frustrating for younger, qualified officers seeking promotion.

The consequences of political promotions are also worrying in terms of army cohesion and discipline. On September 29, 2015, an LAF brigadier general sought to challenge the government's decision to delay Kahwagi's retirement by appealing to the State Council, the republic's administrative court. This was a highly unusual move, and it prompted the Directorate of Intelligence to summon the brigadier general for questioning, as officers have to obtain authorization from the army before going to nonmilitary courts. The officer, a Maronite, was set to retire in August 2016, which meant that the prolongation of Kahwagi's tenure automatically blocked his own chance of being appointed commander in chief.³⁷

CONCLUSION

Successive Lebanese governments have been cautious about what they request from the army, given the risk of political embarrassment if officers do not comply, and because it could lead to a breakdown in cohesion due to the multiple loyalties in the officer corps. However, officers have tended to conform in practice to a common standard of behavior irrespective of their personal allegiances since the Syrian

withdrawal from Lebanon in 2005. Officers with strong anti-Hezbollah views have turned a blind eye, when stationed in southern Lebanon, to the party's covert weapons transportation. Similarly, Sunni criticism of the LAF command's strategy toward the Syrian crisis since 2011 has not led to disobedience during military operations against Sunni militants in Lebanon. Operating amid domestic conflicts with strong sectarian overtones still poses a challenge, as it did in the May 2008 clashes in Beirut. But the LAF has demonstrated its cohesion on several occasions, even when previous redlines were crossed, including fighting the Nahr al-Bared war and securing the eastern border since 2012 to facilitate Hezbollah's military intervention in Syria.

An important factor in preserving cohesion is that no group of officers—whether defined by sectarian identity or political allegiance—has felt isolated in the LAF since 2005. The overlapping of different types of affiliations (sectarian, political, or generational) and the crosscutting ties among officer groups have so far preserved the LAF's unity. But the politicization of command appointments and promotions, which has led to a surfeit of senior officers, undermines the operational effectiveness of the LAF. This politicization also creates an unhealthy division between political and apolitical or less political officers that challenges notions of military professionalism, thereby weakening the officers' confidence in one of the few Lebanese state institutions that is regarded by most citizens as a trustworthy, legitimate, and truly national entity.

NOTES

- 1 Interview with a retired general, Beirut, August 2009.
- 2 Florence Gaub, *Military Integration After Civil Wars: Multiethnic Armies, Identity and Post-conflict Reconstruction* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 57. Morris Janowitz also analyzed the importance of "primary groups": "The men seem to be fighting more for someone than against somebody," Morris Janowitz, *Sociology and the Military Establishment* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1974), 93.
- 3 Interview with a Lebanese officer, Beirut, December 2011.
- 4 Interview with a retired general, Beirut, December 2009.
- 5 Interview with a retired general, Beirut, December 2009.
- 6 Riad Takieddine, *Ihya' Jaych 1988-1994* (Beirut, 1994), 309.
- 7 Oren Barak, "Towards a Representative Military? The Transformation of the Lebanese Officer Corps Since 1945," *Middle East Journal* 60, no. 1 (Winter 2006): 91.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 The situation has been different on the rank-and-file level where Muslims are the majority.
- 10 Interviews with retired officers, Beirut, December 2014.
- 11 In the beginning of the 1990s, the army had to recruit 3,100 Christian soldiers and stop the recruitment of Muslims in order to reach a balance. Takieddine, 193.
- 12 Like Amer Chehab, Fayez Karam, Chamel Mouzaya, or Fuad Aoun, who was in charge of relations with Saddam Hussein.
- 13 Fuad Aoun, *Min Diyâfat Saddam ila Sejn al Mazzeh* (Beirut, 2008), 199.
- 14 Interview with a retired officer, Beirut, May 2010.
- 15 Barak, 84–88.
- 16 Interview with a retired general, Beirut, August 2011.
- 17 Beltram Dumontier, "L'entente entre le CPL et le Hezbollah: pacte national ou 'zawâj mut'a'?" (master's dissertation, Sciences Po, 2007), 42.
- 18 Interview with a retired general, Beirut, December 2014.
- 19 Interview with a retired general, Beirut, December 2014.
- 20 Nikolaos Van Dam, *The Struggle for Power in Syria, Politics and Society Under Asad and the Ba'ath Party* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1996), 26–27.
- 21 Interview with a retired General, Beirut, August 2011.
- 22 Michael Young, *The Ghosts of Martyrs Square: An Eyewitness Account of Lebanon's Life Struggle* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010), 117.
- 23 Karim Pakradouni, *Sadma wa Soumoud, 'ahd Emile Lahoud* (Beirut: All Prints Distributors and Publishers, 2010), 19.
- 24 Interview with a retired general, Beirut, August 2011.
- 25 Interview with a retired general, Beirut, May 2011.
- 26 Interview with a Lebanese officer, Beirut, December 2009.
- 27 Diplomatic cable from Michele J. Sisson, American ambassador in Beirut, to the secretary of state, May 12, 2008, released by WikiLeaks. "Lebanon: Army Commander Says He Will Protect the Government," Al-Akhbar, last accessed November 24, 2015, <http://english.al-akhbar.com/node/367>.
- 28 Ibid.
- 29 Nicolas Nassif, "Lebanon: Turning the Page on the Kuweikhat Incident," Al-Akhbar, September 13, 2012, <http://english.al-akhbar.com/node/12113>.
- 30 Jean Aziz, "Sheikh Al-Assir's Militants Kill Lebanese Soldiers in Sidon," Al-Monitor, June 24, 2013, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/06/lebanon-sidon-assir-salafists-kill-army.html>.
- 31 Rakan al-Fakih, "Militants Kill Two Lebanese Soldiers in Bekaa Clashes," *Daily Star*, August 2, 2014, <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2014/Aug-02/265857-militants-surround-bekaa-army-center.ashx>.
- 32 Jean Aziz, "Arsal Kidnappers Break Silence, Contact Lebanese Mediator," *Al-Monitor*, January 22, 2015, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/01/lebanon-mediation-terrorists-arsal-prisoners-soldiers.html>.
- 33 "Lebanon Army Steps Up Tripoli Battle Against Militants," BBC News, October 26, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-29778462>.
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36 The Higher Defense Council was created in 1983. Its members are: the president of the republic, the prime minister, the minister of defense, the minister of foreign affairs, the minister of finance, the minister of interior, and the minister of economy. It decides on the necessary measures for the application of the government's defense policy. Its secretary general is an LAF general.

37 "Prorogation du mandat de Kahwagi: un officier recourt au conseil d'Etat," L'Orient le Jour, September 29, 2015.

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ARAB CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS PROJECT

The Arab Civil-Military Relations project seeks to expand the knowledge base relating to national armed forces with the ultimate aim of enhancing policy formulation and contributing to democratic transition in Arab states.

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