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## Prospects of SSR in Lebanon

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### Abstract

Nearly four months after the conflict between Israel and Hezbollah, is there an opportunity for the concept of Security Sector Reform (SSR) to shape the reconstruction period in Lebanon? The necessity of a holistic and governance based approach is crucial when one considers the poor management of and the extent of the Syrian influence within the three main Lebanese security institutions, namely the military, the police and the intelligence services. Nevertheless, realistic and sustainable SSR initiatives need to start with the acknowledgement of the limits of the context of Lebanese politics, both with regard to internal and external dimensions. First, the divisions in the society and political communalism in Lebanon have not yet created the conditions for the development of a common national identity in line with the model of the European nation-state from which the concept of SSR is drawn. Second, the democratic reforms of the security institutions are impeded by regional tension and a threatening strategic environment. To serenely engage in the necessary political reform, in line with SSR principles, the new government needs stability and security. This paper concludes that while domestic reforms are largely and necessarily in the Lebanese's hands, the international community can and must act on Lebanese external environment to encourage and facilitate the implementation of SSR in the country. This requires acknowledgment of Lebanon's need for external security. Indeed, in the absence of pressure from all regional power, Israel included, it is unlikely that any attempt to implement SSR in the country will avoid being perceived as an attempt to interfere in Lebanese politics and security.

## Security Sector Reform in the Middle East

SSR aims to address a double deficit, that of security and democracy. The concept aims to 'transform the security institutions so that they play an effective, legitimate and democratically accountable role in providing external and internal security for their citizens.'<sup>1</sup> Though this definition is generally accepted, SSR remains an ongoing, practical and, therefore, contested concept.<sup>2</sup>

The Middle East is undoubtedly the most understudied area in SSR literature. Though the need for political evolution has been widely acknowledged by the governments and intellectuals of the region, the concept of SSR has not shaped the reform discourse yet. This may be surprising when one considers that many of the conflicts and human rights violations have been attributed to a poorly managed security sector. Luethold notes that, however, the strategic evolution, as well as the rise of internal and external pressure on the Arab regimes may encourage the potential for SSR to shape the Middle East's democratic reform discourse and become a 'nascent debate' in the region.<sup>3</sup>

Most importantly, experience has shown that SSR programmes have a higher chance to be successfully implemented in cases in which the recipient country is going through a process of domestic change.<sup>4</sup> In 2005, the assassination in Beirut of the former prime Minister, Rafic Hariri, sparked huge popular demonstration and led to the withdrawal of the Syrian Forces after 15 years of occupation, the resignation of the Heads of the main security services and new elections. This political earthquake known as 'Cedar Revolution' brought with it much hope, after 15 years of Syrian tutelage, for the necessary political reform to finally be implemented and for Lebanon to become a fertile ground for SSR in the region. Finally, the UN investigation commission showed that the Hariri assassination was partly linked to the increasing pressure on Syria through

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<sup>1</sup>Clingendaen, I., Saferworld. (2002). *Towards a better practice framework in security sector*

*reform: Broadening the debate*. London. p.1

<sup>2</sup>Hänggi, H. (2005). Approaching Peace building from a Security Governance Perspective. In

Bryden, Hängis, H (Ed.), *Security Governance in Post-Conflict Peacebuilding*. Münster: DCAF. p.3

<sup>3</sup> See Luethold, A. (2004). Security Sector Reform in the Arab Middle East: A Nascent Debate In

Bryden, Hängis, H (Ed.), *Reform and Reconstruction of the Security sector*.

<sup>4</sup>Chanaa, J., & International Institute for Strategic Studies. (2002). *Security Sector Reform :*

*Issues, Challenges and Prospects*. Oxford: Oxford University Press for the International Institute for Strategic Studies. p.64

the UN Resolution 1559. This Resolution proposed by France and the US and voted on by the Security Council in September 2004, called upon 'all remaining foreign forces to withdraw from Lebanon' and 'for the disbanding and disarmament of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias.'<sup>5</sup>

By July 2005, the new government, rooted in the 'anti-Syrian' opposition, was now benefiting from a strong popular legitimacy and external support for the initiation of the necessary political reforms. Given the situation of the country, security appeared to be a critical issue in the Lebanese transition process. The weakness of the Lebanese armed forces, the presence of militia, and the Syrian influence both on security issues and within the security apparatus led certain observers to see SSR as the *starting point* for any serious attempt at initiating the process of state building and political reform.'<sup>6</sup>

## THE LEBANESE SECURITY SECTOR

As the 2006 conflict illustrated, the authority and sovereignty of the Lebanese state is still at stake. The Lebanese leaders must agree to continue the reconstruction of the army and spread its authority throughout the territory, in line with the UN Resolution 1701. In parallel, a unique police mission and status should be developed so that it is not considered to be a military auxiliary force. Finally, the intelligence services, which under the Syrian domination got used to controlling politics, must be reorganised and their mission redefined.

### The Role of Defence

In all Middle-Eastern countries, the military institution has a central political and security role. However, whilst the Lebanese army has traditionally held the monopoly on the internal and external security missions, its political role has been limited in order to manage and reflect the heterogeneity and unity of the country.

The structural weakness of the army was supposed to relieve fears that the military could be used by one community against another. Christian politicians, aware of the ubiquity of military dictatorships in Arab nations, feared that Muslims might use the armed forces as a vehicle for seizing power in a military coup d'état. Furthermore, many Christian Lebanese feared that a large army would inevitably embroil Lebanon in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Muslim politicians, on the other hand, were wary of a

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<sup>5</sup>UN Security Council Resolution 1559,  
[http://domino.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/d744b47860e5c97e85256c40005d01d6/764dc777bfc4307e85256f08005098bf/\\$FILE/sprst2004\\_36.pdf](http://domino.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/d744b47860e5c97e85256c40005d01d6/764dc777bfc4307e85256f08005098bf/$FILE/sprst2004_36.pdf), 18 July 2006

<sup>6</sup> Saab B., 'Crying out for wholesale security reform,' Daily Star, 28 September 2005

strong army commanded by Christians<sup>7</sup> which could be used prejudicially against Muslim interests.

Consequently, during the first 30 years of independence, the army numbered 18 000 troops while the defence budget never represented more than 4% of the Lebanese Gross National Product (GNP).<sup>8</sup> Yet, this weakness did not prevent the civil war. Indeed, it even encouraged the development of armed factions throughout the country. In 1975, at the same time that the war seemed inevitable and the position among politicians irreconcilable, the army, reflecting the state of the country, fell apart.

In 1989, the Taëf Agreements emphasized ‘spreading the sovereignty of the State of Lebanon over all Lebanese territories [...] and the Disbanding of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias.’<sup>9</sup> To do so, the reinforcement of the army was seen as the greatest priority, for both symbolic and security reasons. The treaty also stated that ‘the fundamental task of the armed forces is to defend the homeland,’ before adding that ‘the armed forces shall be unified, prepared, and trained in order that they may be able to shoulder their national responsibilities in confronting Israeli aggression.’<sup>10</sup>

Fifteen years later, however, the reconstruction of the army shows a balanced outcome. On one hand, it reinstated its authority over the majority of the territory which may allow the country to peacefully engage in the reconstruction period. On the other hand, economic, political and strategic factors impeded this ill-equipped army to reach sufficient operational readiness and resume a formal role in national defence.

A keystone of the Army’s reconstruction was the establishment of the national military service. This aimed both to ensure a sufficient number of troops to re-establish the state authority and to enhance sectarian balance within the military institution at a time when the number of young Christian willing to become professional soldiers was very low. The *loi du drapeau* voted by the authorities allows the army to quadruple over 10 years and reach 50,000 troops and 3,200 officers by 1996.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Traditionally Christian, the president has been given the role of chief commandant of the Army

<sup>8</sup> ‘Lebanon: The Creation of the Army,’ <http://www.country-data.com/cgi-bin/query/r-8058.html>, 29 June 2006

<sup>9</sup> Taëf agreement, <http://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/cahier/proche-orient/region-liban-taef-en> (25 July 2006)

<sup>10</sup> Ibid

<sup>11</sup> Interview with General (ret.) Nizar Abdel-kader, 22 May 2006, Beirut

In 2004, for financial<sup>12</sup> and electoral reasons,<sup>13</sup> the government decided to end compulsory military service. This decision will reduce the number of effectives from 65 000 to 43 000 troops by 2007. Already, many check-points throughout the country, previously manned by conscripts, are no longer occupied. It is likely that this decision may enlarge and deepen the Army's operational problems. Indeed, this reduction of troops has not been counter-balanced by enhanced equipment and material capabilities, particularly in the way of much-needed light armored vehicles and aero-mobility.

Today the repartition of the military is not directly in-line with the national security requirements. For example, 60% of troops are positioned in the costal areas while problems are more likely to arise in the Bekaa Valley.<sup>14</sup> In addition, the army in Beirut is unable to rapidly respond to riots in the second largest city in the country (Tripoli). As a consequence, the army needs to counter-balance the reduction of troops with better mobility. It thus needs more light armored vehicles better adaptable to the Lebanese mountains. It also needs improved aero-mobility, through such equipment as armed helicopters, in order to quickly and effectively deal with local resistance activity. Yet, most of the light armored troop carriers (M113, VAB) are not operational and only 5 helicopters can be used.<sup>15</sup>

The Lebanese debt - the world's largest per capita debt<sup>16</sup> - has served as a further disabler to the army receiving the materials and equipment it requires. This continues to be an enduring problem. In 2005, equipment expenditure represented 5.8 million US\$ of an overall defence budget of 850 million US\$. Thus 99.5% of the Lebanese military expenditure goes to operational or functional costs. Picard notes that 'by the late 1990s, the army employed nearly one-tenth of the Lebanese workforce, providing a livelihood for approximately half a million people, to whom it offered a variety of social and medical services, foreign training, food supplies, and pensions not to mention high wages, all of which turned officers into privileged functionaries.'<sup>17</sup> These services provided to military personnel absorb nearly the institution's entire budget, leaving little for equipment renovation and material purchases.

Moreover, by imposing the nomination of Lebanese allies within the military institution, including the General Lahoud, Chief of the army and now president of Lebanon, Damascus could control the reconstruction of the army at its benefice. For example, while the Lebanese army has been

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<sup>12</sup> Cost of a soldier for the state by month: around US\$ 1000

<sup>13</sup> Many young Lebanese, specifically Christians, were opposed to the civil service.

<sup>14</sup> Interview with Colonel Philippe Douar 30 May 2006, Beirut

<sup>15</sup> Ibid

<sup>16</sup> Between 35 and 40 billions of US\$ for 3 .5 millions of inhabitants

<sup>17</sup> Picard, E. (2002). *Lebanon: A Shattered Country* Myth and Reality of the Wars in Lebanon (Holmes and Meier) p.161

traditionally trained and equipped by the US and France, Lebanese officers were increasingly sent to Syrian military schools. Also, Syria provided the Lebanese army with Soviet tanks, including T54 and T122. By transforming its doctrine, both in tradition and in spirit, the Syrians ultimately aimed to integrate the Lebanese army into a Syrian corps.<sup>18</sup>

Most importantly, the recurrent Syrian discourse, internalised by most of the Lebanese politicians, on the weakness of the Lebanese army and its inability to protect the country by itself not only demoralised military professionals but also impeded any development of a longer term strategic defence doctrine for the armed forces. This was particularly clear when the Syrian authorities refused to allow the army to deploy in the south and take over Hezbollah positions after the withdrawal of the Israeli forces in 2000.

Finally, linked to political and economic restrictions, the strategic situation of the country prevented the army from developing its role to support national defence requirements. Indeed, the presence in the south of the most powerful regional army (Israel) - and at the East of the Syrian 'brother and ally' - necessarily limited the potential for the Lebanese army to set up a military doctrine and to focus on national defence missions.

In this context and during the entire post war period, the army's role was focused on internal missions. The Taëf agreement reinforced the role of the army in internal security missions and public order maintenance: 'When the danger is such that it exceeds the capacity of the Internal Security Forces (ISF) to confront it alone,' the army is to 'protect public order' and 'support the ISF in the preservation of security' and only when the ISF [is] able to accomplish its security mission could it return to its barracks.'<sup>19</sup> Yet, as Picard notes 'Rather than an auxiliary of the ISF, the army has often played a primary role, particularly in several episodes of repression [toward] political forces or [...] representatives of civil society.'<sup>20</sup> If the strong military presence in internal security operations cannot be decoupled from the political will to show the return to order and authority, it also reflects the increasing political role of the army in the society. Arguably, the Lebanese army have internalised some of the traits of other Arab armies, focusing more on regime security than on the protection of the rule of law.

The discourse of the army today is ambiguous. On one hand, the military seems to resent its disempowerment on real defence missions and does not consider demonstrations or riots to be its responsibility.<sup>21</sup> On the other hand, it is not clear that the army is ready to abandon its internal mission to the emerging police institution (ISF). Indeed, internal security is, for the

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<sup>18</sup> Interview with General (ret.) Nizar Abdel-kader, 22 May 2006, Beirut

<sup>19</sup> Taëf Agreement, <http://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/cahier/proche-orient/region-liban-taef-en> 25 July 2006

<sup>20</sup> Picard op. cit. p.162

<sup>21</sup> Interview with Commissaire Buil, 17 May 2006, Beirut

moment, the *raison d'être* of the army and allows it to have influence in the political sphere.<sup>22</sup>

As illustrated by the latest conflict, the *modus vivendi* between the Army and Hezbollah about the control of southern Lebanon is not sustainable in the post-Syria era. Today, Lebanon needs strategic vision, political will and financial means for the army to re-conquer its defence mission and leave public order missions to the police institution.

## The Role of Police

One of the oldest Lebanese institutions,<sup>23</sup> the Internal Security Force (ISF), has perhaps been the most neglected security agency during the first 30 years of independence and the Syrian tutelage. First, traditionally the army had the role of policing and maintaining internal order. Secondly, the kind of crime that the ISF are supposed to deal with was very rare under the Syrian terror. Thirdly, Syria did not develop the ISF because a real police institution involves a thorough cooperation between several institutions such as Justice, immigration and it thus more difficult to control. Nevertheless, following the withdrawal of Syrian forces, the new government showed an increasing interest in the police institution. There are now ambitions for it to play a major role, not only in maintaining public order, but also in criminal investigations and anti-terrorism.<sup>24</sup>

Traditionally cantoned to internal missions, the army never allowed space for a substantial police institution to fulfill its mission. Better staffed, equipped, and informed, the military has been the main institution dealing with internal security. As a result, the ISF has been considered, so far, to be an auxiliary force of the army. This explains its close links to the military in terms of personnel, training and statutes. Indeed, high ranking officers all have a military background, the organisation of the ISF's command is close to that of the army, police training takes place in military schools and can hardly be distinguished from that received by the military.<sup>25</sup> Also, the police institution forbids its personnel to strike or unionize.

While the Taëf agreement and the decree number 1460 of 15 July 1991 stipulated that the ISF should have 29,000<sup>26</sup> personnel, in the 1990s numbers within the ISF never exceeded 8,000. The withdrawal of the Syrian forces, however, may constitute a starting point for the ISF to

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid

<sup>23</sup> Traditionally called police of Beirut in the capital and gendarmerie elsewhere in the country

<sup>24</sup> Interview with Commissaire Buil, 17 May 2006, Beirut

<sup>25</sup> Recruits attend military schools and follow a 3 months programme of police specialisation

<sup>26</sup> Reaching a ratio of policeman per inhabitant of 7.3%, Lebanon would be in line with the international rate.

empower its police missions. Indeed, under the new government initiative, the ISF staff went up to 13,000 in 2005 and today enjoys 17,000 members. These numbers are projected to climb even further to 21,000 by 2007 and 29,000 by 2009.<sup>27</sup> Yet, comparing the ISF budget (3.3% of the national budget) with that of the military (21.5% of the national budget), the growing institution may not be able to reach its ambition for a long time unless it receives sustained and continued foreign support.

The increase in the number and breadth (over a million people were involved) of 'pro' and 'anti-Syrian' demonstrations which recently took place in Lebanon raised concerns over the ISF's ability to manage such situations. Indeed, due to the high level of instability in the country, police forces have been asked to manage demonstrations so that they do not blow up into anti-police riots. For this reason, France and England have increased their cooperation with the ISF, providing order maintenance and anti-riot training programmes.<sup>28</sup>

The demonstrations also showed that, as long as the police need the army's support to maintain order, these two institutions must define their roles to avoid duplication, ameliorate their ability to cooperate operationally, and set up mechanisms of communication to react efficiently on the ground.<sup>29</sup>

Also, since the wave of bombings and political assassinations that hit Lebanon in 2004, the ISF has put greater emphasis on its real need for scientific equipment and expertise to carry out crime investigations and anti-terrorism programmes. In addition, since the Ministry of Justice is even weaker than the ISF, the latter is expected to undertake all investigative work.<sup>30</sup>

Several Arab and western governments, concerned by the potential instability of Lebanon which could become a safe harbor<sup>31</sup> for international terrorists or a transit point between Europe and Iraq,<sup>32</sup> made substantial efforts to increase their financial and technical cooperation to the ISF's Anti-terrorist Directorate. Today, the ISF are acting in cooperation not only with western countries (the United-States, France, Germany, England, Austria, and Australia) but also with Arab countries (The United Arab Emirates, Qatar, The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Egypt). Several international organisations have also proposed

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<sup>27</sup> Interview with Commissaire Buil, 17 May 2006, Beirut

<sup>28</sup> Ibid

<sup>29</sup> Ibid

<sup>30</sup> Ibid

<sup>31</sup> 'Lebanon targets Islamic radicals,' The Christian Scientist Monitor, 23 May 2005 accessible at <http://www.csmonitor.com/2003/0520/p06s02-wome.html>

<sup>32</sup> Out of a hundred of Europeans going to fight in Iraq every year, many go through Lebanon. Interview with Commissaire Philippe Buil, 17 May 2006



cooperative programmes and initiatives (the European Union, Interpol, the council of the Arab League, Minister of Interior and the World Bank).

Officially, to achieve its anti-terrorism mission, the ISF recently created its own Intelligence service called *Bureau d'information* (BI). This agency, which already houses 600 personnel and will soon have 1,000, also suffers from significant technical problems, is politically sensitive, and risks overlapping with the numerous Intelligence services operating across the country.<sup>33</sup>

In conclusion, the reinforcement of ISF's human and financial resources is a good sign of the emergence of a police institution in Lebanon. Nevertheless, ISF need to clearly define its new mission as regards its relationship with the army, and its move toward a civilian status. It must also define its role in relation to the justice institution and other intelligence services

## The Role of Intelligence

The proliferation of intelligence and security services during the post-war period illustrates the imprint of the Syrian security culture in Lebanon. By dividing and ruling the Lebanese intelligence apparatus, Damascus had a priceless tool of control over Lebanon's political life.

Its complacency or complicity in the series of political assassinations, their intrusion into the political life was well highlighted by the finding of the independent investigation on the Hariri assassination. Indeed, the four Lebanese officers arrested and suspected in the Hariri case were all at the head of one of the security services: Moustapha. Hamdane, chief of the Presidential Guard ; Jamil Al-Sayed, Chief of State Safety, Ali Al-Haj, ex-director of the ISF and Raymond Azar, Chief of the Military Intelligence Service (B2).

In addition to the political assassinations, the Lebanese intelligence apparatus internalised Syria's security culture by being involved in grave and recurrent human rights violations. In 2004, the US State Department's Country Report on Human Rights noted that 'the Lebanese security forces committed numerous, serious human rights abuses, sometimes acting independently, and other times on instruction of senior government officials.'<sup>34</sup>

Traditionally, the main intelligence mission has been filled by the *Deuxième Bureau* (B2) - the intelligence services of the army. In 1961, after an attempted coup, the President then felt it necessary to reinforce the army's capabilities and exert influence on the national political scene. Throughout the 1990s, the B2 had 35,000 personnel and its main missions

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid

<sup>34</sup> 'Country Reports on Human Rights Practices-2003,' <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2003/27932.htm>, 18 August 2006

focused on monitoring the political opposition and the Palestinian groups. Its antiterrorist missions are becoming increasingly important today. Totally controlled by the Syrians until 2005, the B2 may have remained the most efficient intelligence service. Yet, though the quality of its equipment and the competency of its intelligence officers, the army dispute the role of intelligence with not less than six other intelligence services.

Created in 1945, the *Direction Générale de la Sûreté de l'Etat*<sup>35</sup> has around 3,000 personnel. After the civil war, it maintained its missions of surveillance of Lebanese political life and control of immigration. However, when the Syrians took control over this institution, it became the main tool of both the media and political party censorship. Traditionally directed by a Christian, this institution 'became' Shiaa the day Jamil Al-Sayed – who operated close to the Syrian regime - was placed at the head of the service.

The *Direction Générale de la Sécurité de l'Etat*<sup>36</sup> was created at the beginning of the 1990s for political reasons. Nabi Beri, before becoming President of the Parliament, wanted the Shiaa to have their own intelligence service.<sup>37</sup> As a result of the circumstances of its creation, the *Sécurité de l'Etat* has never found its place within the Lebanese intelligence apparatus. Its missions have remained limited to the protection of politicians and magistrates. Since 2005, its staff has decreased from 2,000 to 1,600 personnel.

The third and last major intelligence service is the *Bureau d'Information* (BI) which is being developed by the ISF. Currently numbering approximately 600-strong, its numbers are predicted to soon reach 1,000.<sup>38</sup> The BI, a Sunni institution, expects to undertake general missions of internal intelligence and those more specifically linked to anti-terrorism. It is worth noting that the decision of the new Sunni government, through its Sunni Minister of Interior, to rapidly increase the budget and number of the ISF (directed by a Sunni) and its new intelligence service (directed by a Sunni) has been resented by the other services and communities.<sup>39</sup>

The three other intelligence services are the: Presidential/Republican Guard, which detains substantial means of intelligence and maintains

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<sup>35</sup> General Directorate for the state safety

<sup>36</sup> General Directory for the state security

<sup>37</sup> Yet, when the control over the *Sûreté de l'Etat* was given to the Shiaa, the *Sécurité de l'Etat* came under Christian influence.

<sup>38</sup> Commissaire Philippe Buil, 17 May 2006

<sup>39</sup> The government would like to limit the *Deuxième Bureau* to Military intelligence, the *Sûreté de l'Etat* to immigration monitoring and the *Sécurité de l'Etat* to role of escort and protection of politician and magistrate. Thus, ISF's *Bureau d'Information* would have the main role of internal intelligence. Interview with Commissaire Philippe Buil, 17 May 2006, Beirut

order; the Governmental Guard, which is in charge of the security of the Prime-Minister; and the airport Security Service.<sup>40</sup>

Because of the 'privileged' relationship with the Syrians during more than 15 years, the reform of the Intelligence apparatus is a priority. Any programme of reform must be twofold: removing the remaining Syrian influence and addressing the disorganisation of the security services. Their roles, missions and relationships with each other must be clearly defined. In addition, regarding the traditional rivalries between services and the sensitivity of their activities, any attempt of reform must take principles of communal balance into consideration. For example, the government must manage the concerns within the Intelligence community regarding the quick rise of the Sunni *Bureau d'Information*.

A holistic and thorough reform of the Lebanese apparatus is an important part of Lebanon's political reform to democracy and sovereignty. The presence of democratic and civilian institutions, such as the Parliament or the Ministry of Defence, could facilitate the implementation of SSR principles. In addition, the dynamism of the civil society could facilitate the local ownership required in an SSR programme. Nevertheless, since it goes beyond the reform of institutional mechanisms and technical norms, SSR may not be a realistic achievement until Lebanon has engaged in deeper political reform.

## IMPEDIMENTS FOR SSR IN LEBANON

As the previous part shows, security reform must have an important part in Lebanon's recovery of independence and sovereignty. In this process, the Lebanese authorities involved in political reforms could benefit from the concept of SSR, its holistic approach and principles of democratic governance.

However, as previously noted, SSR cannot be limited to the restructuring of normative and systematic mechanisms but will inevitably involve a shift in fundamental values. SSR is a long, difficult, and expensive process which calls for a clear understanding of the major characteristics of the recipient country, regarding potential entry points and impediments to a reform process. Without acknowledging these limitations, an SSR initiative will not meet the needs and foster local ownership.

It is possible to note two major impediments to the application of SSR in Lebanon. Internally, the heterogeneity and the divisions in the society make it very difficult for groups, and therefore the government, to agree on a common national vision and a security policy. Externally, due primarily to Lebanon's current susceptibility to external influence,

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<sup>40</sup> The Security Services of the Airport are suspected to have played an important role in the preparation of the assassination of Gibran Tuenni, Journalist and politicians. Interview with Isabelle Delherba, 17 May 2006, Beirut

regional and international tensions Lebanon does not benefit of the necessary security and stability it needs to reform itself.

## The Internal Dimension

The first obstacle for SSR in Lebanon lies in the inherent sectarian divisions in the society. The different communities' inability to, over time, agree on a Lebanese national identity prevented the successive government from formulating a clear national strategic vision and from defining threats and allies. Any SSR initiative, to succeed, must have an understanding of the communities' fear and interest in order to reach a consensus on security reforms.

To the casual observer, Lebanon's unity seems inexplicable. Its national identity seems to be overridden by its considerable heterogeneity. Though there are minority groups in all of the Middle Eastern countries, what distinguishes Lebanon is that it does not have a serious demographic majority; indeed, none of the 15 Lebanese communities represent more than 50 per cent.<sup>41</sup>

Traditionally a refuge for persecuted minorities (mainly Christians), the political system of Mont-Lebanon, based on clans and extended families, has crystallized the importance of community since the 8<sup>th</sup> Century. In 1860, following sectarian violence, France intervened and made the Ottoman Empire acknowledge the autonomy of Mont Lebanon. Mont Lebanon then became an autonomous Maronite governorate under French protection. After the First World War and the fall of the Ottoman Empire, France created the 'Greater Lebanon' by doubling the territory under the control of Beirut, at the expense of what would become Syria. Consequently, the demography of Lebanon was profoundly altered by the inclusion of new territories populated mostly by Muslims and Druzes. Lebanese Christians, which were the greatest majority in Mont Lebanon, now constituted barely more than 50% of the population, while Muslims in Lebanon saw their numbers dramatically increase.

This pre-independence period is very important in the collective mentality of the Lebanese. Indeed, for people to develop and maintain a sense of political identity it is necessary to share a common vision of their past. Yet, since independence, Muslims and Christians have been fundamentally in disagreement over the history of their country. For a society with natural homogeneity, unity and solidarity, this history often flatters the national ego. In heterogeneous societies like Lebanon, historical fiction that flatters one group may turn out to be unflattering and objectionable for

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<sup>41</sup>Kassir, S. (1994). *La guerre du Liban : de la dissension nationale au conflit régional, 1975-*

1982. Paris, Beyrouth: Karthala ; CERMOC. p.28

another.’<sup>42</sup> History has thus become an instrument of power from the pupil’s civil education to the historical research of doctoral candidates.

During independence, there were three major political positions towards Lebanese identity. Christian nationalists sought to retain France’s tutelage. Arab nationalists sought Lebanon’s incorporation into Syria. *Lebanese* nationalists accepted Lebanon’s independence within the 1920 frontiers, provided that the country followed a policy of real independence and cooperated closely with the Arab world. The National Pact of 1943, an informal agreement between representatives of the largest Christian and Muslim communities, reflected a consensual agreement that the Muslim Lebanese would not seek to unify with Syria and that the Maronites would not attempt to steer the country towards the West.

Yet, this original consensus was caught between the communities’ fears and regional tensions of the 1950s and 1960s. In 1958, with the creation of the United Arab Republic (UAR) violent tensions erupted between Muslims and Christians on whether or not Lebanon should be a member of the Arab organisation. Most importantly, after the establishment of Palestinian refugee camps (1948) and of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) in 1964, the Palestinian armed presence in Lebanon became a major bone of contention among the Lebanese communities. Maronite leaders argued that Palestinian commando operations into Israel, launched from Lebanese territory, exposed Lebanon to the danger of Israeli retaliation and threatened national security and stability. Muslims, for whom Christian political ascendancy was ‘a sort of domination,’ considered the Palestinian commandos a source of security and an embodiment of their cause.<sup>43</sup> On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of November 1969, the Cairo Agreement, signed by Lebanese and Palestinian representatives, granted the PLO wide autonomy within the Palestinian camps and limited their freedom of movement outside the camps. Considered by the Christians to be a betrayal of Lebanese sovereignty, this agreement deepened the divisions in the country. A third crisis was triggered in November 1975 and brought with it 15 years of civil war.

Yet, the end of the civil war did not bring with it the clear victory of group over another and the end of communalism. Rather, the Taëf agreement merely acknowledged the large presence of community-based groups all over the country and their importance for the Lebanese society. It is true that the breakdown of the state during the war contributed to the appearance of the religious community as the ‘final molder of identity [...] and the most operative part of the Lebanese social structure.’<sup>44</sup> As a result, the Taëf agreement, enshrining the political communalism in

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<sup>42</sup> Salibi, K. (1988). *A House of Many Mansions: The History of Lebanon Reconsidered*

Berkeley: University of California Press. p.216

<sup>43</sup> Ibid p.231

<sup>44</sup> Picard op. cit. p.157

Lebanon, worsens the difficulties of finding agreement between communities on national security issues.

The divisions in the society after the war encouraged the involvement of Damascus which quickly became the final arbiter of Lebanese politics. Legally entitled by the Taëf agreement to occupy the country and to assist Lebanese forces in re-establishing their authority throughout the territory, Syrian patronage was supposed to provide Lebanon with stability so that it could recover its lost sovereignty and engage in political reforms, such as abolishing political sectarianism and moving towards a western model of democracy. Yet, by playing themselves on sectarianism and blocking reform, Syria found in communalism a way to perpetuate and justify its patronage over Lebanon during 15 years.

This patronage was even more evident on security issues. As Picard comments, 'what happened in Lebanon is that the local government took charge of managing only day to day affairs, focusing particularly on the economic question, whereas foreign policy and security matters - the real token of state sovereignty - were turned over to Syria.'<sup>45</sup>

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of May, 1991, Lebanon and Syria signed the Treaty of Fraternity, Cooperation and Coordination. Among other areas of cooperation, the treaty contains important defence and security statements. In line with the Syrian official discourse of 'two states, one people' and a 'shared destiny,' the treaty proclaimed 'strategic complementarities' between the two countries.<sup>46</sup> Article 3 stipulates the 'inter-dependence of the security of the two countries' and mentions a reciprocal arrangement not to let the territory of one become a threat to the other. Article 5 states that Syria and Lebanon should make mutual decisions on diplomatic and international issues, mentioning the common fate and interests of the two countries as well as their security situations.<sup>47</sup> Practically, these arrangements were implemented to Syria's benefit, transforming post-war Lebanon into a Syrian protectorate. This prevented Lebanon from formulating an independent foreign and national security policy as well as responding to the major geo-strategic change of the 1990s onwards.

Most of Lebanon's actions - and more significantly inactions - were decided by and for Damascus. For example, though officially participating in the Madrid Conference, Beirut, following the example of its Syrian 'brother,' did not take part in the multilateral discussions on water and refugees. Similarly, during the eleventh session of bilateral Lebanese-Israeli negotiations in Washington in September 1993, Lebanon rejected the final Israeli proposal, again at the urging of its Syrian 'brother.'<sup>48</sup> Moreover, the failing health of Hafez El-Assad, at the time of the Israeli withdrawal in 2001, impeded Lebanese officials from contacting the

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid p.197

<sup>46</sup> Les cahiers de l'Orient dossier Liban p.77

<sup>47</sup> Ibid p.78-79

<sup>48</sup> Picard op. cit. p.180-181

Israeli, formulating a security arrangement and takeover Hezbollah position in the south.

After the withdrawal of the Syrian troops in 2005, Lebanese leaders organised a series of meetings called 'the National Dialogue.' This aimed to reach a national consensus on crucial decisions of national security such as the disarmament of Hezbollah and other militias and the institutionalisation of new relationship with Syria. Yet, the last conflict in the summer of 2006 swept aside these indigenous efforts of reform at the benefit of Hezbollah and thus of Syria.

## The External Dimension

Lebanese history cannot be decoupled from the regional dynamics of the Middle-East. The weakness of the state and the divisions in society allowed for regional and extra-regional actors to assume considerable power and influence at the expense of the Lebanese national and consensual interests. As a result, Lebanon has been unable to encourage respect to its sovereignty or to escape its status as a buffer state. To engage in reform, especially on a sensitive subject such as security, Beirut needs stability within and beyond its borders. Yet, as the last conflict showed, Lebanon remains at the centre of conflicting interests in one of the most dangerous regions. Consequently, security reforms are likely to be at the centre of a regional and international power struggle.

Since the 1980s, Israel and Syria cemented their control over Lebanon against the backdrop of the Israeli-Arab conflict. Syria infiltrated the entire Lebanese political decision-making process, leaving, after the war, 15,000 to 20,000 troops on Lebanese territory. Israel, meanwhile, occupied southern Lebanon. The long *modus vivendi* between Syria and Israel in Lebanon provided the latter with enough stability to engage in post-war reconstruction. Yet, this stability was at the expense of its sovereignty.

The consecutive withdrawal of Israel in 2001 and of Syria in 2005 brought many hopes for Lebanon to recover its sovereignty after 30 years of conflict and tutelage. Yet, notwithstanding the first 30 years of independence, Lebanon's stability has historically relied on foreign protectorates, namely the Ottoman Empire, France, and Syria.<sup>49</sup> The last conflict in the summer of 2006 illustrated that this new sovereignty could be at the expense of Lebanon's stability and security, specifically since Beirut does not enjoy internal sovereignty and the monopoly of legitimate violence within its own territory. Without national consensus, Lebanon is caught between different armed groups and the agendas of regional powers.

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<sup>49</sup> See Roeder, P. G., & Rothchild, D. S. (2005). *Sustainable peace: power and democracy after*

*civil wars*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press.

After the conflict 2006, the tension between Israel and Hezbollah is more dangerous than ever for the stability of the country. Though a new war would not be in the interests of Israel or Hezbollah, Tel-Aviv keeps violating Lebanese air-space and leads covert operations aimed at the assassination of Palestinian and Hezbollah representatives on Lebanese territory.<sup>50</sup>

As far as Syria is concerned, Damascus is willing to show to Lebanon the price of its disengagement. Allied with Hezbollah and Amal (the two main 'pro-Syrian forces' in the country), Syria encouraged the increasing number of demonstrations throughout the country. This situation pushed the famous journalist Samir Kassir,<sup>51</sup> before his assassination, to argue that Lebanese independence would never be achieved in the absence of democratisation in Lebanon.<sup>52</sup>

On a regional perspective, Syria seeks to perpetuate the Arab-Israeli conflict and to appear as the guardian of Arabism and the Palestinian cause. This strategy is supposed to preserve its influence and to help realize its ambition to become a leader in the region.<sup>53</sup> For this reason, Syria has overtime funded and supported the growth in Lebanon of Palestinian groups (such as Hamas and the Islamic Jihad) whose ideology was more in line with Damascus foreign policy: the rejection of the 'Palestinisation' of the conflict and the participation of all Arab nations in the war against Israel.<sup>54</sup>

In addition, another risk of destabilisation in Lebanon may come from Palestinian groups outside the Palestinian camps. The Fatah-Intifada and the FPLP-CG<sup>55</sup> are based in Syria and operate in the Bekaa Valley. These groups by themselves do not represent much but are firmly controlled by Damascus which could activate them to destabilise Lebanon.<sup>56</sup> Consequently, unless Lebanon finds an arrangement with Syria, the disarmament of these factions is unlikely to happen. Also, the possibility of reintegration raises the issue of the loyalty of these groups which have had their operational command harboured in Syria for decades.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> 'Security forces arrest second suspected Israeli collaborator,' Daily Star, 15 June 2006

<sup>51</sup> Charismatic Journalist and Politician assassinated during the last election in 2005

<sup>52</sup> See Kassir, S. (2006). *Liban: Un Printemps Inachevé* Beirut: Sindbad, Act Sud Coll.

<sup>53</sup> Rubin, B. M. (2002). *The tragedy of the Middle East*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p98

<sup>54</sup> Creation in 1966 by the Syrian Baath regime of 'As-Saiqa',

<sup>55</sup> Popular Front for Palestine Liberation-General Commandment

<sup>56</sup> 'FPLP-CG says it would agree to serve under Lebanese Army in joint strategy,' Daily Star, 24 March 2006

<sup>57</sup> 'Jumblatt calls for armed Palestinian brigade,' Daily Star, 23 May 2006



Without denying its national and nationalist dimensions,<sup>58</sup> Hezbollah must also be thought of as a regional and international actor. The objective alliance between Damascus and Hezbollah allows the former to continue to influence Lebanese politics and to exert weight on the Israeli-Arab conflict. Indeed, Syria's political hegemony over Lebanon and continued opposition to Israel are both part of the attempt to appear to be a credible power in the region.

In the same way, the alliance between Teheran and Hezbollah is a crucial instrument for Iran to be involved in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and thus to gain regional hegemony. For this strategy to continue and succeed, Iran needs instability at Israeli borders to spoil any opportunity of peace. In addition, since the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has an international dimension, Hezbollah is also an efficient tool of deterrence for involvement from the International Community and the US on Iran's nuclear dossier.

Another risk of destabilisation for Lebanon comes from the potential impact of the war in Iraq. First, the exacerbation of religious violence between primarily Sunnis and Shias in Iraq could find a general echo among extremist groups in the communities in Lebanon. Secondly, the flow of Salafist Jihadists coming to Iraq to fight against the occupying forces is likely to multiply the number of logistical and operational bases in countries like Lebanon. In September 2004, the arrest, by the ISF, of supposed top Al-Qaeda Lebanese leaders revealed a substantial risk for western interests in Lebanon.<sup>59</sup> There are supposedly two main Salafist groups in Lebanon today: Usbat Al-Ansar (300 men) and Junel El-Charm (40 men). While Lebanon is not considered a battleground for Al Qaeda at the moment, Salafist Jihadism may become a crucial issue for Lebanon in the near future.<sup>60</sup>

Considering all these tensions in the region, the involvement of the international community must not be perceived as another factor of tension. For example, the American and French inspired UN resolution 1559 seems to have been less concerned with democratisation in Lebanon than in applying pressure on Syria because of its role in the 'Iraqi insurrection.' Arguably, considering the political and strategic interpenetration of the two countries, it is likely that a destabilisation of Syria could mechanically bring instability to Lebanon.

In addition, although the western countries, specifically the US, emphasized in 2005, their support for the new Lebanese government and its plans for reform, the inability or reluctance of the great powers to apply

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<sup>58</sup> Hezbollah is a Lebanese organisation which has taken part in the Lebanese parliament since 1992 and has strong popular support for its 'war of resistance' against Israel

<sup>59</sup> Al-Qaeda Lebanese Chief arrested , Daily Star, 23 September 2004

<sup>60</sup> Ibid

pressure over Israel during the first weeks of the conflict in July 2006 sent the wrong signal to pro-western political forces in the country. As a result of this notable silence, the legitimacy of the new government has been seriously undermined; the national dialogue in a state of coma and the balance of power is more favourable towards Hezbollah than before the conflict.

Lebanon's external environment, characterised by the ongoing Israeli-Arab conflict and struggles for regional hegemony, presents a serious difficulty for Lebanon's engagement in sensitive reforms on national security. As one academic has contended, 'it is difficult if not impossible for a country to carry out profound security reforms if its external security environment is unstable or threatening.'<sup>61</sup>

## CONCLUSION

This paper is a contribution to the emerging literature on the concept of Security Sector Reform. More specifically, it seeks to address the relevance of SSR concept in shaping political reform in the Arab world.

The 'Cedar Revolution', is without doubt an historical step toward independence and democracy in Lebanon. Engaged in the reorganisation of the security sector, the Lebanese government could benefit from SSR concepts. Indeed, by moving away from militaristic considerations and adopting a more holistic approach, the SSR concept seems suitable and relevant to the overall reconstruction of the Lebanese security apparatus and to the issue of the reintegration of the Lebanese and not Lebanese militias such as Hezbollah within the regular forces.

Nevertheless, to be successful, any SSR initiative must integrate political internal and external difficulties of such a process: The division of the society over national identity and security policy - and a dangerous strategic environment in which so many powers are involved - present even further challenges to successful SSR.

SSR in Lebanon must follow an indigenous path. In the past, many examples have illustrated that without political will and local ownership in the recipient country, the chances of success for SSR are very thin. It is through a national consensus that Lebanese leaders will be able to formulate a new national security policy.

To encourage this change, the international community, whose actions have been necessarily limited to internal Lebanese politics, must also address the external dimension of the problem. This is important because

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<sup>61</sup> Cawthra, C., and Luckham R. (2003) Democratic Control and the Security Sector: The Scope for Transformation In *Governing Insecurity: Democratic Control of Military and Security Establishment in Transitional Democracies* edited by Cawthra G. and Luckham R. London: Zed Book. p.308

of the impact of external tensions on internal Lebanese politics. Indeed, regional tension creates domestic instability, polarises Lebanese political forces and impedes consensus on security issues. The international community should thus acknowledge Lebanon's need for external security and make pressure on all the regional powers, Israel included. Otherwise, any SSR initiative in Lebanon will be perceived as an instrument of power in favour of a regional or extra-regional power in the struggle for hegemony in the region.

Finally, by linking these issues to the power sharing system, national identity and the formulation of security policy, this paper may also constitute a starting point for further research on SSR and communalism in the Arab world. Notwithstanding the considerable differences between Lebanon and its Arab neighbours, the issue of communal identity is rarely absent.<sup>62</sup> This reality has been painfully demonstrated by the collapse of the state and the revival of sectarianism in the aftermath of the Iraqi invasion by the US-led coalition in 2003. This example shows that 'state security' in the Middle-East may have to go through an intermediary phase of 'community security' in order to meet the principles of 'human security.'

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<sup>62</sup>Even self declared secular regimes such as Syria, far from ensuring fair competition among individuals and groups, foster the domination of one group over another.