

Documento de Trabajo

Working Paper

Spain, Lebanon and UNIFIL

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20/5/2008

WP 21/2008

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Summary

This study provides a historical and political background to the situation in South Lebanon since 1967. It then assesses the causes and results of the war in the summer of 2006 and its implications for local, regional and global politics. It also focuses on Spain's military involvement in Lebanon, especially on the relationship between the Spanish UNIFIL contingent and the local population in South Lebanon. This paper includes a set of recommendations related to the future of Spain's involvement in peacekeeping efforts in South Lebanon.

Introduction

Spain's involvement and interest in Lebanon are not new. Throughout the centuries Spain has been present in Lebanon with its educational, religious and economic interests. There is a small community of Spanish citizens living in Lebanon, mostly married to Lebanese citizens. There is also a community of Lebanese who live in Spain and some have acquired the country's citizenship. Mention should also be made of the tragic death of the Spanish Ambassador Pedro Manuel de Arístegui during the civil war in Lebanon in 1989. Arístegui was the third foreign diplomat (the other two were the US Ambassador Francis Meloy Jr and the French Ambassador Louis Delamarre) to lose his life during the 15-year civil war in Lebanon.¹

In this study I will provide a historical and political background to the situation in South Lebanon since 1967. The role of Hezbollah, its religious, military and political philosophy and strategy in Lebanon and in the region will also be discussed. I will then assess the causes and results of the war in the summer of 2006 and its implications for local, regional and global politics. I will then focus on Spain's military involvement in Lebanon including development and educational projects. Related to this analysis I will focus on the relationship between the Spanish UNIFIL contingent and the local population in South Lebanon. How did the population react to the presence of Spanish soldiers? I will end my paper with a set of recommendations related to the future of Spain's involvement in peacekeeping efforts in South Lebanon.

The basic purpose of this study is to present an overall analytical perspective of the situation in South Lebanon and UNIFIL's involvement. It is hoped that this document can be used as part of the briefing material presented to Spanish troops before their deployment in the Land of Cedars. This study is based on available sources in Arabic, French and English. I have relied on clippings from the Lebanese press to give a rare perspective on how the Lebanese perceive and react to Spain's presence in Lebanon. I include maps to help the reader identify the Spanish and UNIFIL contingents in South Lebanon.

South Lebanon: A Brief Background

Until 1967, South Lebanon was a quiet area populated mostly by Shiite farmers and rural Druze and Christian communities. Following the June 1967 Arab-Israeli war, the situation changed dramatically. The Palestinian resistance adopted South Lebanon as a base for guerrilla actions against Israel. Israel reacted by carrying out punitive raids, mainly against South Lebanon and repeatedly bombed over 150 towns and villages. In May 1970, following a series of Palestinian guerrilla operations, the Israeli army invaded Lebanon for the first time. For many southern towns

¹ I would like to extend my warm appreciation to Charles Powell and Félix Arteaga of the Real Instituto Elcano for inviting me to write this study. A special thank you goes also to Colonel Manuel Astilleros Yarto, Liaison Officer at the Spanish Embassy in Lebanon, who has very kindly provided me with very important suggestions for this paper.

and villages it was the beginning of the end. Al-Khiyam, for example, once the most prosperous and populated town in the South, would see its population dwindle over the next decade, from 30,000 people to 32.² When in 1978 Israel finally handed al-Khiyam over to its Lebanese proxy, Major Saad Haddad (Commander of the Israeli-created and supported South Lebanon Army), its inhabitants were herded into a mosque. 'We sank to Haddad's level', an Israeli military specialist said. 'I watched his men shoot 70 people in cold blood in al-Khiyam'.³ In 1978 Israel also handed over al-Khiyam's military barracks to Haddad's militiamen who, in turn, redesigned them into a concentration camp.

In 1972, in retaliation for the Palestinian Black September terrorist group's assault on Israeli athletes at the Munich Olympic Games, in which 11 athletes were killed, Israel again bombed Lebanon, killing over 400 civilians. In August 1974, Israel declared a policy of pre-emptive raids that was officially endorsed by the Israeli cabinet in 1979. Attacks on the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organisation) bases in border villages became almost daily occurrences. In 1975, with the outbreak of the Lebanese civil war, Israel kept up its military operations mostly in South Lebanon. In March 1978, Israel invaded South Lebanon to 'liquidate terrorist bases along the border'. The human consequences of this invasion were tragic. The Lebanese authorities estimated that total Lebanese and Palestinian casualties were 1,168 dead, almost half of them civilians. Thousands of Lebanese had to flee their homes in the South and seek refuge in the poorest suburbs of war-torn Beirut.⁴ These displaced Lebanese became willing volunteers in the PLO's war against Israel in South Lebanon.

On 19 March 1978 the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 425, a draft of which was submitted by the US. It called upon Israel 'immediately to cease its military action against Lebanese territorial integrity and withdraw forthwith its forces from all Lebanese territory'. A United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) was created to act as a buffer between Israel and its proxies and the guerrilla groups operating in South Lebanon. This year UNIFIL is celebrating 30 years of its presence in Lebanon. UNIFIL, initially composed of 5,000 soldiers, was also supposed to help the Lebanese Government extend its authority in South Lebanon (with troops from Fiji, Finland, France, Ghana, Ireland, Italy, Nepal and Poland). UNIFIL has lost 250 soldiers since 1978, with the Irish contingent having suffered the most, with 36 soldiers killed).⁵

Israel considered UN Resolution 425 to be inadequate because of its failure to condemn 'terrorism'. Although it has been of little help to the Lebanese Government's aim to reassert its control over South Lebanon (until the 2006 war that is, see below), UNIFIL has played and still plays an important role in providing social and medical services to the people of South Lebanon who suffer daily under Israeli aerial and field bombardment. UNIFIL continues to be a symbolic demonstration of the world community's support for the people of Lebanon. In June 1978 Israel withdrew its troops from South Lebanon and created a new situation on the Lebanon-Israel border. Christian militias trained and supported by Israel were established to act as 'guardians' of the so-called 'security zone', a strip of the Lebanese border eight to 16 miles wide and 900 to 960 square miles in area, running from the Lebanese coast in the West to the town of Marjeyoun in the east. Israel's proxy Lebanese army became known as the South Lebanon Army (SLA).

In 1982, the Israeli government of Menachem Begin launched a large-scale military offensive against Lebanon. Its goals were to destroy the PLO's military infrastructure, weaken Syria's presence (Syrian troops entered Lebanon in early 1976 as part of the Arab Deterrent Force) and

² Noam Chomsky, *The Fateful Triangle*, South End Press, Boston, 1983, p. 191.

³ Jonathan Randal, *Going All the Way*, Viking Press, New York, 1984, p. 218.

⁴ George E. Irani, 'Meanwhile in Lebanon...', *The Link*, vol. 29, nr 2, April-May 1996.

⁵ For an excellent background document on the birth of UN Security Council Resolution 425 and UNIFIL see Ghassan Tueini (Lebanon's ambassador to the UN at that time), *Peace-Keeping Lebanon: The Facts, the Documents...*, William Belcher Group, New York, 1979.

install a friendly Christian Maronite leadership that would conclude a peace treaty with the Jewish state.⁶ Operation 'Peace for Galilee' turned out to be a military disaster. Israel lost over 600 soldiers and experienced its first bout of negative public relations. More than 17,000 Lebanese civilians were killed and over 30,000 wounded.⁷ The invasion, which reached the capital of Lebanon, Beirut, awakened the Shiite 'genie' in South Lebanon. Angered by the presumptuous behaviour of Palestinian fighters, Shiites saw the invasion as a golden opportunity to rid the south of the PLO and were potential friends of Israel. But the IDF misread the Shiites' feelings and adopted a policy of abuse against them. The IDF and its Lebanese proxies paid a heavy price for this mistake.

In 1985 Israel withdrew its troops from most of South Lebanon, maintaining control over the 'security zone' through its SLA surrogate. Israel's official policy in the 'security zone' and the villages bordering that area was a repressive mixture of forced migration, economic pressure and psychological warfare. In the occupied zone, Israel and the SLA imposed total isolation upon the local population, opening the gates to the Lebanese who wanted to leave, but barring entry to those who wished to enter, with the exception of the rare few who could obtain a permit from Israeli intelligence and the SLA. In consolidating its occupation in southern Lebanon, Israel made sure that no single confessional group comprised a majority of the population. It did this through population transfers and forced sectarian segregation. One example was the corridor of towns and villages from Jezzine, which was largely Christian, south towards Marjeyoun, a mixed Muslim and Christian city. Midway in the corridor is Rihan, once a Shiite Muslim town, which Israel emptied of its residents, replacing them with Christians from Ez Zahrani and the Iqlim al-Tuffah area. Israel also covets the water from South Lebanon's main rivers, the Litani and the Hasbani.

In 1992, Fida Nasrallah, a Lebanese water expert, wrote that 'Israel will not relinquish its self-proclaimed security zone in South Lebanon without assurances that it will receive its share of the Litani River'.⁸ The Lebanese Government's position is that Lebanon's water resources are barely enough to satisfy the country's own needs. The Litani River runs entirely within Lebanon and, as such, Israel has no riparian rights to its use. Nonetheless, following Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon in 2000 it kept parts of the Lebanese village of Ghajar under its control. The Lebanese government has agreed that the Israelis install a pump right on the Blue Line separating the two countries to provide water to the Lebanese population of Ghajar. As for the nearly 300,000 Palestinians in Lebanon, their situation worsened. The Oslo Agreement in 1993 placed them in a no-man's land. The Lebanese, across the entire political and sectarian spectrum, opposed any aid that might foster their permanent settlement in Lebanon. In fact, the 1989 Taif Accord is explicit in opposing any such possibility given the precarious balance between the various sectarian communities in the country. Israel also adamantly opposes repatriation of the refugees to their areas of origin in Galilee and Israel's coastal cities.

Immediately following the 1982 Israeli invasion, the Lebanese resistance movement sprang into action. Resistance was spearheaded by the 'Islamic Resistance', the armed wing of Hezbollah (the Party of God), a movement which receives military and economic support from Iran.⁹ Hezbollah's

⁶ On the role of the League of Arab States and the Arab Deterrent force see Istvan Pogany, *The Arab League and Peacekeeping in the Lebanon*, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1987. On Syria's involvement in Lebanon see Adeed I. Dawisha, *Syria and the Lebanese Crisis*, St Martin's Press, New York, 1980. On the Lebanese civil war and the 1978 Israeli invasion of Lebanon see Walid Khalidi, *Conflict and Violence in Lebanon: Confrontation in the Middle East*, Center For International Affairs, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass., 1979. For an Israeli account of the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon see the excellent book by Ze'ev Schiff and Ehud Yaari, *Israel's Lebanon War* (edited and translated by Ina Friedman), Simon and Schuster, New York, 1984. For a critical US assessment of the 1982 invasion of Lebanon see George W. Ball, *Error and Betrayal in Lebanon: An Analysis of Israel's Invasion of Lebanon and the Implications for US-Israeli Relations*, Foundation for Middle East Peace, Washington DC, 1984.

⁷ Estimates of the Lebanese Government in its publication 'South Lebanon: 1948-1986, Facts and Figures'.

⁸ Fida Nasrallah, 'The Questions of South Lebanon', Centre for Lebanese Studies, Oxford, May 1992, p. 9.

⁹ For an excellent account of Hezbollah, its origins and current role in Lebanon see Salid Charara & Frederic Domont, *Le Hezbollah: Un mouvement islamo nationaliste*, Fayard, Paris, 2004; see also Ahmad Nizar Hamzeh, *In the Path of*

guerrilla attacks forced Israel to withdraw its troops from Lebanon in 1985. The Islamic Resistance became a source of constant harassment against the Israeli occupation ever since. Because of Hezbollah's constant attacks against Israeli troops, the government of the then Prime Minister Ehud Barak voted for the unilateral withdrawal of the IDF from the 'security zone' in the summer of 2000.

In July 1993 Israel launched operation 'Settling of Accounts' (or the 'Seven-Day War') in South Lebanon to flush out Hezbollah guerrillas who had carried out Katyusha rocket attacks on northern Israel. Israel had four objectives in mind:

- (1) To force the Lebanese government to enter into direct confrontation with the Lebanese resistance in order to guarantee 'security' on Israel's northern border.
- (2) To pressure Lebanon to sign a separate peace deal with Israel, similar to the 17 May 1983 agreement between Israel and Lebanon (which was cancelled a year later by the Lebanese Government as a result of Syrian pressure).
- (3) To demonstrate to the Lebanese Government that its insistence on respecting the 1949 Armistice Agreement (between Lebanon and Israel) and the strict implementation of UN Resolution 425 were superfluous.
- (4) To destabilise the civil peace in Lebanon by systematically destroying homes and property, thereby forcing mass movements of the population.¹⁰

Following a seven-day onslaught, US and Syrian intermediaries worked out an unwritten accord between Israel and Hezbollah. The Israelis agreed not to bomb Lebanese villages if Hezbollah agreed to halt rocket attacks against Israel. This accord was violated by both sides several times. The Israeli government acknowledged in many of its statements that Hezbollah's resistance had become a constant and painful feature of the military realities in South Lebanon. For instance, in 1995 the resistance conducted more than 876 operations against the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) and the South Lebanon Army (SLA), killing 24 Israeli soldiers and 29 SLA men.¹¹ In addition to Hezbollah guerrillas, other Lebanese and Palestinian groups opposed to the peace process have waged warfare in South Lebanon. These groups include the Lebanese communists, the Shiite Amal group and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command, mostly supported by Syrian intelligence. The Lebanese resistance became an important lever for the Lebanese and Syrian governments to use in their negotiations with Israel.

Moreover, since 1984, Iran has become a very important player in South Lebanon's politics. The Islamic Republic armed, trained and financed radical Shia groups that would later unite under the banner of Hezbollah. The Iranian strategy was based on Imam Khomeini's vision of exporting the Iranian revolutionary model, especially to countries where the Shias constitute a significant part of the population. Hezbollah became the linchpin for the Iranian project.

Hezbollah's Political and Military Objectives

In an interview I conducted with a reliable Hezbollah source I was told that resistance was one of the main priorities of his group. 'We consider resistance to be our principal instrument because experience has taught us that with an enemy like Israel resistance is the best choice'.¹² Always

Hizbullah, Syracuse University Press, Syracuse, 2004. To understand Hezbollah's ideology, its internal structure and its internal and international policies see the important book by Sheikh Naim Qassem, Hezbollah's Deputy Secretary-General, *HIZBULLAH: The Story from Within*, SAQI, London, 2005.

¹⁰ For an extensive chronology, bibliography, documents and maps related to the 17 May 1983 Accord between Lebanon and Israel see *Lebanese Israeli Negotiations: Chronology, Bibliography, Documents, Maps*, CEDRE, The Lebanese Center for Documentation and Research, Antelias, Lebanon, 1984.

¹¹ *Monday Morning*, 6/XI/1995.

¹² See Irani, *Meanwhile in Lebanon*, *op.cit.*, p. 8.

according to this same source, another priority for the nationalist Islamist group was to ‘fight the state of economic deprivation of our people regardless of their confessional identity. We believe that there are regions in Lebanon that are deprived not only because of their geographical location but because of the policy of neglect adopted by successive Lebanese governments’. Since then Hezbollah has succeeded in making the issue of South Lebanon a national and governmental concern.

Hezbollah’s military philosophy evolves around the guerrilla-based concept of ‘Muslim resistance’. The Islamist group considers that its fighters have both a military and a civilian dimension. These fighters live as civilians among the population at large but are part of a military strategy. This ‘defensive strategy’ as defined by Hezbollah is based on an immediate retaliation to any Israeli attack against Hezbollah militants hiding within the civilian population. This allows Hezbollah fighters who enjoy the support of the people living in the villages of South Lebanon to retaliate a second time to the first Israeli attack. The Lebanese Shia Islamist group considers its fighters part and parcel of the civilian population in times of peace. In times of war Hezbollah fighters become a well-trained disciplined and well coordinated military force. This coordination also includes the civilian population, which helps in various military activities such as observation, intelligence sharing, manoeuvres and threats. All this is carried out independently of the Lebanese Army and government.

Hezbollah, like the PLO before it, has set itself up as a state within a state. It is a transnational military and political agent receiving its orders from outside powers such as Iran and Syria. Hezbollah is considered a threat to Lebanon’s sovereignty by the Lebanese Government and has been urged to give up its large arsenal by UN resolution 1559. However, Hezbollah’s leader, Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, does not trust international laws and conventions. In a speech delivered on 14 July 2006 he said ‘Unlike many in our nation, I have never believed that there is such a thing called an international community’. Nasrallah believes that his group had to take the law into its own hands to liberate the occupied land in South Lebanon and free the prisoners in Israeli jails. He believes in the right of self defence in a general international ‘Civil war’ fought on a global stage. For Hezbollah and its leader, because of globalisation (which is ‘savage’ and ‘imperialist’) the world is subject to exploitation and the unequal distribution of wealth, led by the countries of the North and at the expense of the poor peoples of the undeveloped South. Moreover, international laws and conventions reflect this unequal power distribution and are merely an instance of the war of the strong against the weak.¹³

Hezbollah’s Foundation and Origins

To tease out the Lebanese Islamist group’s visions and goals I have relied extensively on a seminal book written by Sheikh Naim Qassem, a founding member of Hezbollah who has been the party’s Deputy Secretary General since 1991.¹⁴ In the early 1960s Lebanon witnessed the beginning of a new clerical movement that served to reinvigorate Islam’s key principles in both clerical and political terms. The three leading Shia clerics were Imam Mussa al-Sadr (who founded the ‘Movement of the Oppressed’ as well as ‘The Ranks of Lebanese Resistance’ –Amal–), Sheikh Muhammad Mahdi Shamseddine (who devoted most of his life to intellectual work as well as leading the Shia community) and Sayyed Muhammad Hussein Fadlallah, Hezbollah’s spiritual guide. Each of them had his own approach, practical logic and plan of action, but they all shared a

¹³ To understand Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah’s philosophy and arguments justifying his party’s political and military visions see the book edited by Nicholas Noe, *Voice of Hezbollah: The Statements of Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah*, Verso, London and New York, 2007.

¹⁴ Sheikh Naim Qassem, *Hezbollah: Al Manhaj... Al Tajriba... Al Mustaqbal*, Dar Al-Hadi, Beirut, 3rd edition, 2004. This book is also available in English, Naim Qassem, *Hizbullah: The Story from Within*, SAQI, London, 2005. Most of the quotes in this study are taken from the English version of Qassem’s book.

belief in the need for action to trigger a change in the prevalent living conditions of Lebanese Shiites.¹⁵

During the early years of Hezbollah, the name of Sayyed Muhammad Hussein Fadlallah was closely associated with the Party. He was a symbol of many ideological concepts within the Party, guiding Hezbollah through a mature vision of Islam and of the Islamic movement, and supporting Ayatollah Khomeini, the Islamic Revolution's leader in Iran. Although he was often considered by both local and international media and political observers as Hezbollah's spiritual leader, Sayyed Fadlallah always refused any participation in organised Hezbollah activity and opted to remain a cleric supporting the Party directives that he deemed in harmony with his views. Lebanese Islamists divided their allegiances between Amal (the only political movement at the time), the various Islamic committees, the missionary faction and the independents.

In 1979, the Iranian Revolution led by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini triumphed, in tandem with a rising and insistent need for political revitalisation in Lebanon. Soon Ayatollah Khomeini was designated the leading religious authority within the Shiite community (in which 'interpretative judgement' –*ijtihad*– is possible and where subjects are required to follow the religious interpretation of the more learned among the living clerics) and the concern for the need to build a united Islamic organisation emerged. Thus a number of representatives of the main Islamic groups began discussions about their perceptions of Islamic activity in Lebanon. The results of these discussions were summarised in a final document, the 'Manifesto of the Nine', which declared the following three objectives: (1) Islam is the comprehensive, complete and appropriate programme for a better life; (2) resistance against Israeli occupation requires the call for *jihad* (holy war); (3) the legitimate leadership is that of the jurist-theologian (*wilayat al-faqih*) who is considered to be the successor to the Prophet and the Imams. This document was presented to Ayatollah Khomeini, who granted his approval, thereby bestowing upon himself custodianship as jurist-theologian. Various Islamic groups then adopted the manifesto, thus dissolving their existing organisations in favour of this new framework, which later came to be known as Hezbollah. All of these developments took place at a time of Iranian solidarity with Lebanon and Syria. Syria agreed to the passage of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard into Lebanon, and training camps were set up in the Western Bekaa Valley district.

Thus the three main objectives that represent the main pillar on which Hezbollah is founded are: (1) belief in Islam; (2) *jihad*; and (3) jurisdiction of the jurist-theologian.

(1) *Belief in Islam*

Hezbollah considers Islam both a conviction and a code of law. As a code of law, the *sharia* is thus considered to be clearly described in both the Holy Qur'an and the Prophet's Noble Mores (*Sunna*) and to cover all of humankind's needs. In contrast to the *sharia's* permanent rules, Shiites allow a wide margin to accommodate change and keep pace with any place and age. Islam has, for example, sets guidelines for a 'good' governor or leader while leaving the choice of government framework up to that leader. As such, the question of forming a government is left free of any strict rules and a President can be elected either through a direct popular vote or a parliament.

Even though *sharia* appears, on an intellectual level, to call for the establishment of an Islamic state, on a practical level Hezbollah considers that such a state should be based on free public choice. The Party aspires to be in a position to unify Islam's various schools of thought, an undertaking in which religious jurists have failed over hundreds of years, but Qassem considers the quest to find common ground on a political level more important. 'The requirement is for us to be

¹⁵ A important book on the AMAL movement is Augustus Richard Norton, *AMAL and the Shi'a: Struggle for the Soul of Lebanon*, Texas University Press, Austin, 1987.

together in the confrontation of challenges and not to dissipate time trying to determine the gender of angels while our land is being robbed and our future is under the menace of world hegemony'.¹⁶

(2) *Jihad*

Jihad (or holy war) has its root in the verb 'to struggle' or 'to strive'. It signifies endeavouring and making every effort to battle against the enemy. It is considered to bear a great influence on the trajectory of a Muslim's life and considered to be an integral part of one's true belief. 'The Prophet (PBUH) expressed this meaning upon his reception of a group of Muslims just back from combat: "Welcome to a troop that has fulfilled that smaller *jihad* (battle) and whom the bigger *jihad* still awaits". When asked of that bigger challenge, the Prophet (PBUH) answered: "Jihad with the soul".¹⁷ It is thus considered the duty of all believers of Islam to 'refuse and confront oppression, and to struggle with their inner selves towards the victory of virtue, justice, human rights and uprightness' for which they are promised reward on the Day of Resurrection.¹⁸ Military *jihad* is considered by the clerics to take two forms:

- (1) Groundwork *jihad*, which is confrontation between Muslims and others, and entry into others' lands for reasons not tied to the reclamation of land or the fighting off of aggression. This form of jihad is not considered applicable in the present day.
- (2) Defensive *jihad*, which is the defence by Muslims of their land, their people or themselves upon facing aggression or occupation. This latter is not only considered legitimate, but also a duty of all true Muslims.¹⁹ The woman's role in this context is to give support and help with recruitment. No religious commandment requires from women this form of sacrifice given a sufficient number of men.

On the issue of martyrdom, Qassem writes: 'All that the enemy is capable of is implanting the fear of death in us. When we halt this fear, we render the power of death with which he menaces us futile... martyrdom fills a significant gap in the imbalance of power. Attempting to defeat the enemy with the minimum possible bloodshed is a duty'.²⁰

(3) *Jurisdiction of the Jurist-Theologian (al-Wali al-Faqih)*

Muslims believe that the Prophet is the messenger, the bearer of the holy doctrine of the *sharia*, who has been inspired to see to its execution and to define the nation's path towards fulfilment. Following the Prophet in referential supremacy are the infallible Imams, starting with the Commander of the Faithful Imam Ali bin Abi Taleb and ending with Imam al-Mahdi. Their role is to interpret and clarify the various aspects of the Message, and monitor its proper execution. In the absence of such interpretations given by the Imams, experts and clerics are charged with clarifying what falls under the realm of duty and what it excludes, what is approved and what is forbidden. Implementation is considered to take two forms: one is individual and linked to forms of worship, treatment of others and all that is related to personal and daily life. The other is general and pertinent to the nation as a whole, its interests, its wars, peace and overall direction. Shiites consider that only through the Jurist-Theologian's guardianship and custodianship can the preservation and the implementation of Islam be achieved, since it is he who is charged with defining a clear path to bring the nation together. It is he who has the authority to decide on issues of war and peace. He is also custodian of the nation's wealth as collected through *zaqat* and *khums* and other sources. He sets the guidelines for any Islamic state upon its inception, guiding its abidance of doctrinal jurisprudence and preserving its constituents' interests in accordance with Islam.

¹⁶ Qassem, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.34.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

Following Islam's implementation by the Jurist-Theologian, the tasks of 'administration and oversight of details and particulars; implementing procedures; daily political, social and cultural work; and jihad against Israeli invaders' are considered the responsibilities of Hezbollah's leadership. Such authority is reflected in substantial independence at the practical level, not necessitating direct or daily supervision by the Jurist-Theologian.²¹ Regarding its relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran, Qassem writes that since its creation Hezbollah saw a possibility for achieving its goals and aspirations through the backing and reinforcement offered by the Republic. Qassem sees many reasons behind the success of the relationship between Iran and Hezbollah, of which he considers the most important to be the following: (1) the common framework of international leadership legitimacy (since both Iran and Hezbollah believe in the jurisdiction of the Jurist-Theologian and that Imam Khomeini was himself such a leader); (2) harmony at the theoretical level (although the detailed application of general guidelines is subordinate to the particular characteristics of each country); and (3) common political views (specifically those concerning the support of all liberation movements, especially those aimed at resisting Israeli occupation). Qassem stresses that the relationship between Iran and Hezbollah is not one in which a weaker party is consecrated to the will of a stronger one, but in which the aims of both are realised through independent action.²²

Throughout the presidency of the late Hafez al-Assad, Syria adopted a policy of opposing Israel's projects, promoting Arab solidarity, supporting resistance against occupation and cooperating with all allies towards this end. After the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, Iran declared its support for Syria and its readiness to carry out the orders of Imam Khomeini and dispatch its Islamic Revolutionary Guard to support Lebanon in its confrontation of the occupation. President al-Assad agreed to this, and the Guard passed via Syria into Lebanon to train the youth who were to form Hezbollah and fight the Israeli occupation. Thus the relationship between Hezbollah and Syria was initially restricted to coordination on security issues, facilitation of the movement of activists and their arms and handling any emerging problems. It did not extend to a political relationship.

The first ideological and political discussion between Hezbollah and Syria, which took place after the clashes between the Amal militia and Hezbollah in June 1988, led Syrian forces to infiltrate Beirut's southern suburbs under the banner of separating the fighting parties and re-establishing security. In the meeting requested by the Hezbollah leadership, President al-Assad reassured the Party leaders that its deployment of forces in the region was only for security reasons and that there was no intention for Syrian troops to side with Amal, as Hezbollah feared. This first meeting between Syria and Hezbollah leaders laid down the foundations for continuous political discussions over common issues, primarily related to the conflict with Israel.²³

With the fall of the USSR in 1989, the US became the most influential power in the region and gradually replaced France and Britain, the colonial powers, imposing its policies in all areas. Qassem considers that since then the problem plaguing any relationship or dialogue with the US is the 'political supremacy of this single world power'.²⁴ Furthermore, the US categorised the Islamic resistance in Lebanon as a form of terrorism, further reinforcing the inequality that characterises the relations between Hezbollah and the US. He stresses that the US also instigated an internal attack in Lebanon in an attempt to distract the resistance and ensured that the occupied zone in Lebanon would play a key role in any security guarantees or political agreements to be signed with Syria or Lebanon.²⁵

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 50-58.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 235-239.

²³ *Ibid.* p. 239-243.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 246.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 247.

Qassem says that, until recently, Hezbollah considered calls for meetings and dialogue from some US Congress officials to be futile, and thus rejected them despite frequent requests conveyed through both Lebanese and non-Lebanese officials. 'The US does not take any detailed step or perform any action whatsoever unless this directly feeds the pre-drawn policy of supporting Israel', he argues.²⁶ Even though the French and British attempted to benefit from their colonial past in the Middle East by maintaining roles there, the European influence in the region has steadily declined over the past two decades with the rise of the US as a unilateral world power. In contrast to its relations with the US, Hezbollah has been able to maintain relations with Europe, largely because the Party does not feel there is any threat of direct aggression from it. Hezbollah perceives the role that Europe has chosen to adopt as a catalyst for tempering US unilateralism and thus representing a different Western role, notwithstanding the lack of support for human rights manifested by Europe after the Jenin massacres and other Israeli violations of human rights in the occupied Palestinian territories.²⁷ According to Qassem, Hezbollah considers that given the mutual interest in developing positive relations between the Party and Europe (even if Hezbollah is somewhat cautious about Britain's pro-US policy) channels should remain open.

Regarding relations with the United Nations and its Security Council, Qassem writes that Hezbollah does not question the importance of having an international forum for resolving international disputes and considers that international issues need a coordinator at such a level. It criticises the veto power of the five permanent members of the Security Council, however. Thus, like many members of the UN today, Hezbollah urges 'the reconsideration of the rights of certain countries to use the power of veto' as well as 'the substitution of this decision-making mechanism with another that serves to reinstate international justice'.²⁸

Together with Iraq and the situation in Palestine, Lebanon represented another factor of instability in the Eastern Mediterranean. The year 2006 saw the Land of Cedars again at the centre of the Middle Eastern maelstrom. This is not the first time this small Mediterranean country is used as a convenient battleground for regional and global actors.²⁹

Background to the 2006 Lebanon War

There are several factors to explain the events that led to the summer 2006 war between the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) and Hezbollah (Party of God): (1) the internal situation in Lebanon following the assassination of the former Prime Minister Rafiq al Hariri in February 2005; (2) the emergence of Iran as a major player in the Middle East following the US war in Iraq; (3) the role of Syria that has never accepted its forced ousting from Lebanon in the spring of 2005; (4) Israel's concern with the Palestinian reality; and (5) the US Administration's inability to implement the *global war on terror* and the uncontrollable situation in Iraq and Afghanistan.³⁰

Since the end of the civil war in Lebanon (1975-90) the country has gone through a period of amazing reconstruction shepherded by the late Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri. Thanks to his contacts and global friendships Hariri brought back to Lebanon a respect it had lost and a role it

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 249.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 252.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 258.

²⁹ For further details see the excellent book by Waddah Sharara, *Dawlat Hizballah: Lubnaan Mujtamaa Islamiyyan* (Hezbollah's State: Lebanon as an Islamic Society) Beirut: Lebanon: Dar An Nahar, Fourth Edition, 2006. Other important books published in Arabic in the aftermath of the July 2006 war include Mohammad Husayn Bazzi, *Al Waad Al Sadeq: Yawmiyyat al Harb al-Sadisat (The Truthful Promise: Diary of the Sixth War)*. Beirut: Lebanon: Dar Al Ameer, 2006. See also, *Yawmiyyat Al Harb al Israiliyyaala Lubnaan 2006 (Diary of the Israeli War on Lebanon 2006)*. Beirut: Lebanon: Dar As Safir, 2006. This is one of the most comprehensive documentation of the war published by *As Safir* one of Lebanon's major daily newspapers.

³⁰ For a recent and thorough analysis of Lebanon see Fawwaz Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon*, Pluto Press, London and Ann Arbor, 2007.

used to have. The major drawback, however, was that Hariri focused on the rebuilding of stones at the expense of reconciliation between the Lebanese. In fact, reconciliation between Lebanon's various communities did not really take place. The Christians especially came out feeling defeated and betrayed while the Sunnis and the Shias came out with more control of the power levers in Lebanon. Unlike South Africa and some Latin American countries there has never been a truth and reconciliation commission created to 'police the past' in Lebanon.³¹

The other major fault line is Hezbollah's ever-growing role and influence on the Lebanese scene. Created after the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon, Hezbollah became a major linchpin of the resistance against the Israeli occupation. The party's leadership succeeded, thanks to Syrian and Iranian help, in creating a large network of institutions to answer the various social and humanitarian needs of the population of South Lebanon. Hezbollah became the paramount military and social power in a South Lebanon mostly dominated by Lebanese Shias. Calls to send Lebanese troops to the border with Israel were always faced with resistance. The Lebanese President Emile Lahoud (Syria's major ally in Lebanon) has always argued that sending Lebanese troops to the border would be tantamount to acting as defenders of Israel's security. The summer 2006 war between Israel and Hezbollah demonstrates how wrong this reasoning was. This is why after almost one month since the beginning of the Israeli campaign Lebanon's government has offered to send 15,000 Lebanese army troops to the border.

Following the assassination of the former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri (February 2005) a UN Security Council resolution 1559 was adopted calling on the exit of all foreign troops from Lebanon (in this case meaning Syria) and the dismantling of Hezbollah as a militia. The rationale was that Israel had ended its occupation of South Lebanon and Hezbollah's resistance movement was no longer necessary. This was not Hezbollah's interpretation. For the Shia-dominated militia, Israel was still in occupation of the Shebaa Farms (an area of around 20-25 square kilometres in South Lebanon) and this justified it maintaining its weapons.³² Because of the weakness of the central government in Lebanon the country had become a favoured ground for armed groups to create a state within a state. This was the case of the PLO in Lebanon for at least 25 years until Arafat and his men were forced out of Beirut in the mid 1980s. Then a Lebanese brand supported by Iran and Syria appeared: Hezbollah.

Iran and Syria: Regional Spoilers?

Since the advent of the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979, regional politics in the Middle East have changed. Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini wanted to export his brand of fundamentalist Islam throughout the Middle East and the Muslim world. Lebanon, with its large Shia community, became a favourite target of Teheran's entreaties. Following the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon, the Iranian regime took advantage of the mistakes committed by the IDF to consolidate its influence in the Land of Cedars. The US invasion of Iraq in 2003 made Iran a major player in the region. The Shiite arc of influence now extended all the way from Teheran to Basrah and on to Beirut. The Iranian regime took advantage of the fragmentation of Iraq to extend its influence and presence in southern Iraq. Teheran is waiting to see how the Bush Administration will play its cards (regarding both Iraq and the Iranian nuclear weapons programme) to determine its behaviour in Iraq and the Middle East. Hezbollah is a convenient instrument for Iran's disruptive policies against US interests in the region.

³¹ For further details on reconciliation in Lebanon see George E. Irani, 'Acknowledgement, Forgiveness, and Reconciliation in Conflict Resolution', *Chronos*, nr 5, 2002, p. 195-220.

³² For an excellent legal interpretation of the status of the Shebaa Farms see Marie Ghantous, *Le statut juridique des hameaux de Chebaa: dans le cadre du droit international public applicable aux Etats nouveaux*, Moukhtarat, Beirut, 2005.

Another major player is Syria. The Syrian regime has never formally acknowledged Lebanon as a sovereign entity. Proof of this has always been the absence of embassies between Syria and Lebanon. In 1976, with US and Israeli support, President Hafez al Assad of Syria sent his troops into Lebanon to maintain a state of controlled tension. The Syrians played willing Lebanese factions one against the other to maintain their supremacy. With Washington's tacit support Syrian suzerainty over Lebanon lasted for 30 years. Syria's pre-eminent role in Lebanon was challenged by the late Prime Minister Rafiq al Hariri. Hariri, who had never had a viable relationship with Emile Lahoud, Syria's appointed President of Lebanon, was incensed by Syria's decision to renew Lahoud's presidential mandate, which was unconstitutional. To reverse this trend, Hariri lobbied hard with his European and American friends to have the UN adopt a resolution calling for the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon and the disarming of Hezbollah. In the spring of 2005, following al Hariri's assassination, Syria was forced to pull out its troops from Lebanon. Moreover, the Syrian regime is facing the prospect of an international tribunal that will be investigating all the assassinations that have taken place in Lebanon since Hariri's death, including of course his killing.

Israel and Lebanon

Since Ariel Sharon came to power in Israel and throughout his period in office the Palestinian issue became a primary concern, especially the demographic dimension of the conflict. Sharon decided to build a wall (or 'separation fence' in official Israeli jargon) around most of the West Bank creating a new fact on the ground. He also decided to undercut Hamas' regional connections. Since the beginning of the Second *Intifadah* (2001), pro Syrian and Iranian groups such as Hamas and Hezbollah had forged a close political and military alliance. The victory of Hamas early in 2006 in the Palestinian legislative elections had forced the Israelis to get rid of it and undermine its legitimacy as a democratically elected force in Palestine. Israel's military decision to beat Hamas in Gaza and the West Bank and Hezbollah in Lebanon falls within the objectives stated by the Bush Administration in its *global war on terrorism*. This war was weakened by the resurgence of the Taliban in Afghanistan and the break-up of Iraq because of the rampant civil war going in Baghdad and the Southern part of the country.

The US, Europe and the Arabs

The Bush Administration's objectives to fight terrorism and bring democracy to the Middle East were faced with enormous challenges in Iraq, Palestine and Lebanon. Sensing a possible US decision to whittle down its military presence in Iraq and given Iran's rising influence in the region, Israel's Prime Minister Ehud Olmert decided to hit Lebanon. Arab intellectuals speculated that this new (and old) policy is very similar to the ideas attributed to some Israeli and American circles to divide the Arab Middle East along ethnic and sectarian lines: a Shia state in Southern Iraq; a Kurdish state in Northern Iraq; a Sunni rump state protected by Egypt and Saudi Arabia; Alawi, Sunni and Druze entities in Syria; and, lastly, the partition of Lebanon into Christian, Sunni, Shia and Druze enclaves. The purpose of this balkanisation –according to this idea– is to ensure Israel's hegemony as a Jewish state in a religiously fragmented region. Certainly, this is a prescription for disaster and portends never-ending wars and terrorism in the Middle East and around the world.

The summer 2006 war between Hezbollah and the IDF was a harbinger of the new realities emerging in the Middle East. First, the war in Lebanon was the longest confrontation between the Israeli army and an irregular militia. Usually wars between regular Arab and Israeli armies lasted between one and two weeks. As a result of the summer 2006 war, Hezbollah has emerged as a major player in future Lebanese and regional politics. Secondly, by using Hezbollah as its regional instrument, Iran has emerged as a major power, especially as a protector of the Shias in the Middle East. Moreover, Iran will be an inevitable interlocutor for the US and Britain regarding the future of Iraq. Regardless of whether Iraq descends into civil war or not, Iran is a major player to contend with. Third, the old regional Arab order controlled by Sunni-dominated countries such as Egypt,

Saudi Arabia and Jordan is on the wane. Saudi Arabia has lost its leverage, especially since the terrorist attacks of 9/11 (most of the attackers were Saudis). In 2006, Egypt was also in a transition that could be a destabilising factor in the country. Hezbollah's victory in Lebanon was a major boost for the political fortunes of groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Jordan and Hamas in Palestine. Jordan reaped the consequences of the wars in Iraq, Palestine and Lebanon. The prospects for the Hashemite monarchy in Jordan will be determined by regional instability and global intervention. Lastly, Europe and the West had to undergo a major paradigm shift. The West's Arab interlocutors have changed. Those in the Middle East who wanted to bring democracy and liberalisation to the region have been defeated by the war in Lebanon. The West will have to learn to talk and accept a more radical Islamist vision of the region. However unsavoury such an option is, the West will have to adopt a different and pragmatic approach to the Middle East.

Winners and Losers of the Summer 2006 War

The confrontation between the IDF (IDF) and Hezbollah ended with the adoption by the UN Security Council (11 August) of Resolution 1701. In it the international community set out the principles of a lasting solution to the crisis. UN Security Council Resolution 1701 called for a 'full cessation of hostilities' between Hezbollah and Israel and reiterated the international community's 'strong support for full respect of the Blue Line' (separating Israel and Lebanon); it also called for the 'full implementation of the relevant provisions of the Taef Accord' (1989) –that ended the Lebanese civil war– and the disarmament 'of all armed groups in Lebanon'. Resolution 1701 also involved the release of the abducted Israeli soldiers and the Lebanese prisoners, the delineation of borders, especially in the Shebaa Farms area. Finally, UN Resolution 1701 called for the deployment of 15,000 troops to be added to the UNIFIL contingent in South Lebanon. France, Spain and Italy provided half of this number.

The biggest losers of the Summer 2006 Arab-Israeli war (the longest so far) included the Israeli government, the Lebanese people (an initial assessment of the direct costs of the war amounted to US\$2.464 billion), the Bush Administration's Global War on Terror (GWOT) and the US campaign to promote democracy in the Middle East. For many US, European and Middle Eastern observers the major winner was Hezbollah's Secretary General Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah. Nasrallah became a hero in the Arab world by succeeding in confronting the most potent army in the Middle East for more than four weeks. Certainly, this has come at a major cost in life and property. The downside of Nasrallah's victory was what option Hezbollah will follow: being Iran's long arm in Lebanon or accepting to be part and parcel of the reconstructed Lebanese state. According to Lebanese sources Hezbollah collaborated with the deployment of the Lebanese Army in the South and still respects the presence of UNIFIL II. The Shia group stated that it would refuse to disarm as long as there were still Israeli soldiers on Lebanese soil.

In April 2007, a major investigative report was issued by the Winograd Inquiry Commission on the cause of failure of the Israeli government and military command during the 2006 war in Lebanon. Regarding Hezbollah the Winograd report stated that 'The ability of Hezbollah to sit "on the border", its ability to dictate the moment of escalation, and the growth of its military abilities and missile arsenal increased significantly as a result of Israel's unilateral withdrawal in May 2000 (which was not followed, as had been hoped, by The Lebanese Army deploying on the border with Israel)' .³³

³³ For a full detail of the Winograd Commission's findings see *Haaretz*, 1/V/2007, <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/854051.html>; see also <http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Government/Communiques/2007/Winograd+Inquiry+Commission+submits+Interim+Report+30-Apr-2007.htm>.

Lebanon Since the Summer 2006 War

Today, Lebanon is faced with an internal political deadlock and the threat of being overwhelmed by salafi groups bent on destabilising it and imposing their own fundamentalist militant interpretation of Islam. Moreover, the struggle for influence in Lebanon and the Middle East between the US, France, Egypt and Saudi Arabia on the one hand and Syria and Iran and their allies on the other, does not bode well for a possible settlement of the crisis.

Together with other pro Syrian parties, Hezbollah has withdrawn its members from the Lebanese government. With its allies in the opposition it is now asking to have a major say in government affairs in light of the outcome of the summer 2006 war. The Hezbollah leadership believes it has won the war against Israel and the time is mature to play a major role in Lebanese politics. This has led to a situation of paralysis of government institutions in Lebanon; Emile Lahoud, the pro Syrian President of Lebanon is isolated by the majority parties and by the international community; the Lebanese parliament has not met for months and its Speaker, Nabih Berri, is part of the opposition to the current government of Fuad Siniora; and the Lebanese government has lost six of its members. The government of Prime Minister Fouad Siniora is paralysed and challenged by an opposition determined to force his resignation. Siniora enjoys the support of the slight majority in the Parliament and especially of the US and France: challenged at home, he remains a popular Prime Minister for Lebanon's Western friends.

The creation by the United Nations of a Special Tribunal to investigate Hariri's assassination was also part of the push and pull between Siniora's government and the opposition. Initially, the UN and the Western powers had given a chance to the Lebanese Parliament to approve the tribunal, but Nabih Berri, the parliament's Shia Speaker, refused to convene the legislators for this purpose. The pro Syrian opposition fears that the tribunal could become a weapon in the hands of the majority and its Western backers to harass and humiliate the Syrian regime. In late May the UN Security Council met and voted in favour of setting up the Special Tribunal for Lebanon under Chapter VII of the UN charter (Resolution 1757). Five countries (Russia, China, Qatar, Indonesia and South Africa) opposed or abstained from voting. Moreover, it is the first time in recent history that a tribunal is established not for investigating war crimes or crimes against humanity but to end the era of impunity that has marred Lebanese and regional politics following the spate of assassinations.

Moreover and more worrying are the rising tensions between Lebanon's major confessional communities, such as between the Shias on the one hand and Sunnis and Druzes on the other. Seventeen years after the war ended in 1990 real reconciliation between Lebanon's various communities has yet to take place in the country. The Special Tribunal is an important signal by the international community that the search for justice and accountability in Lebanon are major stepping stones towards stability. There has always been a debate in Lebanon whether to 'forgive and forget' what happened during the Lebanese civil war or to seek truth and reconciliation following the South African and other models.

Another domestic threat with regional implications is the openly aggressive stance adopted by radical Sunni salafi groups. A small organisation called Fatah al-Islam –headed by Shaker al-Absi, a Palestinian who fled Jordan, went to Syria and then to Northern Lebanon to set up shop with the support of Syrian intelligence– claims that it wants to refocus Palestinian politics back to Islamic *sharia* law and act as an alternative to Fatah and Hamas, the two major Palestinian organisations. Tripoli, the Sunni-dominated city in northern Lebanon, and the Palestinian refugee camp of Nahr al-Bared became the headquarters for this obscure organisation. In late May, Fatah al-Islam attacked a Lebanese army position and killed several soldiers. This was the beginning of fighting between the Lebanese Army and the salafi group. Some government members and majority leaders openly claimed that the Syrian regime was a major sponsor of Fatah al-Islam. In a sense, this latest confrontation between the Army and the jihadi group reopened the sensitive and controversial issue

of the Palestinian presence in Lebanon (the latest figures speak of 150,000 to 200,000 Palestinians living in 12 refugee camps throughout Lebanon).

The current instability in Lebanon is also due to the struggle for power and influence in the Middle East. From a regional perspective, there is an ongoing battle for influence between pro-Western Arab regimes such as Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Iran is a major player in Lebanon and the region. Since the inception of the Iranian Revolution the regime has exerted most of its efforts in extending Ayatollah Khomeini's model of governance to the region. Lebanon, with its large Shia community, was an ideal location for this mission and the creation of Hezbollah a major instrument. Iran took also advantage of US mistakes in Iraq and the failure of the Bush Administration's policy to bring stability and democracy to Iraq and the region. The Iranian leadership is well conscious of the vital role it is –and will be– playing in any future settlement in both Iraq and Lebanon. The Iranian nuclear option has now become a significant bargaining chip with the US. US policy towards Iran is still unclear and marred by the divisions within the US Administration.

Regarding Lebanon, Iran is now playing an important role in calming the internal tensions. Its main objectives are to maintain, consolidate and shore up its leading allies in the Shia community: Hezbollah and Amal. The Iranian leadership is well aware that a possible Sunni-Shia confrontation in Lebanon could lead to the weakening of these allies. In coordination with the Saudis, Iran tried its hand at convincing its allies in Lebanon to accept the Hariri tribunal and the formation of a new government, but to no avail. Major obstacles facing the Saudi-Iranian initiative regarding Lebanon include the Bush Administration's policy of isolating Iran, as well as Saudi Arabia's decision to shut out Syria from any involvement in finding a solution for Lebanon. Nevertheless, Syria's isolation due to Saudi discontent with its negative meddling in the Iraqi, Palestinian and Lebanese scenes, does not mean that the Iran-Syria axis is finished. To the contrary, the alliance between the Syrian and Iranian regimes is very strong because more than any time before Damascus is in need of its Iranian ally. It is clear that Iran and its Syrian ally are not too happy with the presence of Western military units (from Belgium, France, Germany, Italy and Spain) within the UNIFIL peacekeeping force.

Another dimension of Syria's reduced role and isolation is due to international efforts to revamp the peace process in the Middle East. One of the basic ideas of this new initiative is to neutralise Iranian and Syrian meddling in Palestinian affairs (through their allies Hamas and Islamic Jihad). The European and US consensus is to resolve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict first and then to follow it up by a peace treaty between Israel and Lebanon. This latter approach would require a flexible Israeli policy based on the withdrawal of Israeli occupation forces from the Shebaa Farms and placing this small area in South Lebanon under UN supervision. The Syrian regime has never formally acknowledged Lebanon as a sovereign entity. An instance of this is the absence of embassies between Syria and Lebanon. The Syrians played willing Lebanese factions against each other to maintain their supremacy. With Washington's tacit support Syria's suzerainty over Lebanon lasted for 30 years.

Syria's pre-eminent role in Lebanon was challenged by the late Prime Minister Rafiq al Hariri. Hariri, who had never had a viable relationship with Emile Lahoud, the Syrian appointed President of Lebanon, was incensed by Syria's decision to renew Lahoud's presidential mandate in an entirely unconstitutional move. To reverse this, Hariri lobbied hard with his European and American friends to have the UN adopt a resolution calling for the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon and for the disarming of Hezbollah. In the spring of 2005, following Hariri's assassination, Syria was forced to pull out its troops from Lebanon. Moreover, the Syrian regime is now facing the prospect of an international tribunal to investigate the assassinations that took place in Lebanon since Hariri's death, including of course his own killing.

Three years after the Syrian withdrawal, the 14 March majority movement failed to harness the popular support it then enjoyed. Hezbollah, a leading Syrian and Iranian ally in Lebanon, is still a major player in the country. The Syrian regime never accepted its forced withdrawal from Lebanon and is attempting with all its means to regain that control. President Assad wants to make sure that the next Lebanese President will be friendly and malleable. The Syrians were used to manipulating and imposing pro-Syrian presidential candidates during the long years of occupation in Lebanon. Ironically, this was done with the tacit support of the US, France and the Vatican, the main Western players on the Lebanese scene. Today Lebanon is faced with the possibility of a controlled institutional vacuum: a new President is yet to be elected; the Lebanese Parliament has been inactive for a year; the current government of Fuad Siniora does not enjoy legitimacy; and there is the risk that the Lebanese Armed Forces could be left without a leader with the retirement in the summer of 2008 of its current commander General Michel Suleiman.

The Spanish Peacekeeping Contingent in Lebanon

In the summer of 2006, following the war between Hezbollah and the IDF, the United Nations Security Council adopted resolution 1701 calling for the strengthening of UN peacekeeping troops in South Lebanon.³⁴ Spain decided to participate with France, Italy and other 30 countries to beef up UNIFIL in South Lebanon. France assumed the initial leading role, with some reservations about the mandate of the peacekeeping mission, which opted for Chapter VI, rather than VII of the UN Charter (Chapter VII guides UN peacekeeping missions in Kosovo and Afghanistan). UN Resolution 1701 was the result of tough negotiations between the UN Secretary-General and the Lebanese, Arab and Israeli governments. The Lebanese and Arab governments were concerned that UNIFIL could become a force to protect Israel rather than being a force to monitor the truce. Israel wanted the latest UN resolution to give more teeth and place UNIFIL under Chapter VII, which makes it a force to impose peace rather than a peacekeeping mission dictated by Chapter VI.

A Spanish contingent 1,100 strong was sent to Lebanon as part of the reinforcement of UNIFIL II. Spain is leading the Multinational Brigade East with 4,250 troops. In addition to Spain, the multinational force includes 12,707 troops composed of contingents from 30 countries: Germany, Belgium, China, Cyprus, Denmark, Slovakia, Finland, France, Ghana, Greece, Guatemala, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Italy, Luxemburg, Malaysia, Nepal, Norway, Holland, Poland, Portugal, South Korea, Slovenia, Tanzania, Sweden and Turkey. Initially, UNIFIL II was supposed to include 15,000 troops.³⁵ The area covered by the Spanish troops includes a population mainly made up of Shiites but also with Druze, Christians and Sunni Muslims. The relations between the Spanish troops and the local population were, with some exceptions, highly appreciated. This situation, however, changed following the death of six Spanish peacekeepers in the summer of 2007. Since then, Spanish and other UNIFIL troops have been very cautious in their interaction with the local population. Notwithstanding this change, aid and other small projects are still ongoing and in addition to its military presence Spain has pledged financial and logistical support for the rebuilding of several towns and villages in the South.

³⁴ An annex of 30 pages detailing the 'rules of engagement' also formed part of UN Resolution 1701. This detailed and highly technical document was aimed at restricting the actions of the UN peacekeeping forces in South Lebanon. For further details see Nicoletta Pirozzi, 'UN Peacekeeping in Lebanon: Europe's Contribution', *European Security Review*, ISIS, nr 30, September 2006. See also Augustus Richard Norton, 'Mision Complicada...', *Foreign Policy Edicion Española*, nr 17, October/November 2006, pp. 30-33.

³⁵ Since the Madrid Peace Conference in 1991, the Barcelona Mediterranean Conference in 1995 and the Euro-Mediterranean Conference in Valencia in 2002, Spain has constantly pledged its financial assistance for reconstruction and rehabilitation in Lebanon. Between 2004 and 2006 the amount of aid provided by the Agencia Española para la Cooperacion Internacional (AECI) rose from €1.340.636 to €7.287.639 in 2006. there are today four Spanish NGOs funded by AECI and operating in Lebanon. The Agencia Catalana de Cooperacion al Desarrollo and the Municipality of Barcelona have also pledged financial support for reconstruction in Lebanon. For further details see *Seminario: Esperanza de paz en Oriente Medio? FINUL*, Madrid, 25-26/VI/2007, Centro de Estudios de Oriente Medio-Fundacion Promocion Social de la Cultura, Madrid.

In his sixth report on implementing Resolution 1701 (1 March 2008) UN Secretary General Ban-Ki Moon detailed the various tasks and challenges facing UNIFIL in South Lebanon and the various threats pervasive in the region. These incidents include the launching of rockets against northern Israeli towns; clashes with criminals smuggling illegal substances and commercial goods from Lebanon into Israel; random clashes between the IDF, UNIFIL and Lebanese civilians; and Israeli violations of Lebanon's airspace. Another source of concern for the UN Secretary General are Israeli reports that Hezbollah is 'rebuilding its military presence and capacity, inside UNIFIL's area of operations'. However, following investigations jointly conducted by UNIFIL and the Lebanese Armed Forces no evidence was found of new military infrastructure being built by Hezbollah in the area under UNIFIL's control. Israel still maintains, however, that 'Hezbollah has continued to construct new facilities and carry out training north of the Litani River and in the Bekaa Valley, where the Government of Lebanon has exclusive responsibility for security'.³⁶ In his report the UN Secretary General praised the coordination between UNIFIL and the Lebanese Armed Forces 'who are seeking to ensure that the area south of the Litani is free of unauthorised armed personnel, assets and weapons, in accordance with resolution 1701 (2006)'. In concluding his report, the UN Secretary General expressed his concern for the threats of war in statements made by Hezbollah and the unstable political situation in Lebanon. He mentioned the constant violations of Lebanese airspace and the occupation of half of the village of Ghajar by the IDF. The Lebanese side of Ghajar is under the supervision of Spanish UNIFIL troops. Lastly, Ban-Ki Moon called on the Governments of Syria and Lebanon 'to undertake practical steps towards demarcating their common border in accordance with resolutions 1701 (2006) and 1680 (2006)'.³⁷

Spanish troops were assigned the toughest area in South Lebanon. Tough because the area under supervision includes sensitive spots such as the Shebaa Farms (whose status is still being debated), the divided town of Ghajar (divided between Lebanon and Israeli occupation), and other two hot spots such as the Fatima Gate (which was used as a point of entry for Lebanese workers during the Israeli occupation of South Lebanon) and the Shaykh Abbad Tomb, a holy place claimed by both Jews and Muslims and divided by barbed wire. Spanish troops are involved in daily patrols to implement UN Resolution 1701 adopted following the summer 2006 war between Israel and Hezbollah. The Resolution calls for peacekeeping forces to support the Lebanese government in extending its sovereignty all over South Lebanon. Together with France and Italy, Spain is committed to supporting the deployment of the Lebanese Armed Forces which for the first time in 30 years are now present in South Lebanon. The relations between the Spanish troops and Lebanese army officers in that region are harmonious and coordination between the two sides is done on a regular basis.

In addition to the military aspect of the Spanish contingent's efforts there is also a civilian dimension. Spanish soldiers are involved in the following projects: mine-clearing projects and a de-mining awareness campaign for the local population (more than one million cluster bombs were left by the IDF following the summer 2006 war); medical assistance; Spanish language courses; fostering small markets and locally-made handicrafts; education and infrastructure projects; entertainment for children; and support for local agriculture and veterinary assistance. Spanish soldiers are helping in the reconstruction of some villages in the sector under their control within the Civil Military Cooperation Unit (CIMIC). Together with providing help in repairing roads and other vital infrastructure, Spanish troops are also helping the local population with medical care. Since their deployment in September 2006, Spanish troops have executed more than 142 small-sized projects for the total cost of US\$1 million provided by the Ministry of Defence in addition to US\$200,000 provided by UNIFIL.³⁸ For almost a year now the Spanish UNIFIL contingent in

³⁶ *UN Secretary General 6th report on implementing resolution 1701*, 1/III/2008, p. 5.

³⁷ *Op. cit.*, p. 13.

³⁸ *An Vahar*, 29/III/2008.

cooperation with the Beirut-based Instituto Cervantes has begun a series of courses teaching the Spanish language in the various villages of the Eastern Sector. Spanish soldiers and officers are involved in teaching 255 Lebanese students attending the introductory level and 80 students at the more advanced level spread around 16 centres and 11 villages.

Major José Alonso Alfaya, who is in charge of cooperation in the area under Spanish control, said his unit 'executes small projects in order to provide emergency help to the local population'. In an interview with the Lebanese daily *An Nahar*, Alfaya also said that his unit carefully studies the needs of the villages based on regular meetings with mayors, *mukhtars*, religious leaders and school supervisors who submit project proposals based on their population's needs. After careful consideration priorities are jointly determined and sent to the Ministry of Defence in Spain to obtain funding.³⁹ In addition to these projects Spanish troops, together with other countries' contingents present in the Eastern Sector, are involved in providing courses in English, computer use, medical help and various recreational and cultural activities to students in the area.

Today, the situation is back to normal in one of the most beautiful and pristine spots in South Lebanon. When I asked a Spanish officer if he expected a long-term presence for his troops he replied that UN stabilisation forces, like energy, can evolve and change. The idea is that Spain, together with the other countries participating within UNIFIL, is contributing to bringing life back to normal and making sure that the Lebanese recover full control of their country. All of these activities are a major contribution to the local population given the central government's absence in South Lebanon. The attention paid by UNIFIL troops constitutes a bright sign of hope for the population and an expression of the international's community's commitment to maintain stability and security in South Lebanon.

During the first few months following their deployment, Spanish troops had to face the opposition of the population in some villages. This was partly due to the fact that the local population was traumatised by the summer 2006 war and by years of Israeli interference and was very suspicious of the presence of foreign troops. Moreover, given its first experience in South Lebanon, the Spanish contingent, before the summer 2007 terrorist attack, had to gain the sympathy and support of the population in the Eastern sector. In one village, for instance, Spanish patrols were greeted with stones and protests. Following these incidents meetings were held between officers from the Spanish contingent and the heads of municipalities. They expressed their concerns and fears that the Spanish contingent would not go beyond its peacekeeping mission and that its moves would be placed under scrutiny by the local leadership.⁴⁰ Most of the complaints originated from mayors who were lobbying for Spanish projects in their own municipalities.

Pedro Herrero, the then official spokesperson for the Spanish contingent, denied reports that the aid policy for the population in the southern border villages is due to a change in UNIFIL's policy. Herrero stated that UNIFIL had no intention of gaining the sympathy of the local population in the light of Spain's decision to help reconstruction in Lebanon. 'We are trying to spend most of the monies for the execution of projects in the areas most affected by the (summer 2006) war. This is also one of the tasks assigned to UNIFIL troops in UN Resolution 1701'. Herrero also mentioned the constant coordination with the municipalities and various Lebanese NGOs operating in the area. The work of the Spanish contingent is guided by the vision of providing humanitarian aid with projects that answer the needs of various municipalities. Reaction to UNIFIL troops varied from one village to the other depending on the composition of the population. Moreover, it should be borne in mind that in most of these villages Hezbollah maintains a presence with its fighters dressed as civilians. For example, Fuad Hamra, the mayor of Jdaidet Marjayoun (in the area under the Spanish contingent's supervision) praised UNIFIL and the role played by the Spanish soldiers. He

³⁹ *An-Nahar*, 29/III/2008.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 16/II/2007.

was quoted as saying that ‘the presence and commitment of Spanish soldiers has brought economic welfare to Jdaidet Marjayoun and surrounding villages’. ‘This new situation’, Hamra said, ‘has had a positive impact in creating job opportunities for the local population and lessen the exodus to Beirut’.

The situation was different in the village of al-Khiam which is a key Hezbollah centre in the area. There the local population confronted Spanish patrols with protests and stones, refusing the services offered by the Spanish command. Ali Zurayk, the mayor of al Khiam, stated that his municipality had no problems with any country willing to provide aid to his village, ‘provided this aid was not a conduit for spying and taking pictures’. He also said that he had shared his concerns with Spanish military officials and with Miguel Benzo, Spain’s Ambassador to Lebanon. In an interview with the Lebanese pro-Syrian daily newspaper *As Safir* Ambassador Benzo tried to clear the air around the objectives and aims of his country’s peacekeeping efforts in South Lebanon. In reply to a question related to the behaviour of Spanish soldiers and the unease by the local populace in South Lebanon, Benzo said that ‘these were isolated incidents’ that occurred in the course of surveying the terrain in the border areas under Spanish control. One of the main issues that riled the local population was the sight of Spanish soldiers taking photographs for military purposes. Benzo stated that there were no other aims behind his country’s military’s action. ‘This is part of UNIFIL’s work’, he said, ‘it could be that the lack of knowledge of the local culture by our soldiers has led some of them to take photos for their own private use. After all, they are regular human beings who would like to keep souvenirs from the countries in which they served. We are aware of that and we asked them to desist in order to avoid misunderstandings’.⁴¹

The Attack Against Spanish Troops (24 June 2007): Lebanese Reactions

On 24 June 2007, six Spanish soldiers belonging to the UNIFIL contingent were killed by a car bomb. Two soldiers were also wounded. The attack created fear and concern about the stability in the areas under UNIFIL’s control. This terrorist attack elicited a wide condemnation in Lebanese political circles. The then Lebanese President Emile Lahoud presented his condolences to UNIFIL’s Force Commander Major-General Claudio Graziano. Lahoud defined the attack as cowardly because it not only targeted UNIFIL troops ‘but the security and stability in Lebanon in general and South Lebanon in particular’. Lahoud stressed that the Lebanese are standing as one behind UNIFIL troops and express their solidarity for its fallen members who have died in the South in defence of peace.⁴² Hassan Hibballah, a Hezbollah member of parliament stated that ‘this crime is a continuation of the crimes that were committed against the nation (Lebanon) to weaken it resolve in fighting Israel. These crimes divert us from the major objectives of the resistance’.⁴³

In an article entitled ‘The Unsurprising Attack against Spanish Troops Places Lebanon and Syria on the Limits of the Red Line’, Sami Klaib, Paris correspondent for the Lebanese daily newspaper *As Safir* (pro-Syrian) wrote that the terrorist attack against UNIFIL troops was expected. Klaib quotes Israeli media sources who, before the attack, were calling for a change in the mission of UN forces by giving it more power and support to fight ‘armed militias, ie, Hezbollah and Palestinian groups that have all kind of allegiances and sources of funding’. Klaib went on to write that the attack against Spanish troops was the prelude for growing pressures against Hezbollah and to encourage the transformation of UNIFIL troops from peacekeepers to a force of dissuasion.⁴⁴ The Lebanese journalist also wrote that it is said that ‘Spanish troops were bolder in their movements (in South Lebanon) and that some of the population in the South called to boycott and not cooperate with

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *As Safir*, 26/VI/2007.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *As Safir*, 27/VI/2007.

Spanish troops'. Klaib claimed that Spain, which has been an active supporter of NATO and US policy in the Middle East, 'was one of the objectives of al-Qaeda'.⁴⁵

The attack against Spanish troops serving with UNIFIL became a card used by the opposing parties in Lebanon. For the Lebanese Government and the rump majority party the major culprit is Hezbollah. The party of God and its Syrian allies are to blame for the breach of security in South Lebanon. The attack against Spanish troops was an opportunity for the Lebanese government and its international supporters to bring an end to Hezbollah as a militia and impose a tight noose on Syria. For the Lebanese opposition, which includes Hezbollah, Amal and General Michel Aoun, the attack against Spanish troops is a US-Israeli provocation to destroy once and for all Hezbollah and send a stern warning to the Syrian regime.

In the spring of 2008, the United Nations peacekeeping force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) was again the target of verbal and armed threats. What was the nature of these threats? On 22 April, Osama bin Laden's chief deputy Ayman al-Zawahiri called on Sunni Muslim militants in Lebanon to 'expel the invading Crusaders who pretend to be peacekeeping forces in Lebanon and not accept (UN) Resolution 1701'.⁴⁶ In his latest report (1 March 2008) on the implementation of UN Resolution 1701, UN Secretary General Ban-Ki Moon mentioned Israeli reports that Hezbollah is 'significantly rebuilding its military presence and capacity, inside UNIFIL's area of operations'. The latest incident between Hezbollah militants and UNIFIL took place on 31 March 2008 when Italian peacekeepers tried to stop a truck carrying arms and ammunitions to Hezbollah inside UNIFIL's area of control. This incident led Silvio Berlusconi, Italy's Prime Minister, to call for a change in the 'rules of engagement' in order to enhance the deterrent power of Italian troops who have the largest number of peacekeepers. This has been one of the major weaknesses of Resolution 1701 in that the peacekeeping force in South Lebanon does not fall under Chapter VII of the UN Charter. Mention should also be made of Israeli demands to strengthen UNIFIL rules of engagement to stop Hezbollah's 'aggressive intentions'. Israel has also recently warned the Lebanese government and UNIFIL to stop Hezbollah from introducing rockets and other kinds of weapons south of the Litani River. Last but not least, there are the regular visits of diplomats representing countries that have troops within UNIFIL to Palestinian and Lebanese leaders influential in South Lebanon. These visits also include regular meetings with Hezbollah to avoid any future terrorist attacks like the one against Spanish troops in the summer of 2007.

UNIFIL is a convenient target every time tensions in Lebanon and the Middle East are on the rise. Lebanon is today living an institutional vacuum and the global regional confrontation between the US and its allies on the one hand, and Iran, Syria and their respective allies on the other, is reaching climactic levels. The upshot for UNIFIL troops is that rather than defending the civilian population in the border areas in South Lebanon they are now trying to defend themselves. Certainly, this plays into the hands of those in the US, Israel and some Western countries who want to defeat once and for all the Iranian-Syrian axis and its local proxies. In this crucial moment in Lebanon's history the cards could go in favour of or against the UN peacekeepers in South Lebanon. On the positive side, since its creation in 1978 UNIFIL has played a very important role as a buffer between Israel and the various groups who have resisted its occupation of South Lebanon. Despite the limited power dictated by its mandate UNIFIL is convenient for Israel, Hezbollah and the Lebanese Government. For Israel, the presence of UNIFIL is a safeguard, certainly a weak one, but still a convenient shield against Hezbollah and various armed groups roaming the South Lebanon. For Hezbollah, UNIFIL, while viewed with suspicion, is an important asset and protection against a potential Israeli attack. Moreover, UNIFIL troops, as exemplified by the important and dedicated work of the Spanish contingent, are a welcome presence for the local population. However, they are perceived as a threat by Hezbollah and constitute potential competition to the nationalist-religious group.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ For further details see <http://www.lebanonwire.com>, 22/IV/2008.

No one can predict what the future holds for Lebanon or for that matter the entire Middle East. What is clear is that Spain and its peacekeepers in Lebanon are building up an important presence that the Lebanese will not forget. This presence is exemplified by the humanitarian, development and reconstruction work carried out in the border areas of South Lebanon. Spain, together with Italy, France and the other countries that have despatched troops to Lebanon, ought to be proud of what they have achieved in spite of the various challenges and risks they face.

Recommendations for Spanish Policymakers

- Prepare Spanish troops before their deployment in Lebanon. This preparation ought to include a detailed and thorough briefing on Lebanon, its culture and how to interact with the local population in the areas under their control.
- Use Spanish citizens of Lebanese ancestry as a vehicle to interpret Lebanon for Spanish soldiers, policymakers and people's representatives.
- Use Lebanese citizens who have learned or are still learning the Spanish language and culture to explain and lobby for Spain's intentions and policies.
- Bring Spain to Lebanon by organising regular bipartisan visits to Lebanon by members of the Spanish parliament and members of Spanish CSOs (civil society organisations).
- Bring Lebanon to Spain by inviting members of the Lebanese government, army and prominent opinion makers to lobby and explain the importance of Spain's contribution to peacemaking in Lebanon. Here the Spanish Ambassador to Lebanon could play a major role.
- Have prominent Spanish policymakers, journalists and academics publish regular editorials in major Spanish newspapers on the importance of Spain's contribution in Lebanon.
- Try to build a coordinated policy with other EU members who are concerned about Lebanon's stability and welfare. This was exemplified by several visits to Lebanon by EU Foreign Ministers such as Spain's Miguel Ángel Moratinos, France's Bernard Kouchner and Italy's former Foreign Minister Massimo D'Alema.
- As soon as possible the Spanish Government ought to initiate a judicial investigation on the killing of the six Spanish soldiers in close cooperation with the Lebanese Authorities.

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