This chapter analyses Lebanese political dynamics within the context of the difficult bilateral relations with Syria and the conflict with Israel.

The first section is dedicated to the structural dynamics of Lebanese politics, namely the political forms and institutions of confessionalism and the way they were re-organised after the civil war.

The second section aims at analysing the domestic impact of more recent political developments such as the Syrian withdrawal in 2005 and the violent escalation with Israel in the summer of 2006.

Finally, the last section is focused on the impact of foreign influences both on domestic Lebanese politics and on Lebanon's bilateral relations with Syria and Israel

The war that broke out in Lebanon in 1975 ended officially in 1990 with the implementation of the Taif Agreement on the initiative of the Arab League and with the consent and patronage of Syria and the United States (Taif being a city in Saudi Arabia in which the so-named agreement was concluded). The partial implementation, during the post-war era, of the Taif Agreement within a confessional system and under the tutelage of the Baath regime led to a radical modification of the balance of power, distorted the functioning of public institutions and impeded the process of reform. Syria's hegemony over Lebanon was progressively institutionalised through the ratification of legally vague texts, namely Chapter 4 of the Taif Agreement, the Treaty of fraternity and economic, social and cultural cooperation and the mutual defence agreement, the last two of which were both signed in 1991. Such hegemony and interests were reflected on the ground in the diplomatic alignment, the security dependence and the interpenetration of the socio-economic (and often mafia-linked) networks in both countries.

The Syrian dossier is so overwhelming in Lebanese politics that it has become in itself a political line of cleavage to the detriment of other political projects and ideas. In other words, the Lebanese political groups after the war identified and classified themselves according to their relationship with Syrian officials and their point of view regarding the Syrian presence in Lebanon ("for" or "against") rather than according to their political program. With the implementation of the Taif Agreement in 1990, Syrian officials thus managed to turn the terms of their relationship with Lebanon into a constituent of all political undertakings, whether of the various opposition groups or of the government.

The subordination of Lebanese personalities from all circles and spheres to the Syrian authorities also had the effect of multiplying the centres of power in Lebanon, which in turn transposed the rivalries between various currents within the Syrian regime onto the Lebanese political scene. In this respect, opposing the government in Lebanon did not necessarily entail being excluded from the centres of decision and power.[48]

Therefore, it is difficult to label politicians as "members of the opposition" and "majority", or as "opposition" and "government" or "those in power". This also relates to the difficulty in distinguishing between the different political parties and currents in Lebanon, in addition to the very limits of the classic categorisation between left and right wing. Observation of the Lebanese scene reveals that no classification can account for the heterogeneous character of political loyalties.

Another characteristic of Lebanese politics is that the party structure since the Taif Agreements is characterised by the rise of formations that were engaged in the conflict. This has been accomplished through the political conversion of certain militias, even though they have not been totally demilitarised, and through the militarisation of certain parties. In fact, the majority of parties operating in Lebanon since 1975 have a militia component. Many militias which were already functioning in a dual party/militia mode have been recycled. Some of them, such as *Hezbollah*, still maintain their military structures. Others have been converted into political parties with the demobilisation and the dismantling of their military structures, such as the parties deriving from the Maronite militia, the Lebanese Forces.

These new parties play different roles on the political scene, but their participation in the political game – "normalised" without being entirely peaceful – has introduced into the political exercise, be it in government, in parliament or simply in society, a kind of logic and method inherited from militia organisation and practice. Even if they try to limit their

48 **In analysing parliamentary elections in 1996, Samir Kassir maintained that the Lebanese cleavage** between anti-governmental and pro-Syrian political forces reflected the division between the two main factions inside the Syrian regime. Cf. S. Kassir (1997), "Désordre établi au Liban", *Le Monde Diplomatique*, février, p. 7.

recourse to violence and arms in solving internal political conflicts, having underwritten support for "civil" and non-violent methods, they still have a concept of politics that sees the state, national and local representative institutions, the public administration and public goods as "booty" which it is the party's objective to plunder. In other words, superimposed on the feudal conception of the state held by the old political class which considers it "a closed concern", this class of politicians has introduced a militia conception which considers it "spoils".

Undoubtedly, in parallel to these two levels of political action, two others must be mentioned: the state as a private "enterprise", introduced after 1993 during management of the country's reconstruction by the old Prime Minister Rafic Hariri, and the state as a military camp, a representation strengthened when General Emile Lahoud became President of the Republic in 1998 and with the progressive involvement of the military and information services in political life.

Another form of mobilisation and party organisation after the war sprang from the role of the "political movements" that already existed before 1990 and which have strengthened their community role since. They are built around a political figure who frequently represents a single community. The political currents of the old Sunni Prime Minister Rafic Hariri and of Maronite General Michel Aoun are examples of these. Enjoying a large capacity for mobilisation, they have a number of media organs behind them, have run in elections in many regions and are heading important parliamentary coalitions.

1.2
The difficulty of reform in the confessional system

The practices of the Lebanese political class during the post-war era are set within the framework of a consociational political system based on confessional consensus, which was created and elaborated so to represent the complexity of the pre-existing socio-cultural structures. It is within this framework that the Syrian regime orchestrated the implementation of the Taif Agreement while laying out new rules of the political game. Since the Taif Agreement, the central balance of power is constitutionally attributed, in a kind of collegial power, to a Maronite President of the Republic, a Sunni Prime Minister and a Shiite Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies. This "presidential troika" regime was managed in the interests of the Syrian regime and of the heterogeneous Lebanese political and economic elites and Syrian allies who came to power between 1990 and 2005 without any common political platform. They maintained their power and control over the political sphere by restricting access to political and state institutions and by setting often arbitrary rules of participation, in particular through electoral laws. These Lebanese elites easily entered - and still enter - into competition to protect positions of power that give access to benefits and allow for control over economic interests. For example, there are regularly disputes among the "three presidents" over administrative nominations. They have often resorted to Syria's arbitration to set the rules of the game and settle their differences. The Syrian regime gives the veto right to one or the other of the three Lebanese presidents, maintaining a kind of negative equilibrium managed to its own advantage. This troika regime has become a custom consolidated by the practice of the three presidents. They have set up a system of personal negotiations outside the institutional framework to settle questions and matters that are a source of conflict or dispute among them, calling upon the ministers and MPs simply to ratify the results of their discussions, whether conflicting or consensual. This custom has distorted the representative institutions and the principle of the balance and the separation of powers.

Apart from reforms relating to the balance of powers, other reforms that could have achieved structural changes in the Lebanese system remain suspended. New institutions that were meant to guarantee the rule of law have either been put into place but have no real or effective power (this is the case of the Constitutional Council and the Economic and Social Council) or have not been set up at all (this is the case of the High Court, the mission of which would be to judge the presidents and ministers, and the Senate). The establishment of these institutions continues to be a source of debate and dissent among the political powers over the sharing and influence of each within them. Reforms related to the gradual suppression of political confessionalism, the extension of administrative decentralisation and the adoption of a new electoral law have not been implemented to date. Economically, the ultra-liberal option chosen by the public powers, which George Corm calls "economic neo-Lebanonism",[49] the cost of reconstruction, the corruption and squandering have sent the public debt spiralling to around US$ 40 billion, which is equivalent to 180 % of the annual Gross Domestic Product in 2005.

The implementation of reforms remains subject to the interpretation of the political and administrative authorities. This gives rise to permanent bartering between political

49 G. Corm (2003), *Le Liban contemporain. **Histoire et société**, Paris: La Découverte, p. 237.

leaders and community representatives who assent to the sectarianism and clientelism in the Lebanese political system. This method of functioning, which can be described as "limited pluralism" or "slightly democratic neo-liberalism", goes beyond the political and administrative sphere of the presidents, ministers, MPs and high officials, to encompass all relations between individuals and the state apparatus.

Therefore, the absence of a national project going beyond the aggregate interests of the governing elite and the permanent conflicts of the political class have exacerbated the population's distrust of the state and its institutions. The effects of these practices are manifest in society in the declining role of public institutions, which are supposed to play a unifying role transcending structural cleavages, as well as in post-war forms of mobilisation which promote the consolidation of traditional structures.

An important example illustrating the difficulties in implementing reforms in the Lebanese confessional system under Syrian domination was the question of the presidential elections in September 2004 and their repercussions.

The Lebanese-Syrian conflict, which broke out after the amendment of the Lebanese Constitution imposed by Syrian President Bachar al-Asad on 3 September 2004 to bring about a three-year extension to the mandate of the President of the Republic Emile Lahoud,[50] sheds light on the power struggles at the regional and international levels and the domestic crisis of power.

Outside Lebanon, the interests involved vary depending on the actors. In spite of the withdrawal of its troops from Lebanon[51], Syria has sought to retain direct influence over the decision-making process in the country by maintaining Emile Lahoud as president of the republic and through the presence of *Hezbollah* ministers in the government. Thus, thanks to its strategic alliance with Iran, its involvement in the Iraq conflict and its influence in Lebanon, Syria continues to be able to play a role at the regional level and to face up to the pressures and demands of the United Nations and certain Western countries, namely the United States and France. The latter is boycotting the Lebanese president and hopes he will step down before the end of his mandate in conformity with the terms of Resolution 1559, thus paving the way for implementation of the other resolutions[52] adopted by the Security Council after the assassination of Prime Minister Rafic Hariri on 14 February 2005. Along with the demands of the US and France, the resolutions could weaken the position of the Syrian regime not only in Lebanon, but in Iraq and Palestine and throughout the region. These resolutions are not formally linked and do not depend on one another. Nevertheless, they suggest that the Lebanon-Syria issue could provide a means for the United States and France to shape a common political strategy in the Middle East in spite to their strong divergences over Iraq.[53]

The demonstrations that took place in the wake of the assassination of Rafic Hariri as part of the *Intifadat al-Istiqlal* (independence uprising), in particular on 14 March 2005, drew one third of the Lebanese population into the streets of Beirut. With the catchwords "sovereignty, freedom and independence", they were organised by various political "opposition" groups brought together in the so-called *Liqa' al-Bristol* (Bristol Gathering). The demands put forward during the demonstrations concerned the setting up of an international commission of enquiry into the assassination of Rafic Hariri, the withdrawal of the Syrian army from Lebanon, the resignation of the head of the Lebanese secret services and of Omar Karamé's government, and the setting of the dates for parliamentary elections between May and June 2005. By the end of June, all these demands had been met.

In reaction to the "opposition" demonstrations, the so-called "loyalist" political groups, mainly the two Shia parties, *Hezbollah* and *Amal*, organised counter-demonstrations. Pledging allegiance to Syria, they denounced the meddling of the United States and France in Lebanese affairs and rejected the imposition of UN Resolution 1559 which calls for, among other things, the disarming of the militias. In parallel, they demanded the just and non-arbitrary application of all UN resolutions concerning the region and the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Inside the country, after the parliamentary elections in summer 2005, the different political forces are divided into two groups regarding the presidential matter. The first, which calls for the resignation of the president, consists mainly of the Current for the Future of Saad Hariri (Sunni), the Progressive Socialist Party of Walid Jumblatt (Druze), the Lebanese Forces of Samir Geagea (Maronite) and the "Kornet Chehwan Gathering", a gathering of Christian politicians. Their objective is to do away with the symbols of the trusteeship of

2.
From Syrian tutelage to the Israeli war

2.1
The crisis of the presidential elections and the Spring 2005 demonstrations

50 The international community had expressed its opposition to the act on 2 Sept. with SC Resolution 1559.
51 The withdrawal of the Syrian army from Lebanon was carried out in April 2005 conformity with UN Resolution 1559.
52 These resolutions are Resolution 1595 of 7 April 2005, establishing upon the request of the Lebanese government an independent international investigation commission, headed by Judge D. Mehlis ; Resolution 1636 of 31 October 2005, calling for the mobilisation of the International Community to help the Lebanese authorities shed a light on the responsibility for the assassination, then provide the best conditions for the extension of the mandate of the Mehlis Commission and, finally, get Syria to cooperate with the Mehlis Commission; Resolution 1644 of 15 December 2005, extending the mandate of the Investigation Commission until 15 June 2006 and "underscores Syria's obligation and commitment to cooperate fully and unconditionally with the Commission". On 11 January 2006, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan named S. Brammertz head of the Investigation Commission and on 29 March 2006, the Security Council adopted a resolution giving K. Annan the right to enter into an agreement with the Lebanese government "aimed at establishing a tribunal of an international character based on the highest international standards of criminal justice" in order to hold accountable all those involved in the assassination of R. Hariri.
53 J. Bahout (2005), "Liban/Syrie : une alliance objective franco-américaine ?", *L' Orient Le Jour*, 15 October, p. 5.

the Baath regime in Lebanon and to re-legitimise the position of president by electing a new president from among their ranks. This would allow the Current for the Future to control two presidential posts – prime minister and president of the republic. Reaching an agreement regarding the identity of the candidate, however, seems to be one of their main problems.

The second group, which supports the president or at least opposes his resignation as long as there is no agreement on his successor, includes two Shiite political formations, the *Hezbollah* led by Hassan Nasrallah and the *Amal* movement headed by the Speaker of Parliament Nabih Berri, in addition to the Free Patriotic Movement of Maronite General Michel Aoun. Since the 2005 elections, the latter presents himself as the only really representative Maronite candidate with a large popular following in Christian circles, thanks to which he would be able to re-legitimise and strengthen the position. On the other hand, the two Shiite formations are concerned about preserving the privileges and prerogatives (sharing of power, access to state resources and to positions in the public administration, etc.) acquired by their community during the fifteen years of Syrian tutelage.

2.2
From the National Dialogue to the Israeli war: A way out of the impasse?

On the eve of the war waged by Israel against Lebanon, following Hezbollah's kidnapping of two Tsahal soldiers on 12 July 2006, the Lebanese political class continued to be divided, schematically, into two groups, each divided internally by distinct priorities and personal interests. These two groups had already tabled discussions in early spring 2006 in the framework of the "Conference on national dialogue" [54] to discuss and resolve the following problems: the enquiry into the assassination of the former Prime Minister Rafic Hariri; relations with Syria; the application of UN resolution 1559, disarming of the militias and the conditions for the presidential elections.

After a number of sessions, participants in the conference had agreed on three points. First, they agreed to set up an international tribunal tasked with judging the suspects issuing from the enquiry on the assassination of Rafic Hariri. Second, they agreed on the need to establish diplomatic relations between Lebanon and Syria and to resolve the border conflicts between the two countries. Finally, they decided to disarm the Palestinian militias and to grant Palestinian refugees the social and economic rights of which they had been deprived. While the international tribunal is being set up, the other two decisions have remained dead letter.

Furthermore, participants were unable to agree on either the identity of the future president of the republic or a strategy of national defence or the future of Hezbollah's weapons. This fuelled discussions on the eve of the war on 12 July.

The question of the strategy of national defence and Hezbollah's weapons is the central problem in the national dialogue. Various requirements would have to be satisfied: application of the Taif agreements and UN Resolution 1559, both of which call for the disarming of all militias; the settling of disputes between Lebanon and Israel concerning the Shebaa farms which were not evacuated by the Israeli army during their withdrawal in May 2000, the release of Lebanese prisoners still in Israeli prisons, and the handing over of maps indicating the location of Israeli army land mines on southern Lebanese territory and Israel's regular violation of Lebanese territory. The latter are the arguments Hezbollah uses to justify its retention of weapons and its resistance to the Hebrew state.

The Shebaa farms are a regional dispute that international law seems unable to resolve. The Lebanese government invokes application of UN Resolution 425 which affirms Lebanon's territorial integrity. But Israel considers this territory part of the Syrian Golan Heights occupied by its army in 1967. After the withdrawal of the Syrian army from Lebanon in April 2005, Lebanese authorities asked the Syrian government to confirm officially that the territory is Lebanese. By refusing to provide the United Nations with the necessary documents, Syria is trying to keep Lebanese and Syrian matters indistinct with respect to the conflict with Israel and to uphold the armed resistance of the Hezbollah.

When national defence was tabled during the national dialogue, Hezbollah leaders opposed sending the Lebanese army to the south to disarm their militias, so that the matters of the Shebaa farms and the Lebanese prisoners could not be settled. The risk, in their eyes, was that the national army would become a border guard between the Israeli army and "the resistance", while the latter ensure a "balance of terror" against the Israeli army. This is why they defend continuing a strong and independent resistance. The groups in the parliamentary majority argued conversely that neither the resistance nor the Lebanese army have the military and technological means to stand up to Israeli power.

54 The conference on National Dialogue started at the beginning of March 2006 on the initiative of the Speaker of the Parliament. The last session before the war was held on the 28 June **2006.**

They insisted that the problems with Israel must be settled through the United Nations, which had already made it possible, they believe, to neutralise the southern borders and to put in place the ceasefire signed by both countries in 1949 (regularly violated by both parties since the 1060s). Incapable of arriving at a common vision, the participants in the conference started to drag out the national dialogue sessions. They would converse by means of communiqués and speeches designed to agitate their partisan and confessional bases in an atmosphere intended to heat the general crisis.

Paradoxically, the triggering of this war, which attested to the Lebanese government's weakness with respect to Hezbollah, has – now that it is over – strengthened the sovereignty of the Lebanese state. On the eve of the war, the Hezbollah, the last officially armed militia, constituted a kind of "state within the state", controlling the south of the country and deciding unilaterally to make war (or peace) and trying to impose its conception of national defence strategy.

After the staggering war, triggered by surprise in response to Hezbollah's capture of the two Israeli soldiers, the majority of the political class appealed to the Lebanese government to take on responsibility at all levels and to take up the initiative. Taking advantage of the rallying of different political parties and the support of all religious authorities, the Lebanese prime minister returned to centre stage to call for a diplomatic battle for a ceasefire at the Arab and international levels.

Indeed, Fouad Siniora seized upon the "political truce" among the Lebanese political groups and their followers during the war. The prime minister, rather than representing only his political current, worked out a plan for getting out of the crisis in concert with the Speaker of Parliament.[55] His aim was not only to put an end to the war, but above all to find a solution to the underlying problems that gave origin to the conflict. It should be underlined that his plan was approved unanimously by the Cabinet, including by the Hezbollah ministers. This bestowed on the prime minister an unprecedently strong and unified position from which to present to the international community and the Arab League a plan accepted and approved by all the main Lebanese political actors and representatives of the religious communities.[56] From this position and with the support of the Arab League and many Western countries, the Lebanese government tried to negotiate the terms of the resolution being discussed in the Security Council to get France and the United States to review their proposals. While all political spheres saluted the efforts of the government, Hezbollah followed with attention the prime minister's negotiations and engagements. Despite their inflexibility towards the Israeli war machine, Hezbollah's leaders realised that, given the widespread destruction, they could not maintain their rigid stance at the domestic level insisting on their positions held prior to 12 July. They asked their ministers to contribute to the government's activities and to delegate the Speaker of Parliament, Nabih Berri, to negotiate in their name with the various Lebanese and foreign actors. Indeed, they rank, at the negotiating level, just below institutions representing the state, the parliament and the government. **This constituted something new, in that they had until that time** always undertaken parallel routes to those of the state in their negotiations.

When the prime minister decided on 7 August 2006 to send the Lebanese army to the south of the country to demonstrate the seriousness and the determination of his government to the international community, the Hezbollah ministers acquiesced in this decision. Despite the combatants' opposition to the Israeli army, they were aware of the risks Lebanese society was running in terms of cohesion if the war were prolonged. For them, the time had come to show a certain opening towards the prime minister's actions aimed at stopping the war – a time at which they could still claim to have beaten Israel to some extent and maintain a strong position vis-à-vis their internal detractors to negotiate their place, or rather their new place and new role within the state.

By reading the terms of Security Council Resolution 1701 on Lebanon adopted on 11 August 2006,[57] which calls for a "full cessation of hostilities", it appears to involve a compromise that satisfies all actors concerned. In fact, the resolution does not call for the forceful disarming of the Hezbollah since, in spite of the strengthening of the UNIFIL forces, their mandate does not allow them to use force (in conformity with Chap. 7 of the UN Charter) – something which to some extent reassured Hezbollah leaders. But, by reading SC Resolution 1701 in the light of inter-Lebanese dialogue, it can be seen that most of the terms go in the direction of strengthening the authority and the sovereignty of the Lebanese state. Paradoxically, the Lebanese government came out of the war strengthened, affirming its role as representative of all Lebanese and their collective interests. It showed a certain ability in diplomatic negotiations, succeeded in deploying its army throughout its territory and reaffirmed the need for the application of the Taif agreement, approved by all Lebanese, which calls for the disarming of all militias.

55 The plan called for an immediate and comprehensive cease-fire and a declaration of agreement on the following 7 points: (1) An undertaking to release the Lebanese and Israeli prisoners and detainees through the International Committee of the Red Cross; (2) The withdrawal of the Israeli army behind the Blue Line, and the return of the displaced to their villages; (3) A commitment from the Security Council to place the Shabaa Farms area and the Kfarshouba Hills under UN jurisdiction until border delineation and Lebanese sovereignty over them are fully settled. (4) The Lebanese government extends its authority over its territory through its own legitimate armed forces; (5) The UN international force, operating in South Lebanon, is supplemented and enhanced in numbers, equipment, mandate and scope of operation, as needed, in order to undertake urgent humanitarian and relief work and guarantee stability and security in the south so that those who fled their homes can return; (6) The UN, in cooperation with the relevant parties, undertakes the necessary measures to once again put into effect the Armistice Agreement signed by Lebanon and Israel in 1949; (7) The international community commits to support Lebanon on all levels, and to assist it in facing the tremendous burden resulting from the human, social, and economic tragedy which has afflicted the country (AFP, 28/07/2006).
56 The leaders of all Lebanese religious communities unanimously accepted the plan on August 1, 2006.
57 The SC resolution 1701 is available at http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N06/465/03/PDF/N0646503.pdf?OpenElement

There are now two series of complementary questions which cannot yet be answered. They concern, on the one hand, the stability of the truce and various belligerents' respect for their commitments and for UN Resolution 1701. On the other hand, they regard Hezbollah's strategy: will the current policy translate into a strategic change from a position of a "state within a state" to a direct monopolisation of the state? To *real Politik*? They seized the moment to accept, with certain reservations, the prime minister's plan and UN Resolution 1701; but it is still possible for them to proclaim a military "victory" and to convert that victory into a political gain, imposing a new and advantageous equilibrium of force on the powers of and the state itself.

3.
Foreign influences on Lebanese, Syrian and Israeli bilateral relations and Lebanese domestic politics

The general policies of the international community towards Lebanon during the past fifteen years have changed depending on the main actors' priorities and on the evolution of the international context. With the partial implementation of the Taif Agreement, the international community accepted Syrian hegemony in Lebanon. The international community's priority was then internal stability, the unification of the country and the reconstruction of the state. Furthermore Syria had to be involved alongside the international coalition that had liberated Kuwait after it was invaded by Saddam Hussein in 1990, and to participate in the Madrid Conference and the following peace process. The international acquiescence of Syrian presence in Lebanon was thus used as a bargaining card.

More recently, a number of regional and international events, such as the death of Hafez al-Asad, the deadlock of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, the US occupation of Iraq and so on, have radically altered such priorities.

The renewed international attention on Lebanon since 2004 has to be seen in the light of a diplomatic tug-of-war between the US and France on the one hand, and Syria on the other. The United States increased its pressure on Syria after invading Iraq, whereas France now opposes the regime of Bashar Al-Asad after having been Syria's critical ally. The new factor in the role of the international community with regard to Lebanon is its intensity and its involvement in the management of even the most minute[58] details of Lebanese political life.

Since September 2004, the Security Council has adopted a number of resolutions regarding Lebanon: two of them have a direct political dimension relating to Lebanon's sovereignty and independence, namely Resolution 1559 (2/09/2004) and Resolution 1680 (17/05/2006). Five resolutions relate to the assassination of R. Hariri, the investigation commission and the bomb explosions in Lebanon.

The effects of international involvement in Lebanon since the first UN resolution in 2004 are mixed and somehow contradictory.

Among the positive effects we can list:

·····• International pressures have contributed to initiating a debate on issues which were previously considered taboo, thus accelerating the pace of change

After the pullout of the Israeli army from South Lebanon in May 2000, some protesting voices called for the withdrawal of the Syrian army, or at least, its redeployment, while questioning the use of the continuing resistance led by *Hezbollah*. These dissident voices were rapidly intimidated, and even hushed up by the thundering official rhetoric, which labelled these issues beyond the scope of public debate and depending solely on the will of two governments, the Lebanese and the Syrian. However, international intervention through the adoption of Resolutions 1559, 1680 and 1701 abolished the taboo surrounding these matters, including the historical issue of the borders and diplomatic relations with Syria. UN intervention brought these points onto the public agenda, and called for the state and the various Lebanese political groups to define their positions regarding these essential issues pertaining to Lebanon's sovereignty and independence. In this respect, one cannot but notice the effects of Resolutions 1559 and 1680 in the short term.

·····• International pressures have encouraged the strengthening of the role of the state

In the long term, implementation of the UN resolutions pertaining to Lebanon, especially 1559 and 1701, could contribute to promoting the role of the state. In theory, the ultimate objective of these resolutions and of the international intervention as a whole is to rebuild Lebanon's sovereignty on new bases revolving around the institutions that represent the state after achieving the withdrawal of all foreign armies and, of course, after disarming

58 According to A. Favier, "the intensive involvement of the International Community in Lebanon can also be measured by the presence of three special UN envoys in charge of overseeing the developments in South Lebanon (G. Pedersen), the follow-up of the implementation of Resolution 1559 (R. Larsen) and the international investigation (Mehlis then Brammertz). These envoys come to light as full-fledged actors in the Lebanese political game along with the ambassadors of the Western powers that are most involved in this dossier (the US and France)", in A. Favier, *Chronique d'une impasse politique annoncée : le Liban après le retrait de l'armée syrienne*, to be published on the website www.ifri.org.

all militias. Nevertheless, this foreign will calls for greater commitment on the part of the international community towards rebuilding the rule of law in Lebanon, which – in the long term – is the sole guarantee of stability and national cohesion.

Notwithstanding these positive effects, international intervention in Lebanon has also generated negative effects, such as:

⋯⋯⟩ International pressures have risked deepening the existing cleavages within Lebanese society

The conflict between the different Lebanese political factions regarding international involvement, particularly implementation of Resolutions 1559, 1680 and – after the Israeli war – 1701, has brought underlying sectarian tensions to the surface. On the one hand, some feel that foreign intervention – especially through the UN – will help Lebanon break free of foreign powers and reassert its sovereignty over its territory. On the other hand, some consider foreign involvement to be a form of hidden meddling in Lebanon's internal affairs and a breach of Lebanon's sovereignty. In this respect, foreign intervention may well fuel tensions and internal divisions by blocking the functioning of government and crippling state institutions.

A major issue of contention is the question of Hezbollah's disarmament called for by UN Resolutions 1559 and 1701. Disarmament of Hezbollah cannot be carried out by force and will not be possible without tackling the wider political problems of Lebanon's confessional structure, the treatment of the Shiite community and, generally speaking, the long overdue political reforms. Disarming Hezbollah without solving the Shiite's grievances would mean running the risk of renewed sectarian violence.

⋯⋯⟩ International pressures have polarised and exacerbated the conflict between Lebanon and Syria

This polarisation also applies to the conflict between Lebanon and Syria. The Syrian regime, completely isolated by the international community, has refused so far to meet the demands of the Lebanese government regarding border demarcation and establishing diplomatic relations. The Ba'ath regime considers these demands to be imposed by the international community, in particular the US and France, rather than as representing the will of the Lebanese people as expressed in the conference of national dialogue. Hence, Bashar Al-Asad will have to come to terms with the fact that his status has changed from being the guardian of Lebanon as recognized by the international community to being hounded by UN resolutions and subjected to severe international pressure. The tension between the two countries has reached a point where any foreign intervention is likely to lead to an escalation of the conflict.

This rough outline highlights the complexity of the Lebanese situation after the withdrawal of Syrian troops and the recent Israeli war. The challenges that the Lebanese government and all political forces are called upon to meet requires a national approach to the crisis so that a consensual strategy can be defined involving state actors and institutions – a diplomatic strategy and a national defence strategy – rather than diverse approaches by the different political actors representing the various religious communities. The latter, with their perpetual divisions on all issues, speak and act over and above the state by pursuing parallel community diplomacy and private defence through militia forces – something which in the long term runs counter to their own interests. Resolution of the current crisis could be an opportunity for Lebanon to reinforce the role of the state and to define its role and place at the regional level.