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Power Sharing in Syria:
Lessons from Lebanon's Experience

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Abstract

In the last two years, the Syrian uprising has turned from a civil protest movement against an authoritarian regime into an outright civil war in which the antagonists' affiliations and identities are increasingly framed in sectarian speech. In summer 2012, various politicians and analysts suggested a power-sharing agreement between regime and opposition representatives as a solution to break the vicious circle of escalating violence. They called it a "Syrian Taif" after the 1989 peace accord that ended Lebanon's long-lasting civil war (1975–1990) by dividing power among religious communities. Others rejected the idea of a consociational power-sharing deal outright because they hold it responsible for the continued sectarian pillarization of Lebanese society. Moreover, Syria's experience is said to differ significantly from Lebanon's, making the effective transmittal of the Lebanese model impossible. This paper takes these differing arguments into consideration and investigates whether power sharing could help to deescalate the Syrian conflict and what lessons should be taken from Lebanon's experience. Lebanon shows that consociationalism tends to stabilize – even deepen – social cleavages. Therefore, a Syrian Taif should gradually substitute fixed guarantees of shares of power with centripetal and unitary state institutions. Furthermore, in addition to internal actors, external powers have to be convinced that power sharing may be the only viable option for ending the devastating civil war in Syria and for preventing the further spread of violence into neighboring countries.

Keywords: power sharing, civil war, sectarianism, Syria, Lebanon, Taif

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Article Outline

1 Introduction

The Syrian uprising has entered its third year, and there is no end in sight for the destructive power struggle between the highly militarized factions. It seems that neither side will be able to defeat the other unless there is a serious change in the balance of outside support. All of Syria's neighbors – and even the great powers – are involved in the conflict, providing financial and military assistance to different proxies. The massive support for both the regime and the opposition has turned the war into a stalemate. Even if the regime collapses, it is most likely that internecine fighting will intensify between the different wings of the fragmented

opposition as well as with the remaining supporters of the old regime – the latter will fear becoming the target of reprisals. It is precisely the lack of a common enemy for the opposition and a commander-in-chief for the state forces that could result in the further split of combatants along regional, ethnic, sectarian and ideological lines. Victory for either side would also disrupt the whole regional power balance and could lead to a burst of fighting elsewhere. A power-sharing deal might be the only solution to break these vicious circles of violence.

Critics of a "Syrian Taif," a power-sharing arrangement between ethnic and confessional communities similar to the Lebanese model, hold that there are fundamental differences between both countries that make power sharing inapplicable to Syria: First, Lebanon is a liberal society with a free market economy that already had an established tradition of power-sharing democracy before the war, whereas Syria has been ruled by an authoritarian one-party regime with socialist leanings since the Baath coup of 1963. Second, sectarian bickering has deep roots in Lebanon, while Syria is often portrayed as a secular, multiethnic society by its inhabitants (Starr 2012a). Third, the demographic distribution differs between the two countries. Sunni Muslims form an overwhelming majority of the population in Syria, whereas no single community holds a distinct majority in Lebanon. Fourth, the Lebanese civil war involved mainly nonstate militias, whilst Syria's civil war is between state forces and rebel militias. Fifth, the stalemate in Lebanon was finally dissolved by the third-party intervention of Syrian troops that crushed the last opponents of Taif and guaranteed the disarmament of the militias. No such external force shows readiness to intervene in Syria at the moment.

Despite these differences, the two countries share some similarities in their sociohistorical geneses of ethnic and confessional composition. Sociocultural behavior, economic and demographic developments, the periphery-center dichotomy, the connection of socioeconomic status and ethnic/confessional affiliation, the politicization of sectarianism and the interference of outside actors are all notable commonalities. Furthermore, the dynamics of the violent escalation in Syria and the country's breakup into militia petty states strongly resemble the events of Lebanon's civil war. As the conflict in Syria threatens to deteriorate into a regional conflagration – given that violence has already spread into Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq, Jordan and the Israeli occupied Golan Heights – both internal and external actors may conclude that a power-sharing deal is a reasonable solution as "further escalation of a conflict will result in mutually damaging outcomes" (Sisk 1996: 23). This "self-negating prophecy" stands at the core of an agreement for consociational power sharing (Lijphart 1977: 100).

The following analysis investigates the pros and cons of a power-sharing agreement for Syria and analyzes the lessons that could be taken from the Lebanese experience. In doing so, it is necessary for this paper to compare the experiences of these two neighboring countries with regard to ethnic and sectarian identities and their politicization. Lebanon was regarded as an exemplary case of consociational power sharing – at least until the outbreak of civil war

in 1975 (Lijphart 1977: 147–150).[1] Nevertheless, Lebanon's corporate consociationalism was too weak to prevent, if not partly responsible for, the outbreak of a civil war between militias increasingly mobilized along sectarian cleavages. Therefore, a reworked power-sharing model was introduced to end the civil war in 1989. Under Baathist rule, Syria pretended to deal with cultural plurality by following a unitary nationalist approach, insisting that a neutral state should neither address ethnicity and religious affiliation nor grant any specific rights to communities as this would strengthen subnational identities and weaken national unity. The Syrian government claimed to have diffused the tensions of primordial antagonism, but – like Lebanon – clearly failed to do so in the long run.

This paper is structured as follows: The second section will show that deepening gaps between primordial identity groups are emerging in the Syrian uprising. As they run parallel to rivalries between external supporting powers, the fighting also epitomizes a proxy war between regional powers with the serious repercussion of violence spilling over into neighboring countries. The third section will present some significant commonalities between the Lebanese and Syrian experience in the causes and the violent dynamic of their conflicts. In the fourth section, we will present the constraints of Lebanon's model, and in the fifth section we will derive some lessons for a possible Syrian solution. In the final section, it will be proposed that there can be no Syrian solution without regional accommodation.

2   Conflict Dynamics in Syria's Arab Spring

The first wave of the Arab Spring had just abated with the toppling of the Tunisian and Egyptian authoritarian rulers when Syria's uprising started as a social protest movement in March 2011. Similar to the other protest movements in the region, its participants demanded dignity, freedom and democratic participation.[2] Barely two years later, the United Nations Human Rights Council claimed that the escalating conflict is "tearing apart the country's complex social fabric" and described it as "increasingly sectarian" (2013: 1). Although most of the opposition groups affirm a nationalist self-conception, sectarianism has become a dominant feature of the Syrian uprising – the most precarious and tenacious conflict in the region and a threat to regional stability.

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1   Consociationalism sees ethnic groups represented in parliament, government and leading public offices proportionate to their demographic distribution; participate in rule by grand coalitions; enjoy veto power in essential matters; and embrace far-reaching cultural autonomy with their own institutions for education, family law and conflict mediation.

2   For the outbreak and dynamic of the Syrian uprising see Leenders and Heydemann (2012); Lund (2012a); Starr (2012a); Landis (2012).

2.1 Soaring Ethnic-Sectarian Cleavages

Ethnic and sectarian cleavages are not a novelty to Syria, although the rulers have tried to conceal them through tabooing – for example, Article 298 of the penal code, which forbids "inciting sectarian tensions." Hafiz al-Assad (who ruled from 1970 to 2000) and his son Bashar (president since 2000) represent a common pattern of authoritarian republicanism in the Arab East. Despite claiming to be a secular nation that provides access to state power and resources irrespective of ethnic descent and denominational creed, Syria is governed by a minority-dominated ruling elite recruited through nepotism, clientelism and cooptation. Many leading political offices and most security-relevant positions have been and continue to be staffed by members of the Assad family and the Alawite community.[3] Members of other communities have been co-opted if they have shown loyalty or suspiciously policed if they have not. Therefore, Christian, Alawite Druze, Kurdish, Turkmen, Twelver Shia, Circassian, Ismaili and other minorities as well as the Sunni Arab majority are split between devout regime supporters, staunch regime opponents and a silent majority accommodated to reality as long as they can afford a decent life through local patronage networks. Regional socioeconomic cleavages have intensified under Bashar al-Assad since 2000. Peripheral rural areas, secondary towns (e.g., Homs and Daraa) and the fast growing suburbs of the central towns of Damascus and Aleppo have been left behind in terms of service provision by the regime, which has focused on the privileged central districts of Damascus and Aleppo instead. The Sunni Islamist rebellion (1976–1982), the Kurdish protests in Qamishli (2004 and 2005), the Druze-led campaigns in the Suwaida governorate (2001) and the current uprising demonstrate that economic crisis and political discontent can undermine patrimonial networking and unsettle the communal balance, resulting in ethnic/sectarian grievances and mass mobilization.

Bashar al-Assad presented himself as the protector of minorities and at the same time made efforts to co-opt and accommodate the Sunni community and its religious networks. More so than his father, he tried to "manage" rather than control religious identities and institutions by opening up the scope of action for Sunni Islamic agencies (Khatib 2012: 33).[4] Islamic charities helped to partly close the gap in basic social services that the state was no longer able to provide in sufficient quantity due to rapid population growth, rural exodus caused by desertification, decreasing oil revenues, the decline of local industry due to the influx of cheaper Turkish products, and corruption as well as state inefficiency in managing these challenges (Ruiz de Elvira 2012). Besides their charities, Islamic NGOs and religious networks provided some modest form of open space beyond state control. This turned out to

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3   Alawites, followers of a heterodox Shiite denomination, originate from the coastal highlands of Syria and southern Turkey. Van Dam (2011) describes the rise of Syria's minorities in the armed forces from the French Mandate to independence, their gradual seizure of power through coups, the privileged access of Alawite commanders and finally the takeover by Hafiz al-Assad in 1970. See also Fildis (2011, 2012).

4   Pierret and Selvik (2009: 609) assess that the regime relied on the rising Sunni mainstream charitable associations "rather unwillingly."

be a costly strategy for the state because it eroded its legitimacy as a patrimonial provider of welfare. Instead, structures of local self-management were established that fuelled communal self-confidence. The once omnipresent state apparatus and Baath Party lost insight into and control over the country's periphery, which would later become the hotbed of the current uprising (Hinnebusch 2012a). The government, underestimating its lack of legitimacy and control, was caught by surprise by the fierce outbreak and rapid spread of the uprising once the protesters had broken the wall of silence and fear.

Had the regime reacted in a more conciliatory way at an earlier stage, it is most likely that the protests would not have widely spread and would have remained limited in their demands. For a long time, the majority of Syria's population would have welcomed a smooth, state-mediated reform process instead of open, violent contestation with an unpredictable outcome. In spring 2011, however, protesters lost their patience with the regime after security forces opened fire on demonstrators. This resulted in further protests, organized around the funerals of the victims, against the disproportionate use of state force. A steady escalation of repressive violence created more "martyrs" and resulted in ever-growing numbers of participants and protest sites. Bashar al-Assad's contradictory policy of promising substantial reform but at the same time ordering a military crackdown disappointed and radicalized the demonstrators, prompting them to demand the "downfall of the system" (*isqat al-nizam*). In summer 2011, the army reacted to counterviolence carried out by deserters and volunteer fighters by shelling residential areas. The first "liberated areas" started to emerge, and the uprising progressively turned into a civil war. In the following months, the army, the 17 different security and secret services as well as state-sponsored militias destroyed not only many residential areas, but also many people's trust in the state. The escalation of violence in Syria and the ever-new militias entering the conflict led to a steady disintegration of the state, society and territory.

Currently, the state has lost control over large parts of Syria's territory to rebel militias.[5] It is also unclear to which degree security forces, army units and the secret services are still following a unified command. Soldiers have reportedly not been paid for months and, consequently, have started to plunder, while others have defected. Volunteers are manning the Syrian Popular Army, a reserve unit of the Syrian Army. The regime is further supported by paramilitary forces such as the Popular Committees (*Lijan Sha'biyah*) – the official name of the ominous Shabiha ("phantom") militia that developed primarily out of local gangs and is composed predominantly of Alawites. This militia spreads fear with ruthless violence especially among the Sunni population.[6] In this context, Alawites are trapped by their sectarian

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5   For the changing territorial distribution between the opposition and the regime see the maps of *Political Geography Now* (2013). According to Sayigh (2013), 10 million of the 23 million Syrians were living in rebel controlled areas in March 2013.

6   See Starr (2012b) and a report in *al-Akhbar*, 04 September 2012, online: <http://english.al-akhbar.com/node/11740>.

identity whether or not they support the regime: by the regime itself, on the one hand, which implicates the community through the aggressive militarization of the conflict, and by Islamic radical groups, on the other, who depict the Alawites as infidels and threaten to exterminate them (Nakkash 2013). The regime still relies on its vast security apparatus, the segments of society connected to its patronage facilities, the minorities' fear of ethnic-sectarian persecution and the deep disunity of the opposition (Landis 2012).

2.2 An Opposition Deeply Fragmented

Although united in their call for the overthrow of the regime, Syria's protesters and insurgents are deeply divided in their political ideas and military strategies. They also lack a reliable leadership capable of coordinating the uprising (Sayigh 2013). Some factions operate inside the country, others outside; some promote the use of violence, others reject it. They are at odds over outside military intervention and the receipt of funds and weapons from foreign governments – mainly Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey. The ideologies found amongst these factions include communism; socialism; Arab, Syrian and Kurdish nationalism; secularism; liberalism; moderate Islamism; fundamentalist Salafism and global jihadism. The ethnic and sectarian composition and regional distribution vary, although Sunni Arabs are considerably overrepresented in the Free Syrian Army (FSA) – the main opposition armed force that unites army defectors and volunteers.

There are also plenty of further militias – most of them with Sunni Islamist leanings – that fight in different volatile alliances.[7] Similar to the Lebanese civil war, the militias demarcate their liberated areas with checkpoints, posters of leaders and martyrs, graffiti and flags that often reveal their ethnic-sectarian affiliation.[8] Young men, even children, wearing improvised uniforms and headbands with pious slogans and posing with deadly weapons have become a common phenomenon. Militias manage their statelets, providing the population with accommodation and, sometimes, with Islamic teaching and Sharia courts and prisons. The growth of Sunni militias – inspired and/or supported by foreign jihadists – further oriented the Syrian uprising toward sectarianism. For some of them, Islamic symbols and sectarian concepts of the enemy are less expressions of religiosity and more semitribal markers that prove opposition allegiance against the "Alawite" regime. Religious communal behavior provides identity and morale in disruptive circumstances. Demonstrating Islamdom also serves the function of competing for legitimacy among different groups and for access to lo-

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7   For an overview of these groups see Lund (2012b) and ICG (2012a).

8   The most common flag of the Syrian uprising is the pre-1963 national flag that shows two green stars instead of three red stars, and green-white-black bars instead of red-white-black. Furthermore, the Salafist black flag with white writing of the Islamic profession of faith (la-ilaha ila-llah Muhammad rasul Allah; there is no God but God, and Muhammad is his messenger) is often shown. Disputes over flags and graffiti sometimes caused fighting in Lebanon (Maarabouni 1991: 160 ff; Salamey 2009: 89 ff). Similar quarrels over symbols are reported from Syria.

gistic networks of weaponry, money and supply. Many FSA units adopted Salafi garb, shaving rules for their beards, Islamic catchphrases and militia names of early Islamic war heroes in order to attract conservative Sunni sponsors from the Arab Gulf monarchies (Abouzeid 2012; ICG 2012a; Lund 2012b).

Rivalries among nonstate forces sometimes lead to internecine fighting. For example, clashes erupted between Sunni Arab rebels and Sunni Kurdish militants in and around Aleppo in October 2012 (*Giglio* 2012; *al-Hayat* 29.10.2012). Clashes also occurred in November in Ra's al-'Ain between the Ghuraba' al-Sham and Jabhat al-Nusra jihadist militias and fighters from the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) (Middle East Online 2012). The major political alliance, the Syrian National Council (SNC), tried to unite the opposition but was subjected to internal and external critiques. In November 2012, the SNC was replaced by the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces (NCR), which immediately gained international recognition – though it still lacks unity and leadership (Sayigh 2013). Its goal is to help push back the growing tide of radical Islam.

For the radical Salafist and jihadist fighters, the Syrian uprising is not a national revolution to topple an authoritarian ruler, but rather a jihad (holy war) that transcends the local arena. In keeping with the medieval theologian Ibn Taimiyyah (1263–1328), they abase the Alawite denomination as a heretic sect of "polytheists" (*mushrikun*) and "rejectionists" (*rawafid*).[9] They have already proclaimed several independent "Islamic Emirates" in the villages surrounding Aleppo (*al-Hayat* 01.10.2012), but their final target is to integrate Syria into an Islamic empire of Bilad al-Sham.[10] In a reinstalled Islamic caliphate, non-Muslim communities will either be regarded as protected minorities with minor rights (*dhimmis*), or persecuted as polytheists. The rhyme "the Christians to Beirut, the Alawites into the coffin" (*al-Masihiyah ila Bairut, al-Alawiyah ila-l-tabut*) has been sung since early anti-Assad demonstrations. Many foreign jihadists from Lebanon, Jordan, Libya, Iraq, Egypt, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Chechnya and other provinces in the Caucasus have joined the fighting and merged with local militias whom they teach guerilla warfare and global jihad ideology. These foreign jihadists are respected by local rebels for their experienced warfare skills and military equipment. One such group, the Front for Aid to the People of the Levant (*Jabhat al-Nusra li-Ahl al-Sham*), has admitted responsibility for many bomb and suicide attacks that

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9   Gulf television stations play an inglorious role in distributing hate speeches of radical Salafi preachers. An example may be watched online: <www.youtube.com/watch?v=6tDSRsWdalk> (05 May 2013) where Muhammad al-Zoghbi declares Alawites as infidels "worse than Jews," a formulation tracing back to Ibn Taimiyyah.

10 This ancient term for Greater Syria contains contemporary Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Palestine. It enjoys a high veneration in Islamist salvation history because it combines Jerusalem (al-Quds), the third holy place of Islam, with Damascus, the capital of the early Umayyad Caliphate (Murtada 2012). In a Friday sermon on 23 March 2012, the Qatari preacher Imran Abu Moussa (2012) described the relevance of *Bilad al-Sham* for "rightly guided Muslims." He categorizes the Alawites, who are cursed in Salafi parlance as "Nusairis," as polytheists who do not fulfill Islamic rituals and drink alcohol. The speech was transmitted by the governmental *Qatar Islamic Cultural Center*.

caused numerous civilian casualties. It is seen as the most powerful force in the rebel-controlled areas.[11] In April 2013, it officially announced its unification with the Iraqi branch of al-Qaeda (Cockburn 2013). When the US State Department classified it as a "terrorist group," even moderate parts of the Syrian opposition rejected this classification,[12] revealing the group's influence and reputation. FSA units sometimes coordinate with jihadists, but have also been involved in skirmishes with them (Chulov 2013; Dettmer 2013). With the further disintegration of state control, weapon depots have increasingly become booty for extremist groups – as was the case in Iraq 2003 and in Libya 2011. Heavy armament, now being deployed by both sides in urban guerilla warfare, has greatly increased carnage levels and could well be used in a post-Assad power struggle or fuel the next jihad in the region – whether that be in Iraq, Lebanon or Jordan.

2.3 Proxy Wars and Regional Repercussions

Both the regime and the opposition are supported by external actors that regard the outcome of the struggle in Syria as decisive for their positioning in an emerging post–Arab Spring order. Syria has turned from an active contender for regional dominance into the staging ground of a complex proxy war that rotates around several interconnected axes. Ethnic-sectarian tensions in Syria are aggravated because they reflect the general fragmentation lines of the region. The sectarian Sunna-Shia dichotomy that has framed regional political discourse for a decade (Nasr 2006) is played out in Syria by the Alawite rulers and the Sunni-dominated resistance. It coincides with a political rivalry for dominance between the status-quo oriented block of Sunni regimes under Saudi tutelage and the predominantly Shiite Iran-led "Resistance Axis," of which Syria has been a decisive part. The loss of Syria would hit this coalition hard because it connects Iran, Iraq, Hezbollah in Lebanon and some Palestinian militias. The Palestinian Hamas movement – the Sunni figurehead of the alliance – has already distanced itself from the Syrian regime (Mohns and Bank 2012), whereas Iran and Hezbollah still support it with weapons, money, logistics, training and fighters.[13] Sunni Arab states, especially Jordan and the monarchies of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), view this alliance as a "Shiite Crescent" and have expressed anti-Shiite and anti-Persian resentment toward it. Although supporting the Sunni-led Syrian uprising, they suppress their own

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11 *The Wall Street Journal*, 10.03.2013, online: <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB1000142412788732428100457 8352640821817264.html> (15 March 2013).

12 *al-Jazeera*, 11.12. 2012, online: <www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/12/20121211117048117723.html> (10 January 2013).

13 In a speech on 30 April 2013, the General Secretary of Hezbollah, Hassan Nasrallah, declared that Hezbollah units are fighting in villages inhabited by Lebanese Shiites on Syrian territory and defending the Shia sanctuary of Sayyida Zaynab in Damascus, which jihadists had threatened to destroy; *Naharnet*, 01.05.2013, online: <www.naharnet.com/stories/en/81489-nasrallah-we-won-t-hesitate-to-help-lebanese-in-qusayr-and-we-pride-ourselves-in-our-martyrs> (03 May 2013).

local Shiite protest movements that demand political participation and freedom.[14] Repelling Iranian (i.e., Shiite) influence is the common denominator for Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey, the Future Movement in Lebanon, regional Salafists and global jihadists in their support of the Syrian uprising. Western powers share the rejection of the Syrian regime as well as the enmity toward Iran,[15] although for different reasons. Intentionally or not, the West is helping to facilitate a dangerous sectarian polarization.

A further conflict level is manifested in the increased rivalry between several Sunni Islamist actors who are competing for dominance and the "true" interpretation of Islam. In 2011, the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood entered the regional arena presenting itself as a historically rooted "revolutionary" movement. Although occupied with defending and stabilizing its rule in Egypt, it nevertheless maintains ties with Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria. In allying with Sunni Islamist rebels it competes with Turkey's moderate Islamic AKP government, which once had a good relationship with Bashar al-Assad. Fundamentalist Salafists – another "winner" of the Arab Spring – challenge secularists, religious minorities and moderate Islamists (e.g., the Muslim Brotherhood) who do not adhere to their strict understanding of Islam. Saudi Arabia, once the main sponsor of global Salafism, has become more cautious in recent times following al-Qaeda's (its former auxiliary in Afghanistan) decision to turn on the royal family and its main ally, the United States. Qatar shows less reluctance to support radical Salafists with links to global jihadism; this even led to an estrangement with Saudi Arabia (Haykel 2013).

On a global level, Western countries differ to Russia and China in their positioning toward the Syrian uprising, evoking memories of the Cold War. Russia and China experienced a loss of influence vis-à-vis the Western military interventions in Afghanistan (2001), Iraq (2003) and Libya (2011). Consequently, they veto any UN Security Council resolution on Syria that could provide an excuse for another externally induced regime change. Russia is worried about its economic and military ties, a naval base in Tartus and the strengthening of transnational Sunni extremism, which is well connected to radical groups in the Caucasus.

The spread of violence beyond the Syrian border into neighboring countries is another external dimension of the civil war. Lebanon is most at risk because the deep political divisions between sectarian communities coincide with those in Syria: The Shiite Hezbollah sides with the Assad regime, whereas the Sunni Future Movement supports the rebels. Lebanese Christians are split as some have embraced the uprising against a regime that once occupied huge parts of Lebanon (1976–2005), while others fear the rise of Sunni fundamentalism and the further expulsion of Christians from the Middle East should the Syrian regime collapse. Sunni Salafi networks in Lebanon have gained new self-confidence through the Syrian revo-

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14 For the Shiite protest movement in Saudi Arabia see Matthiesen (2012).

15 During the US presidential campaign, Mitt Romney suggested using Syria as a battle ground for a proxy war against Iran. *The Guardian*, 08.10.2012, online: <www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/oct/08/mitt-romney-arm-syrian-rebels> (09 October 2012).

lution. In the border area towards Syria, they have already vowed to erect an "Emirate to confront Hezbollah" (al-Zaman 2013). They deliver logistics, weapons and fighters to their Syrian brethren in creed to whom they are connected through a long-standing alliance: After the violent crackdown of an Islamist uprising in Hama in 1982, many Syrian insurgents escaped to Tripoli. The campaign for the reunification of Bilad al-Sham could easily spill over into Lebanon, where jihadist networks have been operating since 2000 (Rougier 2007). The Iraq war of 2003 created cross-border smuggling networks for fighters and weapons between Lebanon, Syria and Iraq that are now utilized as support lines for the Syrian uprising. The events in Syria have also exacerbated sectarian tensions in Iraq – a country that experienced a Sunna-Shia civil war and still suffers a high level of intersectarian assassinations. In Najaf, Shiite militants of the Abu-l-Fadl Abbas-Brigade have headed to Syria in order to defend the shrine of Sayyida Zaynab in the vicinity of Damascus, while in Anbar province Sunni rebels have proceeded toward Syria in support of their fellow community (*al-Hayat* 02.11.2012). In Fallujah, the Free Iraqi Army (modeled on the FSA) took up arms against the "Shia" government of Nuri al-Maliki.[16] In January 2013, the head of al-Qaeda, Ayman al-Zawahiri, declared a jihad against the Shia-led government of Nuri al-Maliki – as he had done a year before against the Alawite Syrian regime (*al-Hayat* 13.02.2012).

Jordanian Salafis and jihadis can also be found on the Syrian battlefields, returning home with fighting experience, weapons, "martyrs," and a more radical ideology. Their newfound confidence leads them to openly conduct protests, even in some cities in which they did not dare to operate before (*al-Shishani* 2012).[17] The escalating conflict also has repercussions for Turkey's ethnic mosaic. Syrian (Sunni) fighters using Turkish territory for retreat, (re)arming and logistics are moving in a region inhabited by Alawite and Alevi communities more worried about Sunni fundamentalism than they are about Bashar al-Assad's dictatorship (ICG 2013). Furthermore, the Kurdish communities cut across the borders of Syria, Turkey, Iraq and Iran, which are porous to the spread of ideas and the movement and rearmament of fighters. The outbreak of fighting between the PKK and the Turkish army at the end of 2012 was widely regarded to be a warning of what would happen if the Syrian state were to collapse. Despite their support for Syria's rebels, even Saudi Arabia and Qatar could face a backlash due to the fact that their close ties to the United States and their "moral corruption" mean they do not meet strict Salafi standards. Furthermore, the global spread of Salafism – the brainchild of Saudi state religion – is causing great discern among its Western partners.[18]

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16   In an interview, the leader of the new militia stated: "The project of this Free Army is much like the project of the FSA [Free Syrian Army] – to bring down the Iranian sponsored Shiite regimes in the region" (*The Daily Star*, 2012).

17   *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, 15 January 2013 reports of 300 Jordanian Salafis who are fighting in leading positions in Syria. See *Al-Monitor*, 27.02.2013, Jordan Prepares for Return of Salafis from Syria, online: <www.al-monitor. com/pulse/politics/2013/02/jordan-salafists-returning.html?utm_source=&utm_medium=email&utm_ campaign=6334> (28 February 2013).

18   *Al-Safir*, 09.01.2013, for an English translation see *al-Monitor*, 10.01.2013.

3   Comparing the Lebanese and Syrian Experiences

The vicious circle of increased sectarian sentiment, escalating violence and outside support has so far prevented any serious attempts to resolve the conflict between the warring factions in Syria. The regime and the opposition disavow each other as conflict partners in a competitive struggle but regard one another an essential enemy to be toppled or destroyed. In 2012, Lakhdar Brahimi, the UN and Arab League special envoy for Syria, warned that the violence could turn Syria into another "failed state" like Somalia.[19] Others drew a comparison with neighboring Lebanon given that ethnic and sectarian identities had turned into deterministic markers for violence and thrown the country into a devastating civil war. Only after 16 years did the Taif agreement help end the circle of violence. Could a power-sharing model similar to the Lebanese one be applied to Syria? Critics of a transfer of Lebanon's model to Syria hold the two countries' social and ethnic/sectarian community compositions as well as their political structures incommensurable. However, a comparison discloses some remarkable parallels, thus justifying this paper's attempt to learn lessons from Lebanon's experience for a negotiated solution of Syria's quagmire.

Historians have counted more than 38 different civilizations that have passed through the Levant. Furthermore, the region is the birthplace of three monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Ethnic heterogeneity as well as orthodox and heterodox denominations continue to influence the cultures of Lebanon and Syria (Abbas 2012). Under Ottoman rule (1516–1918) and the French Mandate (1920–1946), ethnic communities increasingly formed social entities and gained relevance as political actors. The French semicolonial divide-and-rule strategy promoted ethnic-sectarian minorities (Maronite Christians in Lebanon, Alawite and Druze Muslims in Syria) that helped them confront Arab nationalism dominated by Sunni Muslims (Fildis 2011).

After independence, Lebanon and Syria showed some notable similarities in their sociocultural development and the politicization of communal identities – in spite of their differing political orders. Until the middle of the twentieth century, a strong dichotomy between the peripheral, underdeveloped countryside and the central cities marked a socioeconomic cleavage that often collided with sectarian affiliation. In the 1960s, the state-dominated development politics of the Baath Party in Syria and President Fu'ad Shihab in Lebanon led formerly underprivileged areas to catch up quickly. Reforms in infrastructure, mechanized farming methods and an improved education system mobilized peripheral communities and connected them to national development. An unintended consequence was the massive rural exodus and urbanization process that filled huge suburbs and shantytowns. This brought the peripheral communities into direct contact and, consequently, into competition with established urban communities that often resented the peasant newcomers. A still-partial modern-

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19 Syria could turn into a new Somalia – UN's Brahimi, *BBC News Middle East*, 06.11.2012, online: <www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-20220183> (15 February 2013).

ization process did not dissolve traditional bonds. Communities preserved social cohesion through endogamy: family law in both countries is governed by the confessional system, which hinders interdenominational marriage. Community-based solidarity networks prevailed in Lebanon because the state did not foster institution building and a modern bureaucracy. In Syria, however, such networks were diluted by the state, although they were reintroduced in the early 2000s. Clientelism, nepotism and corruption dominate access to chances, resources and power in both countries. In a vicious circle, this entrenches a lack of transparency and responsibility for universal state welfare, which – in turn – strengthens communal solidarity.

In both countries, the rural-urban and newcomer-established dichotomies had a strong sectarian character.[20] Alawites, Kurds and Druze in Syria and Shiites in Lebanon settled in the emerging urban agglomerations, where they dominated some quarters. In Lebanon, sectarian political mobilization in the 1970s was still concealed by a political dichotomy, but soon degenerated into sectarianism between party militias on the left (i.e., Muslim) and on the right (i.e., Christian) during the civil war. In Lebanon, it is still popular to mock Shiites as "the one with a tail" (*Abu danab*), alluding to their supposedly "uncivilized" rural background. In Syria, "the people of the city" became a code word for Sunni Muslims, whereas "the people of the coast" or "the people of the qaf" were the hidden markers for Alawites – referring to their geographic origin and their local dialect. In the 1970s, the oppositional Muslim Brotherhood mobilized urban Sunni resentment against the rural Alawite community's ascent to power. Sunni chauvinism is also evident in the Salafist ideology of an "Islamic Emirate" that has to be controlled by Sunni Muslims.

Lebanon's laissez-faire state granted a lot of autonomy to its subnational communities, neglecting the national development agenda that could have integrated peripheral areas and communities. After the civil war, this understanding reemerged with the neoliberal reconstruction policy of Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri (between 1992 and 2004, with some short interruptions), who mainly focused on the central districts of Beirut while neglecting regional and social balancing. The lack of state protection and a welfare system allowed community-based party militias to resume their patronage networks. In Syria, a different path led to similar results. As we have seen (section 2.1.), Bashar al-Assad substantially reduced neopatrimonial rule and allowed NGOs with religious and communal backgrounds to fill vacant state functions. Under such circumstances, residents in both countries retreated into kinship relationships and religious solidarity networks.[21] The transfer of state functions such as administration, taxing, education, charity, crime prevention, development policy and infrastructure to community-based militias during the Lebanese civil war may show the future development in Syria in the event of continued fighting and state disintegration. Another similarity is the fact that most of the communities of the Middle East are linked to neighbor-

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20 For Beirut see Khuri (1975) and Nasr (1985); for the Syrian cities van Dam (2011) and Batatu (1999).

21 For Lebanon see UNDP (2009: 26); for Syria Hinnebusch (2012a) and Pierret and Selvik (2009).

ing countries through religious, ethnic and familial ties. Ethnic entrepreneurs are tempted to acquire such bonds in order to mobilize outside support for the implementation of their agenda or, at least, to strengthen their veto power. Inversely, regional and global actors exert their influence through local forces used as proxies. Therefore, internal rivalries may connect with regional conflicts. Such ethnic-sectarian considerations have been a decisive factor in forming regional alliances and inducing proxy conflicts – if not war – in Lebanon, Iraq (since 2003) and, recently, Syria.

For many Lebanese, following the news on Syria created a sense of déjà vu with regard to their experience of civil war – for instance, the disintegration of the state and its security agencies as well as the multiplication of territorial and ideological fragmentation lines. As in Lebanon, spiraling irregular violence by snipers, artillery bombardments of residential areas, car bombs, kidnappings for ransom or future prisoner exchange, assassinations, massacres, sexual harassment, the defilement of corpses, the torture and execution of prisoners as well as revenge killings are often carried out along sectarian lines in Syria (Nakkash 2013, Al Akhbar English 2012b). Such acts of violence are accompanied by dehumanizing language – for example, terms such as "cleansing," "armed terrorist gangs," "dirty Nusairis." Religious sites, Sunni mosques, Christian churches and Shiite shrines and Hussainiyahs have become targets for desecration and vandalism. Ever-new violent actors appear in order to defend their (new) local sphere of influence. Civil wars are forming their own topography, economy and understanding of truth. The limits between the own "inside" and the alien "outside" are volatile because the ally of today may become the enemy of tomorrow and vice versa. This forces the population to adapt to ever-new masters. Mediatization, sometimes described as an innovation of the Arab Spring (the "Web 2.0 Revolution"), was also prevalent during the Lebanese civil war – 100 to 200 privately owned radio stations and 50 television channels maintained by party militias. They distributed biased reports and conspiracy narratives, supporting each group's selective narrative of "the truth," and promoted strong negative stereotypes about members of the other side. In Syria, reports of war crimes have become an instrument of propaganda used by both sides. The victims of massacres are filmed with mobile-phone cameras, the content of which is uploaded to websites or transmitted by professional television stations such as Al Jazeera and al-Arabiya or Syrian state television with the aim of mobilizing constituencies, discrediting the adversary and shaping world opinion.

Many Syrians in the first year of the uprising still held that their society, unlike Lebanon's, is not affected by sectarianism (Starr 2012a). When sectarian violence became more visible, the opposition accused the regime of exploiting it in order to implement a divide-and-rule policy that sought to rally the support of minorities by creating fear. The regime blamed external interference and Salafis for the escalation of sectarianism. Irrespective of the cause, sectarianism has become a reality – evidenced in the conduct of militias and the minds of the people – that is threatening to tear Syrian society apart. The question is how to avoid any further acceleration and put sectarianism back into Pandora's box.

Time is running out to find a negotiated strategy that can put an end to the Syrian sectarian quagmire and the increasing violence. No one knows what the ultimate limits in the use of force are for the regime and the opposition. The regime, with its back against the wall, is operating with its tanks, air force, long range rockets, cluster bombs and the unspoken threat of chemical weapons as a last resort. Fear of revenge killings will force regime followers to "rally around the flag" and prove their loyalty towards the regime. Intracommunal pressure for group-solidarity will increase and members who move to the opposition will be regarded as defectors.

4 Lessons from Lebanon's Experience

It took the Lebanese warlords a long time to realize that their mission of exclusive leadership was in vain and that their best chance would be to share power rather than to attempt to monopolize it. None of them succeeded in dominating a territory big enough that could survive as an independent state. Instead, they started fighting against intracommunity competitors for territorial control, the right to represent their community and the right to define its identity. As a consequence, they lost legitimacy among their clients and finally agreed to a power-sharing compromise. Although the Lebanese Taif accord helped end the fighting between the militias, it ultimately failed to create a stable state and to integrate the groups into a united national entity.

4.1 The Right Moment for a Compromise?

Considering such similarities, some observers suggested that a Taif-inspired power-sharing agreement could resolve the Syrian crisis. In November 2011, the Lebanese Druze leader, Walid Jumblatt, was the first to mention a Syrian Taif – although he explicitly rejected the Lebanese concept of power sharing along confessional lines.[22] Russia's vice foreign minister, Mikhail Bogdanov, brought up the idea again in an interview with *Le Figaro* on 10 September 2012 (Malbruno 2012; Rantawi 2012). The notion gained some momentum when Lakhdar Brahimi was appointed the joint special envoy of the United Nations and the Arab League for Syria in August 2012; this was because, in 1989, Brahimi headed the Higher Tripartite Committee of the Arab League that drafted the Taif accord.[23] But the proposal to transfer Lebanon's model to Syria also provoked strong objections because sectarian power sharing is widely held responsible for galvanizing Lebanon's ongoing sectarian fragmentation (Mudallali 2012). In any case, the opponents in Syria were still far from willing to negotiate a

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22 See online: <www.youtube.com/watch?v=PFPyxOfkBg0> (15 March 2013).

23 George Semaan, Lakhdar Brahimi leading Syria towards Taif?, in: a*l-Hayat*, 20.08.2012, online: <(http://alhayat.com/ Details/427920>. Lakhdar Brahimi had also participated in drawing up the Afghan (2001) and Iraqi (2004) power-sharing arrangements.

solution in 2012. The opposition alliances – the SNC and later the NCR – refused to enter into any negotiations with a regime that "has blood on its hands," while Bashar al-Assad excluded armed opposition forces that he regarded as "foreign paid terrorists" from his halfhearted offers for dialogue.

Discernment of the need for a negotiated solution grew toward the end of 2012 given the escalating cycle of violence and the enormous risk of regional repercussions. The number of people killed had surpassed sixty thousand by the turn of the year, and more than one million refugees had left for neighboring countries by spring 2013.[24] On 30 January 2013, the head of the NCR, Ahmad Mouaz al-Khatib, offered to directly negotiate with a regime representative for the first time. On 25 February 2013, Syria's foreign minister, Walid al-Moallem, announced for the first time the government's willingness to engage in dialogue with the opposition "including those who are carrying arms".[25] It could, therefore, be an "alliance of common fear" (Rantawi 2012) that pushes the regime and opposition out of their stalemate. They may come to the conclusion that a continuation of hostilities will destroy far more than they will ever gain by victory in an unpredictable future. After 15 years of civil war, it was a similar self-negating prophecy that helped Lebanon's politicians to start serious negotiations and finally end the war. They approved a power-sharing formula that comes close to consociational democracy and that guaranteed participation for all relevant actors who accepted the settlement. A precondition was that the external actors who had supported their proxy forces in Lebanon were also interested in ending the fighting.[26]

4.2 Demographic Bickering and Consociational Balancing

The demographic distribution of ethnic communities is one of the basic elements of consociational democracy because it suggests a commensurate sharing of power and posts. Nonetheless, the Lebanese experience demonstrates how the claim of proportionality runs the risk of endless bickering. Different birth rates, naturalization policy, emigration, internal relocation, rapid urbanization, violent expulsion and remigration are permanent stumbling blocks for evaluating census data. The disproportionate distribution of power between the communities was a serious defect of the Lebanese prewar formula. The manipulation of census fig-

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24 On April 24, 2013, 1,390,732 Syrian refugees have been registered or were awaiting registration outside the country. For a regular update of UNHCR figures see online: <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php> (24 April 2013).

25 Syria says ready for talks with armed opposition, *The Daily Star*, 25.02.2013, online: <www.dailystar.com.lb/ News/Middle-East/2013/Feb-25/207820-syria-regime-ready-to-talk-with-all-who-want-dialogue-muallem.ashx> (25 February 2013).

26 In 1989, the Cold War was abating and new power constellations emerged. The war against the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait was in preparation when the West schemed an alliance with local powers to mobilize against Saddam Hussein. In this context, Syria was given plenty of rope to finish up with the last renitent actor against the implementation of Taif, the Christian General Michel Aoun.

ures in 1932 gave the impression that Christians were the majority, which saw them entitled to a 54.5 percent share of parliamentarians compared to Muslims' 45.5 percent – this split continued until 1990 even though Christians share of the population further decreased to less than 40 percent. In their meeting in Taif,[27] the participants bridged this problem by agreeing upon a fixed-parity quorum of fifty percent Christians and fifty percent Muslims (Taif II.A.5), which guaranteed no side would be overruled by the other. Such agreed-upon arrangements can adjust numeric imbalances and may be more effective than pseudorealist proportionality, in which too much vigor is spent on how to best adapt numbers and shares.

In Syria, the conditions do not seem appropriate for proportional consociational power sharing because Sunni Muslims constitute a dominant majority at about 75 percent of the population. However, there are several factors that weaken this argument: First, it is unlikely that Sunni Muslims will act as a homogeneous group because their ethnic composition, territorial fragmentation, socioeconomic splits and multiple practices of belief generate different (and sometimes contradictory) collective identities. Ethnic minorities such as the Kurds (10–15 percent), Turkmens and Circassians (1–3 percent) are Sunnis, but their political aspirations differ from their Arab coreligionists. As a result, the Arab Sunni share drops to around 60 percent of the population. Even so, a majoritarian (winner-takes-all) democracy would still pose the risk of allowing Sunni Arabs to completely overrule the minorities. Second, power sharing offers several tools that can adjust such disparate numerical distributions. For instance, proportional representation in parliament and government guarantees minorities adequate participation in the exercise of power. Furthermore, the obligation of grand coalitions and consensus rule in essential topics are tantamount to providing minorities with veto power. This could be further complemented by reserving a key post (e.g., the presidency or the prime ministry) for a minority representative. Following the Lebanese example, a weighted quota of representation in favor of minorities could counteract Sunni Arab predominance.

Third, internal fragmentation will prevent Arab Sunnis from acting as a homogeneous group. Sunni Arabs do not have their own coherent territorial stronghold like the Druze and the Alawite communities; apart from a few largely monosectarian Sunni Arab areas, they constitute a slight majority in some areas and a minority in others. In the biggest cities (Damascus, Aleppo, Homs and Hama) they share their traditional strongholds with significant numbers from various other communities that relocated there in the process of urbanization. Moreover, these four principal cities compete among each other. The industrial and trade city of Aleppo is oriented towards Turkey and Iraq, while the capital Damascus – identified with the Alawite state authority – has more connections with Lebanon and Jordan. Homs and Hama suffer from their peripheral character, which has led to resentment against Da-

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27 The Arabic text of "The Lebanese Document of National Accord" (*Wathiqat al-Wifaq al-Watani al-Lubnani*) is reprinted in Ziadeh (2006: 302–309). For an English translation see Taef Agreement (no year). Passages will be cited in accordance with the numeration of this English translation.

mascus and Aleppo, where an urban Sunni bourgeoisie backed the regime. Fourth, the socio-economic stratification inside the Sunni community is significant; it includes nomadic tribes, agrarian village communities, shantytowns with subproletarian compositions, former countrymen disintegrated from their rural community life, workers, merchants, urban-based civil employees and professionals, rich tradesmen and an industrial elite. Therefore, Sunnis have not developed the same sense of "sect class" associated with the Alawite community (van Dam 2011). Fifth, Sunni Muslims' religiosity differs in terms of creed, practice and intensity; it includes secularists, largely apolitical mystics (Sufists), conservative believers, fundamentalist Salafis and militant jihadis. Once their common enemy (i.e., the regime) is gone, it is most likely that Arab Sunnis will split along political, socioeconomic and ideological lines.

4.3 No Alternatives Left

There are many parallels between the Lebanese and Syrian experiences – not least that there is no real alternative to power sharing. In the event of an unlikely victory for the regime of Bashar al-Assad, it will struggle in vain for the legitimacy and force needed to regain control over the country. Many non-Alawite members have left the regime so that its Alawite character has become more substantial. This has led to its growing isolation inside of Syria and in the Sunni-dominated region. On the other hand, the Syrian opposition is very ambiguous about what will follow should al-Assad be removed from power. The draft programs of moderate forces demand democracy, respect of human and minority rights as well as the right of religious and cultural freedom.[28] However, they remain vague in how to implement these principles and are yet to prove that their programs are more than window dressing for a Western public. The insecurity about the outcome of a regime change keeps relevant segments of society, especially the minorities, scared and partly supportive of the regime. This, in turn, raises suspicion among the rebels that they could be "agents" of the regime. The basic questions that need answering in a postregime Syria is how political power will be controlled and divided and how confidence in the other side may be regained. Minorities may refuse a majoritarian democracy as suggested by the opposition out of fear that they will become marginalized by the Sunni Arab population. Militant Islamists increase such fear of Sunni dominance. Therefore, minority groups will request strong guarantees that they will be allocated with a fair share of power in any future arrangement. Otherwise, they will stick to veto strategies (e.g., blocking solutions, searching for external support, escalating violence, fighting for a separation of their territories or leaving the country).

 Based on the assumption that homogeneous ethnic communities share common interests and may be easily differentiated due to clear-cut identities, culturalist approaches and ethnic entrepreneurs suggest the separation of ethnic entities into distinct petty states. But both

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28 In Berlin, a group of Syrian opposition representatives and Western scientists worked out a draft plan for Syria after the toppling of Bashar al-Assad; *The Day After* (2012).

conditions – homogeneous communities and clear-cut boundaries – neither apply to Lebanon nor to Syria; a separation would have tremendous ramifications. Only crude grid-reference maps make it appear as if new states can easily be cut out of Syria's territory, whereas a closer look shows a colorful mosaic.[29] Even if ethnically homogenous communities once existed, rural exodus and urbanization have mixed the population in the last decades. Attempts at resegregation could give rise to ethnic cleansing. Furthermore, while a territorial separation might be an option for Kurds, Druze and Alawites – who may retreat to their historic heartlands – it is definitely no option for the Christian communities that are spread all over the country. Furthermore, every territorial separation of ethnic groups creates new minorities that will come up with their own claims for cultural rights. Ethnically defined petty states could become even more chauvinistic toward the remaining members of other communities given that they may no longer recognize the need for moderation and compromise. It would lead to social pressure for minorities to leave for "their" respective regions – for example, the one million Kurds settled in Aleppo and Damascus or the half-million Alawites in Damascus. Settlement areas are intertwined, and tensions between the new entities over borders and resources would likely continue – as evidenced in Iraq by the territorial dispute between the Kurdish autonomy region and the central state (ICG 2012b). Such a decomposition into small states is a taboo for many Syrian nationalists because it ties in with the former colonial project of splitting the Arab nation into small states. It also assumedly corresponds with Israel's understanding of a belt of ethnic/sectarian statelets in its immediate neighborhood. Last but not least, Syria's neighboring countries are unlikely to tolerate new entities that might encourage their own minorities to raise claims for autonomy.

How can the regime and its supporters be convinced to give up their monopoly on power before the whole state is destroyed by existential warfare? How can the members of the Alawite and other minority communities identified with the regime be protected from revenge killings? How can radical exclusivist ideologies of superiority – such as those propagated by the Salafi and jihadi Islamists who seek fundamentalist Sunni rule – be prevented from taking over power by force? How can historically rooted minorities be assured of their cultural freedom and rights in order to convince them not to leave the country and, thus, protect its cultural pluralism? Neither separation into ethnically homogeneous petty states nor a continued monoethnic dictatorship, nor a simple majority democracy nor a secular society with vague guarantees of minority rights is capable of solving these fundamental dilemmas.

4.4 A Transitory Power-Sharing Strategy

In the power-sharing debate, consociationalism has been the preferential model, especially for postconflict societies, whereas centripetalism is better suited to societies with more mod-

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29 For a detailed map see online: <http://gulf2000.columbia.edu/images/maps/Syria_Ethnic_Detailed_lg.jpg> (05 May 2013).

erate sentiments between the communities (Reilly 2012). In the transitional phase between war and postwar, memories of discrimination and violence along ethnic-sectarian cleavages still firmly determine the perception and behavior of vital actors. Each community fosters its own narratives of victimization and regards its own position as tenuous. There is still a lack of trust and confidence in peaceful bargaining, of changing majorities and of social mobility that cuts across ethnic cleavages. Therefore, people stick to their own primordial groups of identity and solidarity instead of relying on the vague perspective of intercommunal, national solidarity. Based on this wariness, ethnic entrepreneurs demand robust guarantees for their constituencies; otherwise they may spoil negotiations and pursue the separation of their territories. Under such conditions, consociationalism offers a relatively quick-fix solution because it guarantees all major groups trusted participation and a reliable share of power for their elites. After several failed attempts at a negotiated solution, the Lebanese Taif accord established a quorum between religious communities that helped end the civil war. Many of its regulations were adopted in the revised constitution of 1990.[30]

The negotiators of the Taif accord were well aware of the negative effects of continued consociational power sharing given that this arrangement was held responsible by many Lebanese for the outbreak of the civil war. Therefore, they included elements of centripetalism and formulated a clear demand to abolish the political representation of confessional communities. The members of the first elected postwar parliament were assigned to appoint a national commission that would have the mandate to eliminate "political confessionalism" "in accordance with a phased plan" (Taif I.2.G).[31] But this noncommittal phrase proved to be a serious flaw in that it lacked a clearly defined timetable for the transition from consociationalism to centripetalism and, ultimately, a unitary society with equal civic rights. Instead, the provisional distribution of power based on religious affiliation turned into a steady state and a structural barrier to political reform.

There were some external factors that kept Lebanon in a permanent mode of crisis: The Syrian troops and security forces that helped to disarm the militias and restore state authority became a permanent presence and an instrument for the Syrian regime to supervise Lebanese politics. Most Lebanese regarded them an illegitimate occupying force until they were forced to withdraw in 2005 after massive popular protests. Another obstacle was the continued Israeli occupation of parts of South Lebanon, which gave justification to Hezbollah and other nonstate forces to keep their weapons of resistance. Guerilla violence escalated into three wars (1993, 1996 and 2006) that led to thousands of casualties and widespread destruction in Lebanon.

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30 The Arabic text of the constitution with its amendments of 1990 is reprinted in Ziadeh (2006: 241–275). An English translation can be found in *Arab Law Quarterly*; see: Lebanese Constitution (1997). Articles of the constitution will be cited as e.g. "Art. 95, 1990" – 1990 indicating the year of revision.

31 The abolishment of sectarian quotas was also assigned in the constitution, Art. 95, 1990.

But these external factors were not the only – nor probably even the most important – reasons for the weakness and failure of Lebanon's power-sharing agreement. Rather communal pressure and the tenaciousness of the political elite prevented the implementation of the reform agenda to overcome sectarianism because deputies elected by proportional representation were no longer keen to abolish the quota system. Instead of overcoming pillarization, they have promoted a sectarian mentality and structure that distributes state institutions and sources among religious communities, forcing primordial affiliations upon people instead of offering them a modern citizenship with equal rights. Consociational guarantees steadied the influence of such sectarian entrepreneurs, who based their authority on the pretension of representing their communities. These entrepreneurs fostered group cohesion and expanded the sway of sectarian identities into different societal fields like education, charities, employment, NGOs, media, parties and even sport in order to stabilize and expand their power.[32]

5 How Could Syria Avoid the Unfulfilled Promise of Taif?

Syria faces a dilemma: On the one hand, time is running out because there is a vicious circle of violence, state institutions are collapsing, ethnic-sectarianism is aggravating tensions and the conflict is threatening to spill over into neighboring countries. On the other hand, time is needed to find new political representatives, to build up trust and to successfully rebalance claims, interests and expectations. Therefore, a multiphased model (akin to the design of the Lebanese Taif accord) may be utile because it would enable the creation of immediate institutions and allow for a longer-lasting process of negotiating and establishing effective transethnic and transsectarian political and social structures. The Lebanese Taif accord consists of a mixed model that compromises elements of consociationalism, centripetalism and the vision of a unitary nation state as part of a three-step solution. With its wide range of suggested institutions, it offers plenty of opportunities to facilitate the transformation toward a new institutional design. But the Taif accord has two central shortcomings: ambiguous institutions and the lack of a concrete timetable to abolish the static proportional power-sharing arrangement between religious communities.

An adequate formula for Syria will require modifications, such as a clearly defined exit strategy that is in place from the beginning as well as state institutions and government rulings that aim to promote centripetal cooperation between the communities. The cycle of such a transitory model could contain the following steps (which will be expanded upon in the following paragraphs):

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32 For these patronage networks see e.g. Gellner (1977) and Johnson (1987). Reiche (2011) and Kingston (2001) provide special studies on sport and NGOs, respectively.

1) creating immediate guarantees of proportional, parity or negotiated political representation;

2) setting up centripetal institutions with incentives for interethnic cooperation;

3) creating, in the long run, a unitary state of institutions that guarantee civil rights irrespective of ethnic or other identities and affiliation.

After half a century of one-party rule, the formation of political actors will be a new experience for Syrian society. It is likely that in such a situation of radical change, traditional and primordial identities will gain prominence as "communities of fate," especially when they resemble historic memories. Tabooing ethnic/sectarian identities will not help to overcome the underlying lack of trust and confidence in "the other." Rather, opponents will suspect a hidden agenda, which may even create more resentment. Acknowledging the existence of the fear that communities will be discriminated against or even threatened with extermination by other communities is a first step in facing the negative dynamics of mistrust. A transitory political system will have to take such cleavages into consideration and to create a political and legal framework that helps to rebuild confidence and cooperation. In the immediate aftermath of violent conflict, stakeholders will demand fixed shares of power for their communities due to deep mistrust – as the consociational model suggests. However, Lebanon's postwar experience proves that such a model tends to assume a life of its own and expand outside of the political realm into different segments of society.

Therefore, a prescribed distribution of consociational power should be substituted by a more competitive scheme of democracy with centripetal instruments that help the protagonists in "moving out of zero-sum politics into self-interested cooperation" (Wolff and Yakinthou 2012: 7). Such an arrangement needs an institutionalized exit strategy that must be implemented in a fixed time frame as well as incentives to overcome divisions and to depoliticize ethnic identity. Horowitz (1985, 2008) suggests a centripetal approach that focuses on intermediary institutions and stimulates interethnic cooperation (e.g., by composing mixed electorates that force the candidates to moderate their language in order to catch votes from other communities). An integrative power-sharing agreement has to bridge, and not deepen, the "primary" social cleavage. One possibility is to strengthen alternative cleavages and identities like regionalism, language and gender. A fair representation of the regions or a quota system (e.g., for women or for professions such as farmers) could help break up the primary cleavage of ethnicity and sectarianism and build up alternative solidarity units. The emergence of a nonsectarian civil society that does not preserve ethnic pillarization, but rather helps to gradually dilute its relevance, could divide power through emphasizing nonethnic and nonsectarian criteria – such as programmatic parties, socioeconomic interest groups and voluntary associations. Such organizations would help transcend ethnic and sectarian solidarity networks by promoting common interests such as profession, education or political opinion. Over the course of time, this should result in the gradual shift in attention from primordial affiliations toward political considerations.

An integrative power-sharing approach attempts to safeguard all segments of society and to transform authority into a civil state and society into a unity of shared values and chances. If common state institutions offer reliable services, people would no longer depend on the services of their parochial communities; this would also stimulate cooperation on common issues, helping to overcome fragmentation lines. Therefore, the state needs reliable security and administration institutions. Socioeconomic development programs that balance the regional distribution of chances and secure social justice between communities are vital. This is due to the fact that large developmental gaps between rural areas and cities lead to a high rural exodus and the increase of underdeveloped, desolate suburbs that become hotbeds for radical polarization. No less important are the "soft powers" of a national education system and unbiased media outlets. Cultural rights have to be accompanied by a national program – for example, competitive state schools that are serious alternatives to religious or private schools and that do not only target those unable to afford private schools. Furthermore, secular family law has to complement a voluntary confessional family law. Implemented together, these steps could lead to a unitary nation state in which ethnic and sectarian identities shed their political relevance, and communal guarantees are superseded by individual rights.

6 Perspectives

This paper's comparison of the Lebanese experience and Syrian experience has proven that – with the exception of some differences – there are strong similarities between these two countries. This reaffirms the value of drawing on the Lebanese experience in discussing the possibility of a Syrian power-sharing agreement. Syria (still) has the big advantage that its state structures may be revived as they have not completely disintegrated or become the booty of community militias. An arrangement for the solution of ethnic and sectarian divides should take place in several steps. An ideal-typical transitory strategy of power sharing in Syria could learn from the successes and the mistakes of the Taif accord. The most probable alternatives to such a transitory power-sharing agreement are either a long lasting civil war for territory and power, a new dictatorship of a minority or majority group or the separation into ethnic ministates, which would only perpetuate the conflict on a minor level. The Syrian quagmire and its regional repercussions are too complex to be solved by a military victory. Taking into account the serious fragmentation, the traumatic violence and the deep mistrust between the communities, it is also improbable that a secular democratic state can emerge in the near future.

As conflicts in the region are structurally interwoven, there can be no sustainable peace in Syria without a comprehensive regional solution. Syria's neighbors must be included in any peace negotiations in order to implement and safeguard a power-sharing agreement. Double-layered negotiations between internal and external actors should bring all relevant parties together: the regime and the opposition, the United States and Russia, Saudi Arabia

and Iran. Regional stability can only be achieved by gaining mutual security between Iran, Turkey, the GCC, Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq as well as Israel and Palestine. The polarization between a newly arising "Sunni Crescent" and the "Shiite Crescent" will lead to further escalation. In a best case scenario, all actors will share the common understanding that narrowing one's own expectations through compromise will achieve better results than sticking to a winner-takes-all mentality. External powers must be willing to accept the self-neglecting prophecy that further escalation will bring more harm than any negotiated compromise. What is needed is a smooth transition rather than the unpredictable outcome of a system collapse. There are some chary hints that regional and global actors are coming closer to such a comprehension.

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