

**CONSOCIATIONALISM IN LEBANON AFTER THE
INDEPENDENCE INTIFADA
EXTERNAL THREATS AND POLITICAL
STABILITY: A REVERSED RELATIONSHIP?**

By

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I, the undersigned Elisabeta-Cristina Dinu, hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. To the best of my knowledge this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgement has been made. This thesis contains no material which has been accepted as part of the requirements of any other academic degree or non-degree program, in English or in any other language.

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ABSTRACT

Although consociationalism literature argues the existence of foreign threats to the political system should increase elite cooperation and political stability, after 2005 Lebanon did not follow this pattern. By implying ‘foreign threats’ are objective and shared among political elites, consociationalism literature entails a traditional approach to security. Since in Lebanon the principal focus of insecurity is society, political parties are securitizing actors and disagree fundamentally on how to build security for Lebanon. The study explains why political instability increased in Lebanon after the pull-out of Syrian troops, by exploring the relation between elite perceptions of security threats and political stability. Based on the critical realist paradigm, the study locates the external threat at the empirical level, political stability at the actual level and the relation between the two at the causal level. The study combines analysis of primary and secondary sources with elite and expert interviews, complemented by political elites’ public statements and interviews. The study shows that political stability in Lebanon remains largely dependent on elite perceptions of regional and international threats. As external threats increase political instability, security is not only a conducive factor of consociationalism, but its very subject.

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List of Abbreviations

FPM – Free Patriotic Movement

LAF – Lebanese Armed Forces

PSP – Progressive Socialist Party

STL – Special Tribunal for Lebanon

UNIIIC – United Nations International Independent Investigation Commission (for the assassination of Rafik Hariri)

UNSC – United Nations Security Council

NDS – National Defense Strategy

Introduction

As globalization reshuffles political and violent conflict, academics and policy-makers alike agree conflict resolution mechanisms need to evolve. Consociationalism is one of the most influential tools for building democratic governance in deeply divided societies. However, the power sharing tool was challenged in the MENA region, in Lebanon and more recently in Iraq.

The numerous proxy conflicts in the Middle East which often follow sectarian and religious allegiances and withstand nation-states highlight the necessity to reassess consociationalism (Marshall 2016; Ahram and Lust 2016). After 2003, most civil wars were situated in Muslim majority countries, involved radical Islamist actors pursuing transnational aims and presented the danger of contagion (Walter 2017).

Because consociationalism has been designed to function as a domestically confined power arrangement, rethinking power sharing in a transborder perspective has significant implications for the role of consociationalism as a conflict-resolution mechanism. Although “the existence of foreign threats to the political system should increase elite cooperation and political stability”, the post-Cold War era has shown foreign security threats may have a reverse impact on consociational systems, generating increased polarization and instability (Lijphart 1969, 1975, 2008).

In a region that is struggling with the tension between the territorial state and the population state, Lebanon is a strong example of a consociational system in which the existence of foreign threats and feelings of vulnerability among political elites did not bring about internal solidarity and cooperation. Power sharing in Lebanon has been dependent on international and regional power play, as the relationships between internal and external political actors determine the success of conflict regulation (Geukjian 2017).

The study explores the effects of foreign security threats on the stability of the consociational system of Lebanon after the end of Syrian occupation in April 2005. The study argues “the principal focus of insecurity is society, rather than state”, especially in MENA and particularly in Lebanon (Roe 2005, 4). By building on the premise that foreign threats are dependent on human perception, constructing security at a state-level is only possible if elites agree on who is a threat and how it should be tackled.

The paper is based on the critical realist paradigm, locating the external threat at the empirical level, political stability at the actual level and the relation between the two at the causal level. The causal relationship is built on consociationalism and power sharing literature. The conceptualization of ‘external threat’ builds on constructivist literature, with a focus on the Copenhagen School. Contributions assessing definitions of political stability provide the framework for the operationalization of political cohesion in Lebanon.

The study explores the relation between elite perceptions of security threats and political instability as a "consequence of strategic decisions made by pivotal actors [in their pursuit of security], however constrained by macrostructures” (Kissane and Sitter 2005). Challenging the effectiveness of consociational power-sharing in Lebanon carries implications not only for theoretical evaluations, but especially for policy-making. As attempts of state-building in post-conflict countries such as Iraq have showcased the limitations of the model, reassessing the internal-external dichotomy of security threats is crucial for the adaptation of consociationalism as a conflict regulation policy tool in the 21st century.

I. Literature Review and Research Design

Most theoretical literature on consociationalism builds on Arend Lijphart's exploration of "a system of accommodation and compromise among elites, whereby deeply fragmented countries have been able to preserve political stability"(Pappalardo 1981). Theoretical accounts are concerned with explaining stability over time in societies characterized by deep vertical cleavages, exploring factors driving its success or its negative effects (Barry 1975; Lustick 1979).

Studies of Lebanese consociationalism also build on Lijphart's prerequisites of elite cooperation¹ and conditions for the maintenance of consociational democracy². Initially portrayed as "the Switzerland of the Middle East", the eruption of the 1975 civil war stimulated a wave of analyses of Lebanon that attributed its failure to extreme sectarian divisions, tackling the political system in domestic terms (Hudson 1976). The crisis of the Lebanese system following UNSCR1559/2004 sparked a new wave of contributions, which challenge the adequacy of consociationalism for plural societies undergoing democratic transitions, but also focus primarily on domestic politics.

For Simon Haddad, Lebanon rather mimics consociationalism, without fully fitting the model: the absence of open dialogue, the lack of loyalty to the country and the primary allegiance of

¹ Awareness of the dangers inherent in fragmented systems, commitment to system maintenance, ability to transcend subcultural cleavages and to forge appropriate solutions that can satisfy the demands of subgroups.

² The existence of a multiple balance of power with no segment having a majority; a multiparty system in which representatives are elected on a segmental logic; a relatively small population; the existence of external threats and feelings of vulnerability among political elites; the existence of society-wide loyalties and a sense of common identity; the absence of extreme socio-economic segmental inequalities; and a prior tradition of elite accommodation.

Lebanese people to their sects, as well as the mix of historical legacy of conflict and the contemporary lack of trust in institutions strengthen group identities, hinder cooperation and reconfirm consociationalism can only produce a short-term end to a conflict (Haddad 2009). For Imad Salamey, the performance of the parliament and the electoral system are the principal factors that impede the stabilization of Lebanon, together with socialization systems, demographic dynamics and spatial distribution dilemmas (Salamey and Payne 2008; Salamey 2009).

For John Nagle, the challenges lay in consociationalism's predisposition to "freeze existing divisions and to result in political immobilism" (McCulloch 2014, 502), impacting the conceptualization of ethnicity and the transition to a non-sectarian state (Nagle 2016). However, although it is widely accepted "Lebanon's democratic development is a necessary condition to maintain the system" (Di Mauro 2008, 466), some argue "Lebanon is not yet ready to adopt a completely secular system" (S. Makdisi and Marktanner 2009, 14).

The economy and the media are also explored in literature as factors that may determine Lebanon's vulnerability to conflict. The country's economic structure "favors wealthy elites that, in turn, use their wealth and access to the state to strengthen their hold over communal clients" (Orsborn, Cox, and Sisk 2014, 1). The media also plays an important role in "shaping identities, offers competing visions of Lebanon, and is often used to manipulate public opinion" (Harb 2006).

All these accounts could be categorized as a mix of institutional approaches, elite approaches and development approaches, often mixed in functionalist arguments explaining political instability in Lebanon. Although many of them acknowledge the importance of regional and international security threats for political instability, few use international approaches to study consociational democracy in Lebanon.

Among the first wave of contributions, Dekmejian stands out for considering the risks of using a Western model to study a Middle Eastern country, discerning three competing levels and symbols of allegiance - subnational, national and supranational, he outlines “the dialectical progression from one level to another has been repeatedly hampered” (Dekmejian 1978, 263). A more recent analysis indicates the “effective implementation [of consociationalism] depends on outsiders – Syria, Israel, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the US”, separating the causes of instability into internal and external (Jabbra and Jabbra 2001). Salmey acknowledges “the expansion of sectarian compradorialism and international proxy roles played by competing client groups” after the Syrian pull-out (Salamey 2009, 94). Others touch upon the role of Hezbollah as a state-sanctioned regional political actor resulting from sectarian legacies (Barakat et al. 2015, 155).

Yet, few of these accounts prioritize external threats and their effects on political stability. Coined by Lijphart only as conducive factors for the stabilization of consociational systems, external security threats can also have effects on the prerequisites for consociation, especially in MENA, because social groups functioning in the system have clientelistic ties to external actors. Foreign threats trigger processes that can shift commitments to system maintenance and alter the meaning of fragmentation, they can impede political elites’ ability to transcend cleavages and forge common solutions, whereas in time they can even shift power-balance within the consociational system.

Among the few contributions that address the importance of external powers for the success of consociationalism in Lebanon is Ohannes Geukjian’s “Lebanon after the Syrian Withdrawal”. Geukjian underlines that the “key consociational theorists, such as Lijphart and O’Leary, have underestimated the importance of external factors in undermining existing power-sharing rules; the post-2005 failure in Lebanon is caused by the absence of constructive external intervention” (Geukjian 2017).

However, this contribution focuses on macro-processes that altered political stability but does not explore how political elites' perceptions of external factors determined reactions to security threats. The level at which securitization processes occur is determined by psychological and functional constructs of power (Lustick 1993; Schmitt 2005; Krabbe 1922). Because most of the determinants of political stability explored in existing analyses of Lebanese consociation derive from functional aspects, the current study explores Lebanese elites' perceptions of 'external threats'.

The study builds on the premise that perceptions are influenced by the embeddedness of the context in which actors reside (Given 2008, 607), but follows an overall critical realist approach, recognizing "reality as something that exists independently of those who observe, but that is only accessible through the perceptions and interpretations of participants" (Ormston et al. 2003).

The paper implies all social structures possess causal mechanism that can explain processes in the realm of reality (Fletcher 2017). The actual layer of critical realism represents the first section of the study and answers the following research question: Did the end of Syrian hegemony increase in political instability in Lebanon? Concerned with objective reality, the section shows political instability increased in Lebanon after the Independence Intifada, based on analyses of primary and secondary sources complemented by expert interviews.

The second section of the study consists of the empirical layer and investigates why Lebanon did not follow the consociational literature pattern after 2005. The chapter explains political instability through political elites' perceptions of security threats: elites disagree fundamentally on how to build security for Lebanon; clustered into two competing security building processes, their perceptions of threats increase political instability. The third section explores international and regional dynamics, seeking to show their impact on Lebanese government formation in 2018.

A mix of elite interviews and analyses of politicians' public statements were used as foundation for a variable based comparison between their perceptions of threats to Lebanon. Semi-structured interviews with active members of political parties were conducted in May 2018 (after the parliamentary elections), based on the same set of questions areas for all interviewees. In some cases, the identity of some interviewees will not be disclosed as per their request for anonymity.

II. Consociationalism and Political Stability in Lebanon after 2005

After 2005, Lebanon exemplified the paradox of contemporary democracies: “success and failure go hand in hand” (Hobson 2018, 44). Did the end of Syrian hegemony increase political instability in Lebanon? The PRS Index shows significant fluctuations in Lebanon’s stability after 2000 (Figure1), while the WGI indicate a consistent decrease in political stability, rule of law and governance effectiveness (Figure2).

Political instability was largely induced by elite behavior: “what elites do or what happens to them is very important for understanding the stability of a political system” (Ake 1975). The following sections focus on contingencies affected and effected by Lebanese elite behavior, in the form of presence of violence, governmental longevity, decision-making effectiveness, and structural change. If political stability is “the regular flow of political exchanges” (Ake 1975, 237), then irregularities resulted from forced change or attempts to force change are accounted as indicators of political instability (Dowding and Kimber 1983, 240).

II.1 The Independence Intifada

The Independence Intifada was the consequence of a precipitant event: PM Rafik Hariri’s assassination. The popular protests that followed were the result of a decline in the public belief that governing elites were worthy of support (Useem and Useem 1979). However, what perpetuated the crisis was a result of elite behavior and external intervention.

After PM Hariri’s assassination in February 2005, up to 20.000 anti-Syrian protesters gathered in Beirut (Short 2005). They claimed the government should resign, demanded Syrian military withdrawal, the establishment of an international UN tribunal to investigate Hariri’s death and the resignation of the heads of the intelligence services. The former PM’s funeral procession

was attended by over 150.000 and turned into “an outpouring of anti-Syrian fury” (*The Economist* 2005).

The international community’s endorsement of protestor claims had ramifications: After George W. Bush and Jacques Chirac declared their support for the UNIIIC, PM Omar Karami resigned on February 28 and shortly Bashar Al-Assad announced Syria will leave Lebanon.

Although the events resembled a revolutionary moment, political elites’ power to mobilize protestors curbed the revolution. Hassan Nasrallah called for national demonstrations against “the clear intervention of the US and France in Lebanese internal affairs” (Wilson 2005). On March 8, an estimated 500.000 Lebanese took part in the demonstrations opposing the UNSCR 1559/2004 rendering Syrian presence in Lebanon illegitimate. On March 14th, 800.000 people gathered in the city center in an anti-Syrian counter-demonstration that became the biggest protest in Lebanese history (*BBC News* 2005). March 8th and March 14th became two opposing parliamentary coalitions.

As the two camps retaliated, Lebanon was torn between *the old* and *the new* visions of Lebanese foreign policy. President Emile Lahoud reappointed pro-Syrian Karami as PM, who vowed to bring all factions together under a unity government, but failed (Sturcke 2005). After Karami’s second resignation due to recurrent protests, Lahoud appointed Najib Mikati - a consensus candidate, as PM.

II.2 From Compromise to the July War

The 2005 elections and government formation resembled temporary stability, “in pursuit of shared political goals for adjusting to changing conditions” (Hurwitz 1971). After Syrian troops completed their withdrawal on April 26, “elections were held for the first time without Syrian interference” (Haddad 2018).

The elections witnessed the biggest elite replacement in Lebanon's history: 46% of elected MPs entered the Parliament for the first time. Due to Michel Aoun's return from exile and his participation in elections, the Christian seats were subject of the biggest renewal – the FPM became the largest Christian block in the Parliament. Saad Hariri's list emerged victorious, with Future Movement winning 36 seats within the 69 seats won by the March 14 Alliance. The March 8 Alliance got 57 seats. Following only one month of negotiations, President Lahoud validated the nomination of Future Movement's Fouad Siniora as PM. The new cabinet was a compromise between pro-Syrian Lahoud and anti-Syrian Hariri and included Hezbollah members for the first time. However, the compromise was short-lived.

The tension between state capacity and regime stability surfaced when Nabih Berri convened the National Dialogues at the beginning of 2006 (Andersen et.al. 2014, 1307). The Dialogues were a “damage-limitation exercise meant to stabilize the political situation” by facilitating inter-party dialogue about the most divisive issues in Lebanese politics that went beyond government-formation consensus: the UNIIIC, electoral reform, relations with Syria, the return of Israeli occupied Lebanese-claimed territory, and Hezbollah's weapons (K. Makdisi 2006). As FPM and Hezbollah signed an MOU coining a common National Dialogue Strategy, tensions mounted over the National Defense Strategy (NDS), which revolved around discussions about disarming Hezbollah. The talks were postponed several times and had limited results.

Since the March 14 parliamentary majority was narrow, the anti-Syrian block “internationalized the struggle”, by bringing the UNIIIC to the frontline (Hazbun 2016, 1058). External actors fueled the power-sharing conflict in Lebanon and aggravated the consociational regime's incapacity to be self-reinforcing. Although they lacked the parliamentary majority for the decision, leaders of the Government called for the establishment of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL), to which the UNSC responded positively with the unanimously adopted

UNSCR1664/2006. The move bypassed March 8's opposition, forcing them to walk out of government, and proved to challenge the legitimate constitutional order, coined by Hurwitz as an indicator of political instability.

If the state managed instability by organizing elections and forming a government, it was unable to frame the NDS. As tensions grew, on July 12, in the shadow of the ongoing disputes about Lebanon's Southern border, Hezbollah attacked Israeli positions on the Blue Line North to Shtula, killing 3 Israeli soldiers and capturing 2, seeking to trade them for Lebanese prisoners held in Israel. Part of the same operation, Hezbollah launched missiles into Israel, hitting the area of Even Manhem. The government distanced itself from Hezbollah's actions. Israel responded with an assault in Lebanon using planes, tanks and gunboats. 1200 civilians were injured in Lebanon, leaving 1.191 dead. The duration, intensity and amplitude in violence uncovered that "the weakening of power sharing was accompanied by an increases in violence" (Lijphart 2008, 56). UNSCR1701/2006 called for a ceasefire that was accepted by the Hezbollah and the Israelis.

The July War unfolded all dimensions of instability in Lebanon: military violence escalated, and decision-making ran into stalemates that could only be unlocked through forced structural change: political instability manifested through the contestation of the rules of the game by political players.

After the cessation of military operations, the March 8 block returned to opposing the UNIIIC and the STL through politics. In November 2006, two days before the government was due to discuss the UNIIIC, all five Shi'a ministers in the government resigned. As "the length of time in office is one of the most easily quantified views of political stability", the resignations unfolded into a political crisis (Hurwitz 1971): because the Constitution required 9 out of 24 ministers to resign for the fall of the government, the cabinet remained valid and the Lebanese parliament voted and passed the draft UNIIIC document, based on a constitutional

two-thirds majority. Lahoud and Berri accused the government was unconstitutional because the Shi'a were no longer represented.

II.3 Forced Structural Change

With no constitutional arms left, Amal, Hezbollah and the FPM launched a series of street demonstrations demanding a Shi'a veto power in the government. Demonstrations continued for 17 months, and tensions increased as the debate shifted from the UNIIIC file to the presidential election. While Saudi Arabia, the US and France were providing the March 14-led government with political and economic assistance, the March 8 forces vowed to continue protesting until the government would fall (Ghazal and Hawley 2006).

All the attempts to elect a new president failed, because March 14 was unable to ensure the constitutionally required two-thirds majority and consensus was off the table. Both camps tried to maneuver around the ambiguous constitutional article³ setting the presidential election procedure: March 14 politicians argued that the inability to elect a president with a two-thirds majority in the first round should have allowed the parliament to fill the position with a simple majority vote in the second round; Hezbollah and its allies insisted that the presidential election invariably necessitates a two-thirds majority.

In an attempt to support the March 8 Block, during his last day in office, Lahoud issued an order indicating the LAF should fill the vacuum of the vacant Presidency (*BBC News* 2007). However, the President is unable to declare a state of emergency without the support of the government. Starting November 2007, the Siniora Government remained the interim following the end of the Presidential mandate.

³ Article 49 of the Constitution states the President is elected with a two-thirds majority in the first round, without explicit provisions about the following rounds.

As the Arab League Summit held in Damascus failed to mediate between opposing factions “Lebanon’s political scene remained unstable” (EIU 2008). In May 2008 the government “crossed a red line when it decided to go after Hezbollah’s communications network” (Stratfor 2008). Because political opposition was fruitless, the “relative utility of violence as means for value attainment” for Hezbollah and its allies surpassed any other possible strategies (Gurr 1970, 156): on May 7th, violence erupted as followers of Hezbollah took over Beirut.

The irregularity “modified the system of political exchanges and altered the regular pattern of political exchange” (Ake 1975). As inter-sectarian confrontations extended, the Council of the Arab League moved to stop the violence. The Doha meeting bringing together leaders of Lebanese political parties resulted into an agreement to end violence, elect consensus candidate Michel Suleiman as President, redraw the electoral constituencies in accordance to the district system and granted governmental veto power to the opposition by redistributing ministerial seats⁴. A new Cabinet headed by Fouad Siniora was formed in July 2008. The Doha Agreement proved the consociational system’s “inability to avoid changes in its basic structural arrangement, featuring a break into the continuity of its form and pattern” (Hurwitz 1971, 457).

In the 2009 elections, incumbent March 14 block got 71 seats and by the end of June 2009 and Hariri was appointed as PM. Although parties seemed to agree on a new power-sharing formula for the distribution of ministries, Hariri was unable to form a government until December 2009. The March 14 block was further weakened when the PSP withdrew from the alliance.

The struggle moved back to the international level in March 2010, when the STL summoned several members of Hezbollah for questioning and Nasrallah called on Lebanon to boycott the Tribunal. In search of consensus, the National Dialogues were reconvened, upholding their previously unsolved agenda, but without featuring any results. In January 2011, in

⁴ 16 seats to the majority, 11 to the opposition, and 3 to the President.

the aftermath of the failed Saudi-Syrian initiative to mediate between the government and the opposition in Beirut, Hezbollah and its allies used their governmental veto in response to the STL, orchestrating the fall of the government (Chulov 2011; Al Tamimi 2011) . By June 2011 the STL issued arrest warrants for members of Hezbollah, whose leader declared they will not allow the arrest. The March 8 - PSP backed new PM - Najib Mikati was only able to form a government after five months of negotiations.

II.4 New regional struggle

By April 2012, “the unrest in Syria had paralyzed politics in Lebanon, as rival camps remained concerned about spillover of violence”(EIU 2012). After the beginning of Syrian conflict, small-scale protests occurred during 2011 in Lebanon, featuring violent clashes between pro and anti-Assad factions in Beirut and Tripoli. Hezbollah deployed troops on Syrian territory from 2012 onwards, in support of the Assad regime. The group also fought alongside the LAF on Lebanese soil in Aarsaal and in Tripoli to prevent ISIS penetration into Lebanon. Anti-government protests turned violent in August 2015.

Not only Lebanon entered a period of intermittent violence in 2013, but it also faced a new series of institutional crises. PM Mikati resigned, due to tensions with the March 8 members of government. Future Movement Tammam Salam was assigned to form a new government in April; the Parliament only passed a vote of confidence in the new cabinet a year later, as Salam threatened to resign in several instances. With disagreements about the electoral law persisting, elections were postponed twice - first from June to November 2014, then up to 2017; Parliament cited Syria-related security concerns. Meanwhile, President Suleiman’s term ended in May 2014, leaving Lebanon, again, without a President.

The following years showed that international and regional stability is critical for Lebanese politics because it acts as framework for internal settlements (O’Leary 1987, 25). After March

8-allied Aoun was elected president in October 2016, Saudi Arabia became increasingly concerned with Iran picking up speed in the region and contributed to the resignation of two Lebanese PMs: Tammam Salam resigned to be replaced with Saad Hariri in December 2016; in November 2017 PM Saad Hariri resigned from the Cabinet featuring Hezbollah members, in a televised speech from Saudi Arabia. Unlike Salam, Hariri revisited his resignation.

In May 2018, parliamentary elections took place in Lebanon under an electoral law that was finally agreed upon in June 2017. The Hezbollah-Amal block made a strong statement in elections, winning 28 seats; allied FPM won another 20, at the expense of Hariri's party that lost a third of its seats..

II. 5 Non-state violence and political assassinations

The incidence of non-state violence and terrorist attacks in Lebanon increased after 2005, reaching peaks in 2008 and in 2012 (Figure3, Figure4). The targets were diverse, ranging from government institutions, police and military buildings or personnel, to private business, strategic infrastructure or private individuals.

If bombings have been the most common type of attack (Figure5), targeted political assassinations confined political elites. In 2006, Minister of Industry Pierre Amine Gemayel was shot with an automatic rifle after his car was blocked in a crowded street in Beirut. MP Walid Eido was killed by a car bomb detonated by remote control in Beirut in June 2007. Intelligence officers Wissad Eid and Wissam al-Hassan were killed by car bombs in 2008 and 2012.

II. 6 Conclusion

Since 2005, Lebanon witnessed an increase in political instability, featuring extensive violence, political movements opposed to the existing system, governmental crises, contestation of constitutional order, ineffective decision-making, and civil society systemic protests.

Almost three years with a vacant presidency, lengthy cabinet negotiations and inter-party violence, contingencies were largely generated by interactions between political elites. As political international and regional cleavages deepened between the Russia-Iran-Syria-March 8 axis and the US-France-Saudi Arabia-March 14 axis, Lebanese political elites reflected the regional and international context.

The revolutionary moment following PM Hariri's assassination was curbed by elites' power to mobilize protestors. In 2005 consensus was compromised by the 'hybrid sovereignty' of the Lebanese state and the incapacity to agree on the NDS, which resulted into the July war (Bacik 2008). In 2008, Hezbollah and its allies forced structural change through violence, by brokering an agreement that would increase their political power to block the UNIIIC and the STL. The unrest in Syria has paralyzed politics, as Lebanon entered a new period of intermittent violence and institutional crises.

To explain the increasing political instability of the Lebanese consociational system, the following section explores elite perceptions of foreign threats to Lebanon as rationale for the emergence of competing security clusters.

III. Elite Perceptions of Insecurity

According to consociationalism literature, external threats to the state contribute to the system's reinforcement and political stability (Lijphart 1968, 1969, 1975, 2008). Although external threats to the state of Lebanon existed after 2005, the consociational system was unable to generate "peaceful settlements due to *issue indivisibilities*" (Fearon 1995, 382) and domestic political actors resorted to coercive measures for "compelling the enemy to do their will" in several instances (Clausewitz, Howard, and Paret 1984). Why didn't Lebanon follow the pattern depicted in consociational literature after 2005?

In consociationalism literature, 'foreign threat' is conceptualized in a positivist perspective, which implies a traditional approach to security, where threats are objective and shared among political elites. Yet, in Lebanon security is far from state-based. Firstly, globalization externalized internal issues and internationalized external ones (Collins 2007). Secondly, because the Lebanese state is unable to "use legal mechanisms backed by certain coercive powers to create consistent enforcement", democratic control surpasses its capabilities (Archibugi 2012, 200). Thirdly, if "all significant concepts of modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts" (Schmitt 2005), the "tension between visions of divine and popular sovereignty" in Islamic thought also challenge traditional security (March 2013, 316).

In Lebanon the government is only one actor constructing security among others and the state remains a "field of power marked by the use and threats of violence" (Migdal 2003, 16). Because the principal focus of insecurity is society, understanding the effects of insecurity on consociationalism requires operating with a broader perspective of security.

The Copenhagen School extends security to multiple levels and sectors of analysis. From a sectorial perspective, although sectors are inseparable parts of complex wholes, in Lebanon the political and the military sectors weight the most. From a level perspective, the case of Lebanon

is rather subject of *security constellations* (Buzan and Waever 2007) or ‘global security assemblages’ (Abrahamsen and Williams 2011): actors are not clearly located, because they act in part on the subunit level, and in part on the subsystem and system ones (Buzan, Waever, and Wilde 1998, 7).

A large body of work argues securitization in Lebanon occurs at sect-level: “ethnicity matters—for violence, democratic stability, institutional design, economic growth, individual well-being, and so on” (Chandra 2006, 400). However, on the cultural level, studies show differences in Lebanese attitudes and value orientations do not fall on religious rifts (Moaddel, Kors, and Garde 2012, 1).

Because political elites’ positions in relation to foreign actors encompassed their domestic policy choices after 2005, ethnicity-based explanations of political instability fall short. Moaddel et. al show that “nationalist aspirations were compromised, and sectarianism strengthened when different sections of Lebanese society opted to ally with a foreign power, as the Shi’is allied with Iran and Syria and the Sunnis with Saudi Arabia” (Moaddel, Kors, and Garde 2012, 28).

Mobilization of segments of society falls on sectarian lines, because “the insecurity of ruling elites within their domestic sphere plays a significant role in shaping the dynamics of insecurity” (Buzan and Waever 2007, 187). However, elites’ decisions to trigger mobilization follow larger fluid patterns of alliances with external and internal forces in the overall structures of security (Buzan and WæVer 2009, 256; Hazbun 2016, 1054).

Political elites are aligned with political parties that have been the backbone of political processes. Unlike other Arab countries in which the development of political parties was hindered by authoritarianism, consociational power-sharing in Lebanon enhanced the importance and competitiveness of political parties.

Despite the complexities of the Lebanese political mosaic, the system is still largely centered on party-based politics. These groups are also at the forefront of security, because “in the war years, political parties were the most predisposed and the most well-equipped actors to engage in armed conflict” (el Khazen 2003, 610).

As they transitioned from and to armed militias throughout their existence, Lebanese parties are naturally inclined to “abuse extreme forms of politicization [of security] to achieve specific political objectives and consolidate their grip on power” (Emmers 2007, 113).

III.1 What is threatened?

Irrespective of the threat in relation to which political parties in Lebanon build security, after 2005 political actors have invoked primarily *the nation* or *the state of Lebanon* as a referent object, “building on Lebanity” (Al Mawala 2018).

Cleavages are primarily political. The Christian parties were divided between the two opposing political factions, with Kata’eb and the Lebanese Forces joining the March 14 and Michele Aoun’s FPM and the Marada Movement on the side of the March 8 block. The small Armenian parties were also split between the two alliances, with the Social Democrat Hunchakian Party and the Armenian Democratic Liberal Party siding with March 14, whereas the Tashnag Armenian Revolutionary Federation joined the March 8. The Druze PSP joined March 14, only to drop out of the movement in 2009, and to decisively support “Hezbollah-backed Mikati” as PM of Lebanon (*Reuters* 2011). The only seemingly consistent sectarian cleavage in Lebanese politics is the Sunni-Shi’a divide, which puts in opposition the Freedom Movement and the Hezbollah-Amal coalition.

Lebanese political parties have increasingly converged on “enabling a call for urgent and exceptional measures to deal with threats” to the state of Lebanon (Buzan and Waever 2007, 491). Saad Hariri, leader of the Future Movement has repeatedly declared “my focus is my

state” (Hariri 2018). On the opposite side, during the 2018 electoral campaign, Hezbollah has called frequently for unity among sects by extending their ‘relative deprivation’ rhetoric’ to surpass the Shi’a community: “the Bekaa region has been a sectarian diversity that must be preserved; people of all denominations and sects suffer from the same deprivation and tough security situation affecting us all” (Nasrallah 2018a). In 2008, before taking over Beirut, the Secretary General of Hezbollah asked, “who will defend Lebanon, if Hezbollah is disarmed?”, reiterating “the Lebanonization of Hezbollah” (Abu-Lughod and Warkentin 2012, 36, 32).

PSP’s Walid Jumblatt cheered for “one voice, one flag” (Fisk 2005) in the “historical moment in 2005 when all Lebanese people, from all sects, were united” (PSP Member 2018). “Let us talk as Lebanese people and as Lebanese parties” said a PSP member during a 2018 interview (PSP Member 2018). In 2015, FPM’s leader, Michele Aoun, reiterated “we have different confessions, but we are the same citizens and we have the same nationality” (Aoun 2015).

If the Kata’eb contests the legitimacy of Hezbollah, they derive their criticism from the argument that Hezbollah does not prioritize the interests of the Lebanese state, but represents foreign interests: “Hezbollah is not a Lebanese party, because they are supplied, and they take their orders from Iran and from Syria, hence they do not have the highest interest of the State of Lebanon, but they have the highest interest of Syria and Iran” (Abdallah 2018) . Similarly, the head of Lebanese Forces, Samir Geagea was declaring “our participation with Hezbollah in the same government could also mean that we are participating in a government that stands by President Bashar al-Assad's regime, which could be very damaging to Lebanon” (Geagea 2014).

Whereas the Armenian groups tend to focus more on their ethnic identity in their rhetoric, their stance does not contest the legitimacy of the Lebanese state, but derives primarily from their minority protection agenda. Although in opposition to Kata’eb, the Tashang interviewee also based their answer on national interest when commenting on the legitimacy of the Hezbollah:

“as long as Hezbollah’s agenda is Lebanese, I believe it [Hezbollah] is beneficial for Lebanon” (Tashnag Member 2018).

Identity is “not a fact of society, it is a process of negotiation among people and interest groups” (Buzan and Waever 1997, 244). In light of failing pan-Arabism, Lebanese politicians found their way towards formulating what ‘everyone can and should have in the modern world – a nationality’ (Anderson 2003, 49). However, as Lebanon witnessed increasing political instability, discursive ‘Lebanity’ did not provide an answer to the question of whether “constitutional power is exercised or remains only on paper” (Migdal 2003, 61).

III.2 The new security context

UNSCR1559 fundamentally altered regional security patterns. In response to Syria’s push for the extension of the presidency of its Lebanese ally Emile Lahoud, the UNSC imposed sanctions on Syria for not respecting the Taaif Agreement, which rendered its presence in Lebanon legitimate for only two years (*The Taif Agreement*, 1989).

By 2004, the Druze community and the Sunni community joined the anti-Syrian block. PM Rafik Hariri’s relation to Bashar Al-Assad deteriorated rapidly. According to the UNIIIC report, when the two met in Damascus in August 2004, Assad threatened to “break Lebanon over [Mr. Hariri’s] head and Walid Jumblatt’s if Mr. Hariri (and presumably Mr. Jumblatt) did not agree to support the extension” (Detlev 2005, 5).

On 14 February 2005 an explosion in downtown Beirut killed PM Rafik Hariri. If the Hezbollah and its allies were explicit in arguing “Hariri’s assassination only served US interest” (Al Mawala 2018) and Nasrallah has repeatedly accused “the Israeli enemy of the assassination of PM Hariri” (*BBC News* 2010), Jumblatt testified to the STL in 2015, declaring that ‘Assad issued Hariri’s death sentence’ (*The Daily Star* 2015).

For the UN, Syria was unwilling to comply with UNSCR 1559 (Tür 2007, 114) and the assassination took place “against the backdrop of Hariri’s power struggle with Syria” (Letter UNSC, 2005). The dichotomy was the result of the interaction of two competing transnational patterns and normativities of security interdependence (Buzan and Waever 2007, 491; Abrahamsen and Williams 2011, 91).

III.3 Is Syria a threat?

Hariri’s assassination amplified the “fundamental shift in the position of international and regional actors *vis-a-vis* Syrian policies in Lebanon” (Kurtulus 2009, 198). These divisions translated primarily into the political sector.

Before 2005, Syria orchestrated Lebanon’s ‘inward’ and ‘outward’ security policy. Although the Syrians inhibited democratic decision-making in Lebanon, they also restricted the manifestation of regional and international power struggles in Lebanese domestic politics by controlling Lebanon’s ‘outward’ security policy. Concomitantly, irrespective of the type of methods implied, be they mediation or coercion (with the caveat that the latter was the rule rather than the exception), the Syrians solved consensus problems in Lebanon. If for some, “before 2005, the country was run properly” (Al Mawala 2018) and was “much safer” (Tashnag Member 2018), others consider Syrian presence to have had negative effects on consensus building, because “no one had the freedom to do anything, not even [Syria’s] allies” (Abdallah 2018); “before 2005 there was no decision-making at all” (Mhanna 2018).

Syrian orchestration was multidimensional. The Taif Accords stipulated “Lebanon should not be allowed to constitute a source of threat to Syria” (*The Taif Agreement*, 1989). Two years later, a joint Syrian-Lebanese Supreme Council was established (*The Treaty of Brotherhood* 1991). Strengthened by its legal-institutional legitimation, Syria had the capacity to enforce any law (Haddad 2018). Syria also maintained a pivotal influence in Lebanon by “manipulating

a wide range of Lebanese political and military organizations”⁵ (CIA, 1984) and could count on its allies “to execute the intelligence colonization of state” (Wege 2011, 9; Knudsen 2014, 9)

UNSCR1559 heralded Syria’s loss of control over Lebanon’s ‘outward’ security policy. For some, UNSCR1559 was decisive in “triggering opposition to Syrian troops” and political instability (Al Mawala 2018). For others, “using the word ‘destabilization’ for a UNSCR implies that stability means agreeing to what the most powerful local party wants” (Mhanna 2018). However, Syria continued to influence the ‘inward’ security policy of Lebanon, acting through Lebanese domestic actors that are members of the same security assemblage – political parties, members of the intelligence services or the LAF: because “the Syrians were not only military troops, their presence remained almost the same after 2005: voices of the Syrian regime could be heard in Lebanon’s institutions”(Kiwan 2018).

In 2005 Syria did not leave Lebanon, it shifted its tactics in response to the new international security context. The loss of Syria’s legal-institutional channel of orchestration in Lebanon transposed its top-down command into a bottom-up reprisal. As the Syrians were already “a part of the local fabric”, a wave of assassinations of vocal anti-Syrian journalists and politicians shook Lebanon (Mhanna 2018).

Politically, Syria “delegated its role to Hezbollah”, a member of the same security assemblage, whose political role expanded, increasing political instability (Haddad 2018). As the Future Movement became by far the biggest party of the Parliament after the 2005 elections, Hezbollah started blocking legislative proposals that threatened Syrian interests, generating numerous political deadlocks.

⁵ PLO, Amal, Hezbollah, PSP, the Sunni community and the Christian presidency.

When the March 14 block decided to call for the establishment of the STL in 2006 without the necessary parliamentary majority, the opposition walked out of the government, however with little effects. In 2008, the March 14 attempted to shut down Hezbollah's Iranian financed telecom network, which constituted the backbone of the Syrian intelligence infrastructure in Lebanon. With Shi'a ministers already absent from a government that remained constitutional, Hezbollah and its allies took the para-military path in demanding Shi'a veto power in the government.

After 2011, as the competing security axes were unfolding in the Syrian and Yemeni civil wars, Lebanon did not fall into violent conflict, even though spillover effects of the Syrian war were increasingly putting pressure on the consociational system. With Russia, Iran and Hezbollah directly involved in supporting the Syrian regime by September 2015, Hezbollah and its allies continued to block attempts to elect a new president in Lebanon. Soon after the Syrian regime started showing signs of recovery, in October 2016 pro-Syrian Michele Aoun was elected president.

By 2018, Hezbollah's electoral results render the group more power in the parliament, in accordance to the party's new strategy: "victories and achievements [of the resistance] must be protected by your voices [votes], the resistance needs political protection because of the international and regional conspiracy" said Nasrallah in a 2018 electoral speech (Nasrallah 2018b).

In May 2018 the Syrian regime is back on its feet, and Lebanese elites' perceptions of Syria remain clustered into two "conceptual frameworks which shape the way political phenomena is perceived and interpreted" (Freedman 1993, 120). Future Movement's Saad Hariri depicted the Syrian regime as a severe threat in multiple instances. In the first interview following his peculiar resignation from Saudi Arabia, Hariri stated "I have many enemies, the extremists and the Syrian regime; the latter issued a death sentence against me" (Hariri 2017c). Similarly,

Jumblatt declared “I will stick to my political and moral opposition [to the Syrian regime] [...]. I would rather commit suicide on my own terms but not go to Syria and check in with Bashar” (Jumblatt 2016). For Kata’eb members, Syria is the biggest internal and an external threat to Lebanon: “Syria has players inside the country that are able to ruin it from within, without any Syrian soldier crossing the border into Lebanon; [the Syrians] are able, without firing one single shot, to create problems in Lebanon (Abdallah 2018).

On the other side, for many the Syrian regime is not a threat to Lebanon: “the Syrians were here for two reasons: stability - in terms of preserving peace between Lebanese parties, and for the Israeli threat and the occupation in the South” (Tashnag Member 2018).

Michele Aoun declared in 2015 that he wishes the Russian intervention in Syria “would fix the government of Bashar Al-Assad” (Aoun 2015), which did not fall because it benefitted from the support of the resistance, Iran and Russia. Nasrallah also confirmed “Syria has friends that will not allow it to fall” (PRI, 2013).

Disagreements between Lebanese elites on whether Syria is a security threat to Lebanon increased political instability and will keep shaping security paradigms.

III.4 How should Lebanon respond to the Israeli threat?

There is wide political consensus among Lebanese political parties that Israel is a security threat to Lebanon. However, the two competing security assemblages translate into disagreements about how Lebanon should respond to the threat. Disputes extend over the military sector. The dichotomy has normative foundations in the legitimacy of functional actors, which springs from the question of trust in international institutions.

For Hezbollah and its allies, international institutions are ciphers for the legitimacy of state power (Koremenos et.al. 2001, 762; Buchanan 2011, 11). In the era of American hegemony,

“the most powerful states in the system create institutions so that they can maintain their share of world power, or even increase it” (Mearsheimer 1994, 13). Referring to US, French and Saudi intervention in Lebanon, Nasrallah declared on March 7th 2005 that the Lebanese “must convince each other that only true sovereignty means no intervention” (Wilson 2005). The parliamentary vote in favor of UNIIIC and the government’s attempt to suspend Hezbollah’s telecom network were all part of the Saudis’ plan to retaliate against the resistance and disarm it.

For Hezbollah and its allies, the international community did not fail to contain Israel, it does not have an interest to do so because of the “American-Israeli-Arab-Western conspiracy” (Hasan 2015). The Lebanese Westernized elites only declare they are pro-Palestine, but their policies never reflected that. The pro-Saudi groups in Lebanon accept Israel to close this chapter. The resistance has proven to be the only tool that achieved visible results against Israel. These results will remain the pillars of its popular support, irrespective of the success or failure of Hezbollah’s political branch: “having experience with the international community, the only way [to address the Israeli threat] is by building our own power to be able to fight back; the resistance is the only option” (Al Mawala 2018).

The PSP had an opportunistic pivotal stance in relation to Hezbollah’s weapons: “I evaluated the May 7 period and we were on the brink of getting trapped in a domestic conflict so I reverted to the roots of the PSP and the Jumblatt family in defending Lebanon from an Arab and Palestinian perspective” declared the leader of the party in 2011 (*The Daily Star* 2011).

On the other side, elites argue Israel can only be contained through the “so-called rules of state behavior” (Waltz 1979, 128): “we know that Israel has been a country that does not respect UNSCRs and we are against that, but that does not mean Lebanon can afford to disassociate with this international entity, because we need its protection” (Abdallah 2018). In 2017, Hariri declared “we will not compromise on the fundamentals: our view of the Assad regime and our

stance towards the illegitimate arms [of Hezbollah]” (MEM, 2017). “Sovereignty is being threatened by transnational actors”, therefore the existence of Hezbollah had only negative effects on Lebanese policy towards Israel (Buzan and WæVer 2009, 261). Hezbollah is, “in accordance to international law, an illegitimate non-state actor” (Mhanna 2018).

Lebanese political elites agree that the LAF lacks capacity to deter Israel (Figure6, Figure7). For some, Hezbollah is the reason why the international community did not contribute to increasing the LAF’s capacity – “Lebanon could not benefit from its friendship with many powerful countries, because one of the most important conditions for these powers to give weapons to the LAF is if there would be no alternative to the army”(Abdallah 2018). Hezbollah’s paramilitary only legitimates Israeli aggression and international concerns, impeding the military consolidation of the Lebanese state.

For others, the Hezbollah exists because the West did not arm the LAF and the Government repeatedly refused support from members of the opposing security assemblage – “Iran is offering support, we are refusing it. Russia is offering support, we are refusing it” (Al Mawala 2018).

The existence of military alternatives and the “heavy imposition from the global level” accentuates commitment problems among political parties in Lebanon in regards to its policy towards Israel (Buzan and WæVer 2009, 256). As long as multi-level members of the two security assemblages will lack either the will or the credibly to promise to adhere to a DDR⁶ agreement concomitantly, disputes over how to tackle the threat of Israel in Lebanon will enhance polarization and political instability (Walter 2017, 246).

⁶ Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration.

III.5 Elites disagree even in times of war

Hezbollah did not randomly revive the Arab-Israeli conflict. The beginning of the July war indicated that in a weak state such as Lebanon, “the identification of threats in the national security discourse indicate a greater concern with internal threats”, and that these internal threats are aligned with two competing multi-leveled patterns of security (Silva 2016, 7).

The Hezbollah-Syria-Iran-Russia axis was losing relative power in Lebanon, as the international community was keen on disarming the security assemblage’s remaining strong actor in the country. By July, for the Hezbollah, there was no question that the US-France-Saudi axis was carrying an international-legal offensive against it.

When “a declining power expects it might be attacked by a rising power in the future, preventive war in the present is rational” (Fearon 1995, 385). Hezbollah and Israel almost had an implicit arrangement to carry their confrontations in the Sheba’a prior to 2006. By attacking Israeli positions on the Blue Line North to Shtula and Even Manhem, Hezbollah knowingly triggered a disproportionate military response from Israel, which featured air strikes hitting near or on civilian objects and the destruction of key infrastructure (Human Rights Watch 2007).

Faced with few assets left for bargaining, despite the costs suffered for fighting, the July war was *ex-post facto* efficient for Hezbollah, opening a policy window. The assemblage attempted to tackle regime instability and ease domestic opposition to Syria by “using international conflict to divert attention from domestic problems and generate a ‘rally around the flag’ effect”(Davies 2016, 120). Accordingly, pro-Syrian President Emile Lahoud was emphasizing the urgency of the Israeli threat in a July 22 interview: “Massacres are happening in Lebanon. We are paying very high price. We have women, children, all are being hit by planes. In 2000 Hezbollah was the main liberator of our land. And at the time, the Lebanese army was and still

is with what is happening on the frontier, there is no animosity between the army and the resistance. The resistance are Lebanese”(CNN 2006).

Such securitization attempts offer insights into the stability of social attitudes towards security legitimacy and the possible future direction of security politics (Buzan, Waever, and Wilde 1998, 39).

At society level, the tactical move was temporary successful: according to an opinion poll carried out shortly after the truce, 86.9 per cent of the Lebanese citizens supported the confrontations carried out by the resistance against the Israeli aggression (Kurtulus 2009).

At elite level, international and regional allegiances undermined the coalescence of Lebanese political actors against the Israeli threat. PM Siniora rushed to distance the government from the Hezbollah raid: “the government was not aware of and does not take responsibility for, nor endorses what happened on the international border” (Myre and Erlanger 2006). If most politicians agree the July War was a defeat for the State of Lebanon, the March 14 saw UNSCR1701 as a defeat for Hezbollah, while the March 8 depicted it as a success of the resistance.

If the July war was not successful in increasing elite support for Hezbollah’s security legitimacy in Lebanon, its assemblage succeeded in rebalancing the regional and international conflict. The war drew attention to Hezbollah’s military power, increasing its domestic weight in relation to other political parties, which became more susceptible to negotiations to avoid unwanted military confrontations. UNSCR1701 settled favorably “the issue of the Lebanese prisoners detained in Israel” (UNSCR1701/2006) and although it featured the deployment of the LAF and the UNIFIL forces in the South, and an arms ban for which the US called specifically on Iran and Syria to respect, the UNSCR did little to contain Hezbollah: the LAF

– once fully a member of the same security assemblage and now at least partially attached to it is not an impediment for Hezbollah, and the UNIFIL has limited capacity.

The July war laid at the juncture between domestic, regional and global security dynamics, where Hezbollah acted as a policy entrepreneur by “packaging together securitizations from [the state level] into a higher and larger order” (Buzan and WæVer 2009, 257). Because “Lebanon cannot solve the problem of Palestine”, it becomes the confluence point of two mutually exclusive macrosecurities (Tashnag Member 2018).

III.6 Conclusions

The new context for regional and international security was mirrored in Lebanese domestic politics via political elites’ perceptions of security threats.

Although after 2005 political parties invoked a common referent object of security - the state of Lebanon, they disagreed fundamentally on how to build security.

Lebanese political elites disagree regarding whether the Syrian regime is a security threat to Lebanon, and these divisions translate primary into the political sector. Although elites agree Israel is a threat, they disagree on how to respond to it, disputes extending over the military sector. The Israeli threat did not even impress on the elites the need for internal unity when delivering a disproportionate military response against Lebanon during the July War.

Because disunity is caused by political parties’ memberships in competing macrosecuritizations, the following section briefly explores the international and regional dynamics undermining the coalescence of Lebanese political actors in 2018.

IV. Lebanon and the Middle East Cold War

If in consociational democracies, the cartel of elites is strengthened during periods of international crisis, then the successive MENA crises in the past decade should have increased the political stability of Lebanon.

The dynamics of the Middle East resemble “a cold war among a number of regional players, both states and non-state actors, in which Iran and Saudi Arabia play the leading roles” (Gause 2014, 3). The confrontations between the two are the interface of a global security constellation, where the competitors measure their power based on their ability to affect domestic politics across MENA.

At the global level, the Western block assumed the fall of the Iron Curtain was “the end point of mankind's ideological evolution” and produced the *existing order universalism*, which provided a framework for international security having the state at its core (Fukuyama 1989): “the survival of liberty in the US increasingly depends on the success of liberty in other lands” (Bush 2005). Although the current US administration toned down democracy promotion abroad, its foreign policy in MENA still functions within the lines of this macrosecuritization, resting on its regional and local partners’ need of US support rather than ethics in action.

The competing macrosecuritization has been shaped in opposition to the world order, opposition that became “an integral part of its *raison d’etre*, its core identity and principles” (Sitter 2003, 4). Vladimir Putin has repeatedly affirmed that “the US should not preach to Russia about democracy”, because “democracy cannot be exported from one country to another, like you cannot export revolutions or ideology” (Putin 2005).

At regional level, the “warm era” between Iran and Saudi Arabia started to turn cold following the 2003 US invasion of Iraq” (Regencia 2018), which had a domino effect (Abdulrazaq 2018).

Since, Iran's power in the Arab world has gotten stronger. The open confrontations between Hamas and Fatah and the failure of the Saudis to broker an agreement made Hamas' relationship with Iran grow. In June 2018, in Iraq, the Shi'a nationalist leader Muqtada al-Sadr's group won parliamentary elections and allied with Hadi al-Ameri, the leader of the Iranian backed militias to form government. Yemeni forces backed by the US-Saudi-led coalition failed to defeat the Iranian-backed Houthis. With Syria becoming central to Saudi interests, the Iranian-Russian backed al-Assad regime is recovering. Although it looked like Riyadh dealt Tehran a setback in 2005 in Lebanon, by 2018 Iranian influence in Lebanon is firm.

The spillover of global and regional transnational conflicts into domestic Lebanese politics was brought to the forefront in November 2017. Saudi Arabia had to respond to the Iranian offensive and show it still has the power to balance Iranian presence: PM Hariri resigned in a televised speech from Riyadh, in which he stated: "Iran only brings destruction wherever it goes, interfering in the affairs of Arab states, such as Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Bahrain and Yemen. In the past decades, Hezbollah was sadly able to create a de facto situation by the power of its weaponry which they claim is for the resistance, but it is used against our brothers. The evil that Iran sends to the region will eventually backfire on Tehran" (Al Arabiya English 2017)

As the Saudis were failing to contain the Iranian winning streak, the STL indicted five Hezbollah members in the 2005 assassination of Rafik Hariri. While Nasrallah dismissed the charges for being highly politicized, Hariri called on the electorate not to vote for those accused of the death of his father (*The Daily Star* 2018). On May 16, 2018, the U.S. and the members of the Gulf Cooperation Council imposed sanctions on 10 top Hezbollah officials, as well as several companies around the world suspected of money-laundering for the group.

At the domestic level, in June 2018 political stability in Lebanon depends on how fast the government will be formed (Kiwan 2018), and negotiations are directly dependent on the global and regional levels.

The US unfolded a wave of actions inciting Iran: “Americans are trying to provoke Saudi Arabia against Tehran by provoking inexperienced rulers of the region” (*Reuters* 2018). The US decision to retire from the Iran Nuclear Deal and the sanctions imposed on Hezbollah increase tensions.

The offensive attempt by the US-Saudi axis to roll-back Iran will only boost cohesion among the Russia-Iran-Syria-Hezbollah axis. Iranian President Hassan Rouhani declared that “Tehran and Moscow should establish a more “serious dialogue” on the future of the nuclear deal following US withdrawal from the agreement” (Al-Manar 2018) and reiterated that the US decision to leave the agreement “will make them soon regret it like never before in history” (The National 2018). The Iranian rockets launched at the Israeli occupied Golan Heights on May 9, 2018 brought the Iran-Israeli shadow war into the light (Ward 2018). The strikes were “a simulation for a larger war, [and] the message was [Iranian] infrastructure is strong there, the Saudi umbrella is weak” (Al Mawala 2018).

Israeli officials believe their response “has delayed expected Iranian attack on Israel - but hasn’t dented Iranians’ motivation to carry it out” (Kubovich 2018). Benjamin Netanyahu declared the Israelis are “determined to block Iran's aggression even if this means a struggle” (The National 2018).

With the unsolved NDS on the table and Hezbollah’s increasing political power, it is likely that Iran will attempt to display its power in Lebanon and complicate government formation. On May 24 Hariri was endorsed by a large parliamentary majority to form the government. Asked if there is a veto on Hezbollah’s participation in the new Cabinet, Hariri said “I only heard that

from the Lebanese media, this is the first time I hear it” (Mroue 2018). As “President Aoun will invite the leaders of political parties to a round table at the Baabda castle to discuss the NDS”, with Hezbollah sufficiently strong politically in Lebanon, Iran’s retaliation might prevail on their list of priorities during negotiations, in the detriment of national consensus (PSP Member 2018)

The concentric circles of power were mapped by Nasrallah: “although so far, I do not know Russia as well as I know Iran, there is no sign suggesting that Russian leaders are about to abandon the situation in Syria” (Hasan 2015), even if the “US ‘Zionist lobby’ pushed for Western strikes on Syria” (Fulbright 2018).

On the opposite side, Hariri has repeatedly called for support from the international community, expressed his gratitude to President Emmanuel Macron’s friendship (Hariri 2017b) and to Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, appreciating that “[the Lebanese] and the Saudi leadership are in full agreement” (Hariri 2017a).

Lebanon remains a complex of “external and internal inter-sectorial tensions”, with government formation highly dependent on international and regional security dynamics (Kiwani 2018). Many agree “the political system was designed to be run by an outside superpower, leaving the state behind as a low-key actor” and political parties highly dependent on third party support (Al Mawala 2018): “these powers are not only regional, international players are also involved” (Abdallah 2018). In 2018, Hezbollah’s domestic grip on power is likely to serve primarily Iran’s regional response to the US provocations, as stability in Lebanon will remain a regional gamble.

Conclusions

Political instability increased in Lebanon after 2005 because security is constructed by external actors. Consociationalism literature implies ‘foreign threats’ are objective, which entails a traditional approach to security, where threats are shared among political elites. However, in Lebanon the government is only one securitizing actor among others.

Because the principal focus of insecurity is society, political parties are securitizing actors and disagree fundamentally on how to build security. After 2005 parties undergone a common bottom-up process of ‘Lebanonization’, which brought about a common referent object of security - the state of Lebanon. Yet, elites disagree regarding whether the Syrian regime is a security threat to Lebanon, and these divisions translate into the political sector. Although elites agree Israel is a threat to Lebanon, they fundamentally disagree on how to respond to the threat, disputes extending over the military sector.

These sharp divisions that lay at the root of Lebanon’s increasing political instability derive from political parties’ memberships in two multi-leveled competing macrosecuritizations - the Russia-Iran-Syria-Hezbollah axis and US-France-Saudi Arabia-Future Movement axis.

The MENA is facing a cold war in which Iran and Saudi Arabia play the leading roles, connecting the global, regional and domestic levels through their competing alliances. With armed confrontations carried in Yemen and Syria, Lebanon remains a political battlefield. As the two security assemblages confront each-other through their domestic allies, “they embody permanent tensions across the levels” causing political instability (Buzan and WæVer 2009, 257).

Security created by “top-down processes”, has broader implications for consociationalism as a conflict resolution mechanism in MENA (Buzan, Waever, and Wilde 1998, 200).

Top-down security alters fundamentally the exercise of political power and the enhances commitment issues among political elites at domestic level. Especially in small countries such as Lebanon, “elites perceive their own political unit as inferior in capabilities to other political units with which they interact in the international system” (Lehmbruch 1975, 381). Consequently, domestic actors losing power will keep seeking external support to assist them to gain back their power in the government. Hence, prospects of external support become central to conflict onset and escalation (Gleditsch 2007, 296).

Top-down security fuels inter-sectarian tensions if regional or international players have common ethnic or religious features with the domestic actors they support. The replication of regional conflicts in domestic politics fuels inter-sectarian conflict and prevents “leaders of social groups with heterogeneous and overlapping memberships from adopting moderate positions” (Lijphart 2008, 28).

Although security is coined only as a conducive factor for the functioning of consociational systems in most literature, in fact security produces effects on the prerequisites of consociation: it can shift commitments to system maintenance, alter the meaning of fragmentation, impede elites’ ability to forge common solutions and shift power-balance. If security is constructed at society level, security itself becomes the very subject of consociationalism.

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Appendices

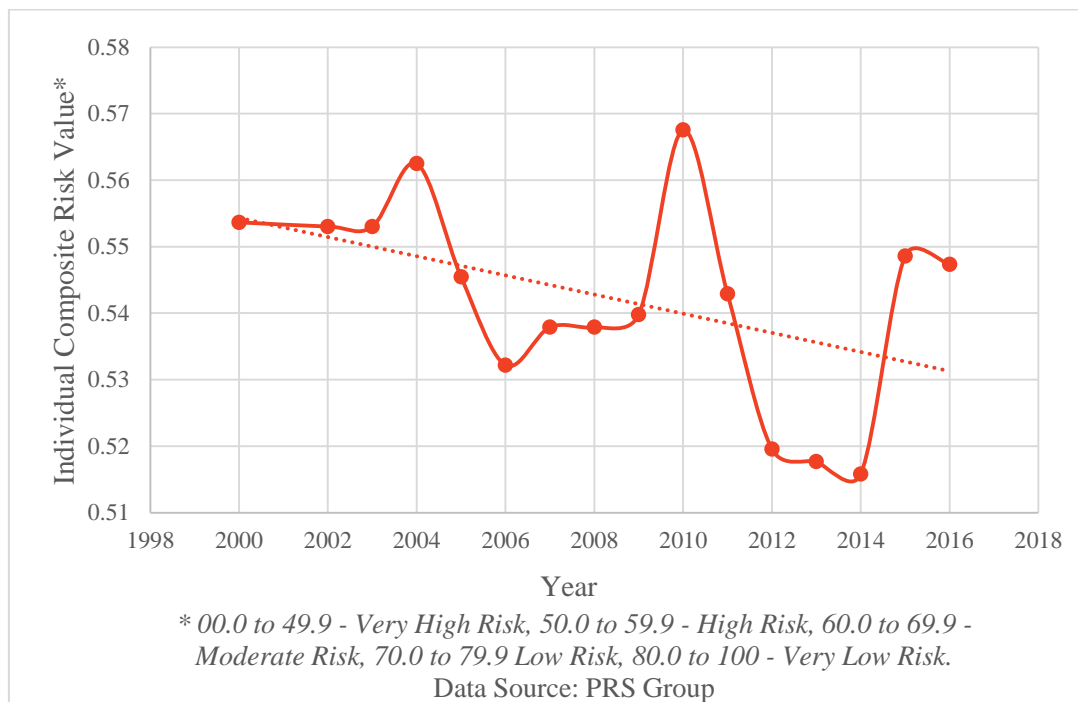


Figure 1. Individual Composite Risk Lebanon, 2000-2016

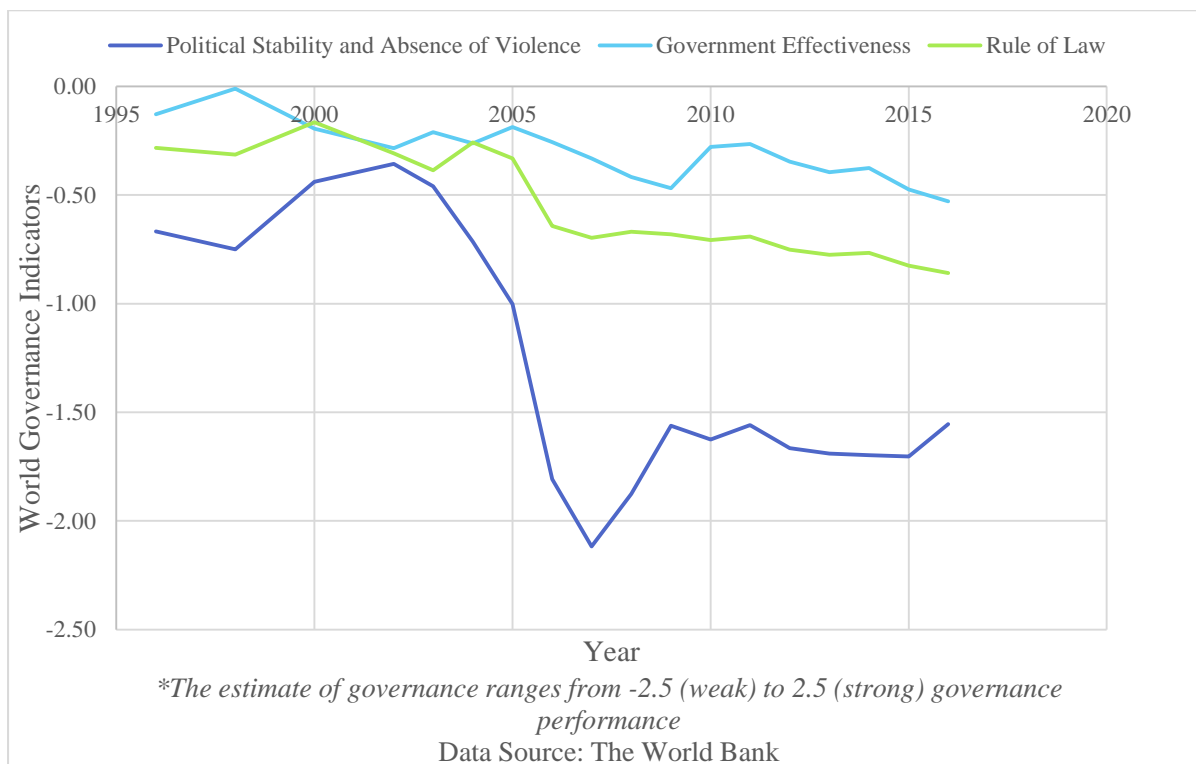


Figure 2. The Worldwide Governance Indicators Lebanon, 1995-2016

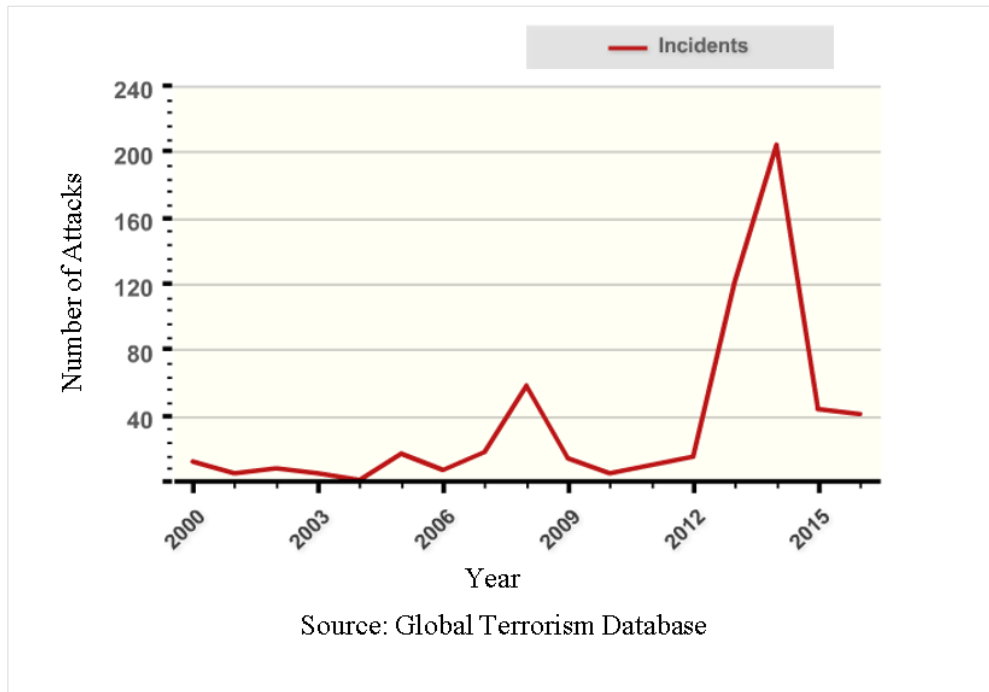


Figure 3. Terrorist Incidents in Lebanon, 2000-2016

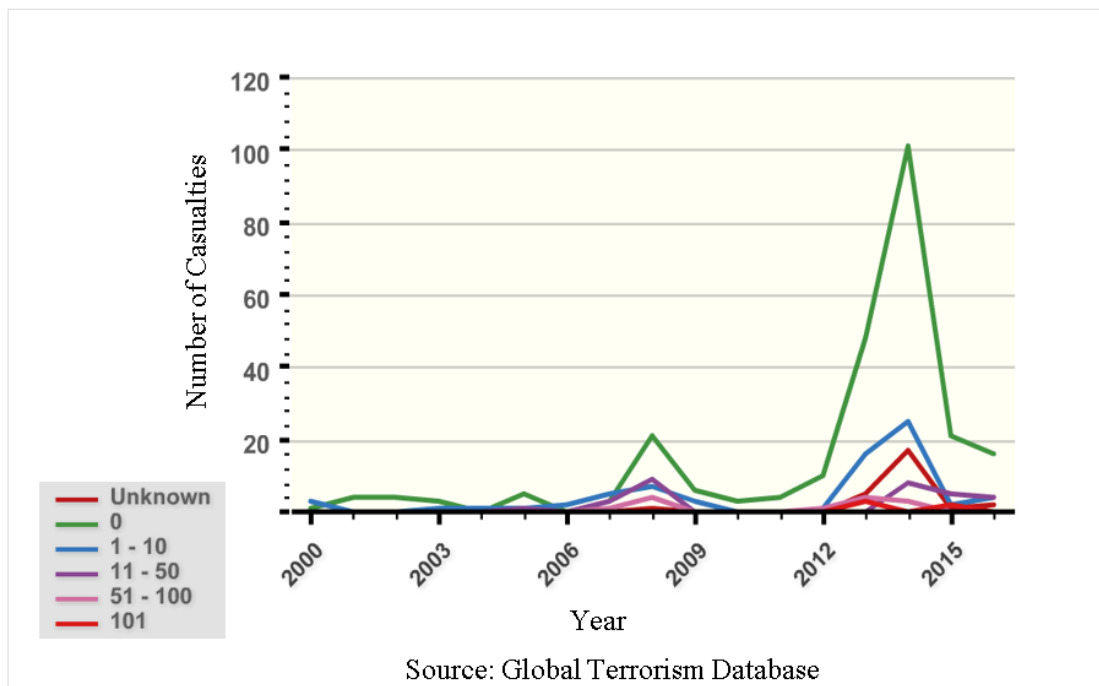


Figure 4. Number of casualties resulted from non-state violence in Lebanon, 2000-2016

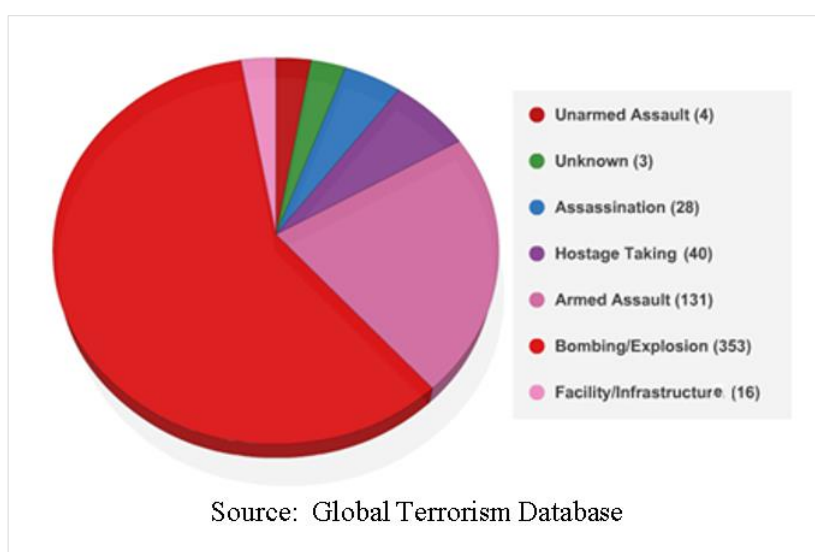


Figure 5. Non-state violence by type of attack in Lebanon, 2005-2016

Lebanon		OVERALL	Israel	
40	(0)	Air Defense Systems	459*	(12*)
73	(41)	Aircraft	648*	(91*)
510	(70)	Artillery	1,488	(0)
2,816	(114)	Ground Vehicles	12,131*	(611)
1,848*	(2,500*)	Guided Munitions	20,950*	(23,200)
76,400	(0)	Personnel	641,500	(0)
22	(0)	Ships	77*	(8)

Legend: (armaments in order), (*) estimations
Source: Qualitative Military Edge, Foundation for the Defense of Democracies

Figure 6. Military capacity comparison, Lebanon and Israel, 2018

Lebanon			Hezbollah		
OVERALL					
40		(0)	Air Defense Systems	200	(0)
73		(41)	Aircraft	30	(0)
510		(70)	Artillery	150,000	(0)
2,816		(114)	Ground Vehicles	500	(0)
1,848*		(2,500*)	Guided Munitions	2,213	(0)
76,400		(0)	Personnel	6,000	(0)
22		(0)	Ships	0	(0)
Legend: (armaments in order), (*) estimations					
Source: Qualitative Military Edge, Foundation for the Defense of Democracies					

Figure 7. Military capacity comparison, Lebanon and Hezbollah, 2018