



Lebanon between the Defense Strategy and the Dilemmas of Sovereignty

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Lebanon is not currently considered a strong state with a central government that controls Hezbollah-dominated war and peace decisions, and as a result, it is unable to develop a defense strategy based on scientific foundations and concepts in its current situation, which is witnessing external interventions, sharp political divisions, loss of identity, and economic collapse. Despite this, it has the soft and hard power instruments, as well as the ability to rebuild a state capable of adopting a defense policy that allows its Army to have a military strategy capable of protecting it from external threats while also ensuring human security for its citizens.

A review of the history of defense strategy dialogue sessions organized by the political party leaders since 2006 revealed the ruling powers' inability to reach an agreement among themselves for one main reason: the discussions at the national dialogue tables were mostly centered on Hezbollah's weapons and its leadership's monopoly of war and peace decisions against Israel within a cross-border project linked to Iran. As a result, there was no scientific or practical discussion on how to build a military policy for Lebanon, on which the majority of its constituents agreed. This reality has not altered but has worsened because the economic position in 2006 was outstanding in comparison to this stage, as it was experiencing growth despite the Israeli war against Lebanon in that year. Today, Lebanon is experiencing hyperinflation, the collapse of the national currency, an increase in poverty, and the presence of nearly 1.5 million Syrian refugees.

The last inclusive and productive national dialogue table was during the Former President Michel Suleiman's tenure, specifically in June 2012, when it issued what became known as the "Baabda Declaration," and the most important thing in it was the agreement to neutralize Lebanon from regional crises, particularly in Syria, but Hezbollah evaded the agreement days after its signing and became a major player on the Syrian arena, alongside the Syrian regime. Its role was later extended to Yemen to help the Houthi militia, an internationally recognized coalition that fights with the Saudi-led Arab coalition, in its war against the Yemeni government forces.

Hezbollah's involvement in conflicts outside Lebanon, alongside Iran, within the so-called "axis of resistance," and against the interests of Arab states in the Gulf, has harmed Lebanon's relationship with these countries and exacerbated the internal schism in the Lebanese arena, with some calling for Lebanon's withdrawal from the region's conflicts. At a time when Hezbollah and its allies insist on tying Lebanon to the axis of resistance, the Maronite Patriarchate has taken the helm for Lebanon's neutrality.

Based on the foregoing, Lebanon is in an abnormal situation that does not apply to anything in international relations theory because its system is a democratic parliamentary republic, and its decisions are subject to unique concepts that do not exist in international relations theory or international community norms. When Hezbollah and its allies have a majority in parliament and administration, democratic voting is sometimes used; when they do not have a majority, they insist on "Consensual Democracy," in which consensus is required, and any party can reject a decision.

The term "Charter" has also been incorporated into the literature of Lebanese politics, such that the rejection of representatives of one of the Lebanese people's main confessions stops or negates the majority's decision. Between "Consensual Democracy" and "charter," Hezbollah and its allies controlled the Lebanese government's decisions and limited the parliament's effectiveness in developing a defense policy or military strategy based on scientific criteria that enjoy popular support in Lebanon.

Risks and Defense Policy

Defense policy is often drafted by the state's political authority, which establishes the state's foreign policy, naming the hostile actors of the country and how the components of the state's power must be employed to neutralize or limit these threats. The military leadership determines the military strategy - or defense, as some call it - and tactics that will be used to safeguard the country's boundaries and sovereignty based on defense policy. The state wields four forms of power: diplomacy, the media, the economy, and the military. Diplomacy and the media, according to the American Professor Joseph Nye, are weapons of the soft power of the state, whereas the economy and the military are tools of the hard or hard power of the state. Some theories think that economics can be utilized as a tool of soft power, particularly by small and medium-level states.

External threats are nothing new for Lebanon. Even before winning independence in 1943, it was often invaded by troops en route to victories in Europe, Asia, or Africa. Lebanon's strategic location on the eastern Mediterranean's beaches and at the crossroads of three continents made it a must-passage for attacks from the east and west. Perhaps its geographical location, as well as the overlap with diverse cultures transported by invaders throughout history, contributed to the formation of this number of sectarian ideologies and the blending of Western and Eastern traditions into its civilization.

Lebanon was one of the founding members of the United Nations and the Arab League after its independence, and it signed a mutual defense agreement with the Arab states to oppose Israel. As a result, addressing the Israeli threat is nothing new for Lebanon but something it has been doing since the proclamation of Israel's formation on its southern border in 1948. There was a defense policy for dealing with Israel that was based on viewing it as an enemy and addressing it with both soft and physical power tools within the framework of the mutual defense pact with the Arab states. The Lebanese Army had a flexible defensive combat strategy that aimed to impede the advance of the outnumbering Israeli forces and train its members to use guerrilla tactics in the event of a lack of communication with a command to attrition the enemy and prevent him from achieving his field objectives.

While the Lebanese Army's tactics are delaying Israeli forces' advance, Lebanon's soft power tools are active through its strong relations with the UN Security Council, the Arab League, and other international organizations to obtain an international resolution forcing Israel to cease operations and withdraw from Lebanese territory. This tactic was used successfully more than once between 1948 and 1975, when the Lebanese civil war began, as witnessed by many military commanders and officials who lived through these periods and took part in its events. As a result, Hezbollah and its supporters' portrayal of the military's inability to combat Israel is inaccurate.

The Cairo Agreement of 1969 dealt a blow to the defensive strategy because it legalized Palestinian armed action from Lebanese territory, posing a threat to civil peace, and the government lost influence over war and peace decisions with Israel. The truth is that since the administration of US President Lyndon B. Johnson in the 1960s, the American-Western decision to arm Israel in a way that gives it permanent military superiority over its adversaries has made it difficult for any Arab country to win an all-out war against it, which has a monopoly on nuclear weapons in the Middle East. Even the October 1973 war was not a total victory for the Arabs, as the freeing of the Suez Canal was countered by the Israeli operation Deversoir and the recapture of the area in the Golan by Israeli forces that had been gained by Syrian forces at the start of the conflict.

As a result, the theory of defeating Israel and ending its existence is no longer accepted or convincing by Arab countries, which began signing peace treaties with them even before the start of the regional peace process in 1991, following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the birth of a new unipolar world order on which the United States, Israel's strategic ally, was founded.

Syria, which has had forces on Lebanese soil since 1976, has frozen its Golan front with Israel and has used Hezbollah and Palestinian and Lebanese factions in Lebanon as a tactic of pressure and attrition against Israel to better its bargaining position. Following Israel's withdrawal from southern Lebanon in 2000, Syria aided Hezbollah in monopolizing the resistance against Israel in southern Lebanon, and all leftist and Palestinian groups have since been barred from armed participation and ruled by Hezbollah in southern Lebanon. This has enhanced Iran's position in Lebanon and made it an effective tool for putting pressure on Israel's northern border. Although no UN documents proving Lebanon's ownership of the Israeli-occupied Shebaa Farms have been provided, the Lebanese government used these territories during the Syrian military presence in Lebanon to consider the Israeli withdrawal incomplete, thereby maintaining the legitimacy of the Hezbollah-led resistance.

Following Syria's withdrawal from Lebanon in 2005, the Lebanese internal political map underwent several changes, resulting in the formation of alliances and the formation of blocs, which Hezbollah exploited more successfully than its rivals, aided by its large arsenal of weapons and a well-trained militia. According to the evidence of the party's leaders and His Secretary-General, the withdrawal of Syria from the Lebanese stage has boosted Iranian influence, which supplies Hezbollah with weapons and finances. Since then, Lebanese political groups have been attempting to negotiate conversation tables to reach an agreement on a new military policy. The debates centered on three issues: resistance weapons and how to use them, Palestinian weapons outside and inside the camps, the disarmament of uncontrolled weapons throughout the country, and the need for the state to manage war and peace decisions.

Hezbollah rejected all ideas made by opponents of its weapons, and His Secretary-General provided a reading that outlined his view of the defense strategy and concentrated solely on Israel, designating it as the lone enemy and dismissing the rest of the themes considered a threat to Lebanon by other parties. In this paper, Hezbollah also labeled several Lebanese officials as "traitors" for not sharing its concept of the importance of continuing resistance work against Israel. This paper argued that the existence of Hezbollah's weapons was justified by the weakness of the Lebanese Army, emphasized the need for the resistance to continue operating independently of the state, and warned that any attempt to withdraw Hezbollah's weapons would result in civil war. Apart from its blatant disrespect for the constitution and the national defense law, Hezbollah's report failed to recognize the most basic axioms in defense plans.

After the start of the Arab Spring in 2011 and its arrival in Syria, where anti-regime demonstrations turned into military clashes, Lebanon's neutrality was added to the table of defense strategy dialogue, where Iran entered the fray to protect the Syrian regime.

According to some of the individuals who took part at the dialogue table that resulted in the Baabda Declaration in 2012, Hezbollah was not about to enter the Syrian crisis, so it accepted its terms, which included neutralizing the conflict there. However, under intense pressure from Tehran, he retreated from his position and entered the Syrian arena, where he quickly became a significant figure on the front lines. Following the advent of Sunni extremist groups, notably ISIS, in the Syrian and Iraqi arenas, the spark of the Syrian war traveled to Lebanon, which suffered attacks by ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra, an al-Qaeda partner.

Hezbollah's rhetoric shifted from justifying its involvement in Syria to safeguard some Lebanese to defending Shiite shrines and battling takfiri terrorist groups. In the same context, the Lebanese Army was able to hand ISIS terrorists a major defeat in Operation Fajr al-Juroud (August 2017). However, Hezbollah intervened abruptly by opening a communication channel with ISIS fighters, resulting in the transfer of those who remained to eastern Syria, a move that some interpreted as an attempt to prevent the Lebanese Army from appearing to have won a decisive victory without any resistance role. Hezbollah is eager to put into action the three-pronged equation that it has imposed on all Lebanese Governments since the events of May 7, 2008, which resulted in the Doha Agreement, namely the equation of the Army, the people, and the resistance. This equation encapsulates Hezbollah's defense strategy: there is no monopoly on the state's security and military institutions taking up arms, and no war against any enemy of Lebanon is complete without the participation of the resistance – Hezbollah – which remains independent of the Lebanese Army.

Strategic Analysis

This historical review examines or recounts every conversation between academics about the issue of disagreeing on a military strategy and the challenge of constructing a truly Sovereign State. The mechanism for developing a defense strategy must begin with the creation of a pillar paper that defines goals, priorities, and risks, followed by the creation of a realistic action plan that is flexible and the result of consensus and consensus, followed by the allocation of resources to implement this plan, cooperation between government parties and civil society, defining responsibilities, and gaining public support. All of this is lacking today; thus, the facts must be evaluated, beginning with Lebanon's current position.

Food security, health security, political security, personal security, social security, environmental security, and economic security are among the most significant components of human security that a large portion of Lebanon's population lacks. The vast majority of people have lost their bank money. Salaries have lost their purchasing power and worth as a result of rising inflation. Because of the state treasury's bankruptcy, it was compelled to discontinue subsidizing food and medicine, leaving many people unable to satisfy their healthcare needs. Concerning the environmental issues caused by the state's incapacity to find permanent solutions to the rubbish spread on the streets, it has become a permanent issue, in addition to the pollution of seawater and groundwater with no measures in place to halt it.

Poverty and the growth of Syria Refugees have increased the amount of looting and homicides, affecting society's security, while political parties' power over the judiciary has harmed freedoms, resulting in the incarceration of political activists being widespread. The failure of the judiciary to determine who was responsible for the political assassinations of activists such as Lokman Slim and Joe Bejjani is more proof of inadequate personal security. Political security was exposed during the recent parliamentary elections when many Shiite candidates were beaten and forced to quit.

Pillars of National Sovereignty

Following the presentation of the fact of political security, we must examine the reality of national sovereignty. The most crucial basis for sovereignty is the ability to protect borders and prevent them from being invaded, which is now lacking. It has become common for Hezbollah and other political forces to control illegal land corridors with Syria, which they use to smuggle oil derivatives and foodstuffs, costing

the state treasury millions of dollars in fees and taxes and resulting in the loss of these materials in Lebanese markets on occasion, raising their prices for citizens. Hezbollah also needs these crossings to transit fighters and weapons between Lebanon and Syria. Hundreds of images and videos reveal these smuggling activities taking place in front of the authorities' eyes. Iranian security leaders also visit Lebanon through Rafic Hariri International Airport without the knowledge of the State apparatus and freely roam throughout the country. According to Nasrallah, Hezbollah possesses tens of thousands of rockets and a hundred thousand men. Where are these weapons located, and are they kept in residential areas? Who was responsible for bringing in the ammonium nitrate shipment that triggered the Port of Beirut explosion on August 4, and why was the inquiry into the bombing halted? These are questions that have no official answers, even though most Lebanese are aware of them, and they are a common secret that cannot be spoken about.

Human security is weak as a result of the foregoing, and Lebanese sovereignty is continually penetrated and known to all. How can political leaders responsible for the breakdown of human security and some of them accountable for everyday violations of sovereignty agree on a country's defense policy? The peace that exists now between the forces of power is owing to everyone's unwillingness to enter into a fresh civil war, as well as the fact that many of them benefit from the current scenario. In exchange for turning a blind eye to Hezbollah's weaponry, Hezbollah-allied parties are not held accountable for misbehavior in the ministries and departments they control, which receive millions of dollars in tax revenue and international help. Some political leaders also have monopolies in some economic areas. Today, Lebanon is ranked as a "prominent" country on the list of the most corrupt.

A group that owns an organized militia the size of a regular army and implements a foreign agenda does not want a strong central government capable of developing a defense policy that gives it complete control over war and peace decisions, as well as the definition of the enemy and the mechanism for confronting it. This political and military force summarizes the Lebanese State and imposes its perspective of who the adversary is, how to face it, and when, and it is unwilling to relinquish this role, as seen by its persistent refusal to change this strategy, which has been in effect since 2006. Some argue that the fate of Hezbollah's weaponry is related to the Iranian-Israeli-Western war and the Iranian-Arab conflict and that resolving these issues will force Hezbollah to give up its arsenal and negotiate its victories. This may be true, but how long before it is realized? This kind of thought is founded on the belief that Lebanon's problem is external and so cannot be remedied inside. Outsiders want the Lebanese to be self-sufficient and to have a fully-fledged sovereign state.

Threats to Identity and Strengths

As a result, **Hezbollah** has imposed a defensive policy based on the following premises:

- Lebanon is not an independent and sovereign state but rather a component of a regional axis running from Afghanistan to the Mediterranean. This has previously been mentioned by Iranian leaders.
- This axis's leadership can be elected or imposed.
- The definitions of enemy and friend were not based on risk and opportunity analysis, and the debate on this issue was not allowed to deepen or extend. Why, for example, should every Lebanese take part in the liberation of Jerusalem?

- It was based on intellectual values and references, some of which, such as the concept of Jihad, the *Shahada* (proclamation of faith in Islam), and martyrdom, date back to before the state, while others, such as the nation, for example, are above the state and some components of the Lebanese people do not agree with it.
- A national strategy was not agreed upon before the elaboration of a defense strategy.

In light of the loss of Sovereignty and the expansion of corruption and instability, the question that arises is if there is a people united by a common identity that can be contained to the state of Lebanon. A state is a collection of individuals or groups who share common characteristics such as language, history, culture, and religion. What binds the Lebanese to form a state? They are divided into around eighteen groups; thus, religion is not what binds them together. It is a cohabitation culture with the potential to blend Eastern and Western customs, language, and destiny.

To remain united, states maintain traditions and employ symbols to strengthen their people's national and social identities. What are the symbols that currently unify the Lebanese people? Today, how many Lebanese political parties display the Lebanese flag during their events? How many Lebanese groups regard historical figures as national symbols, such as Emir Fakhr al-Din, Bechara al-Khoury, or Riad al-Solh? How many young Lebanese are familiar with the figures of Lebanon's independence? Are the Rahbani Brothers a collective symbol? Lebanese identity is under threat today because a component wishes to import and impose a culture that rejects the integration of traditions and the infidelity to everything Western. The Lebanese identity is under threat, and so Lebanon's viability as an independent state is in peril. When identity is threatened, arguing the preservation of sovereignty is pointless.

Following the overview and the painful reality that Lebanon is currently experiencing, it is now vital to analyze the starting points for a brighter future. The following are the positions of authority in Lebanon that can be used to develop a national security philosophy:

1. The presence of millions of Lebanese expats worldwide, including those in important positions, wealthy, and active. The majority of them remain linked to their nation and are ready to assist when needed. They are Lebanon's most powerful source of soft power, and any endeavor to restore the Lebanese state will be futile without them. They will also be the most powerful weapon in the hands of Lebanese diplomacy when it wishes to deploy soft power. Reports and studies on Lebanon's current economic position generally concur that if Lebanese expats did not make monthly payments to their families, there would be no economic cycle in Lebanon today and no tourism sector.

2. The estimated value of oil and gas resources is thought to be in Lebanon's territorial seas and economic zones. These riches will not only ease Lebanon's economic and debt difficulties but will also help to maintain civic harmony. All studies in conflict areas have shown that the discovery of oil has led to increased stability because oil companies will not operate in areas where there are hostilities, threats, and security issues. Thus, it will be in the interest of all powerful parties to reconsider their policies to create an environment that allows exploration operations and the removal of oil to benefit from its revenues. Lebanon's neighbors, which are rich in oil and gas, would prefer to de-escalate tensions on their borders with Lebanon so that they can invest what they have. Regional and international powers will also attempt to profit from the oil reserves, making Lebanon's stability crucial. However, the interests of the people must be preserved by establishing a sovereign fund to which profits from oil derivatives are transferred to be used in development projects and to become a powerful tool for Lebanese leaders to employ when developing the state's military policy.

3. The Lebanese Army has proven to be an inclusive national institution capable of performing its tasks professionally if politicians allow it to do so, as it was the one that was able to defeat terrorism that was attempting to play on sectarian lines, and it was the one who was able to resolve internal conflicts professionally - such as the Khaldeh incidents. It is to avoid any clashes with Hezbollah militants, despite the provocation it symbolizes for a regular soldier to observe another person armed and engaging in illegal activities. The Lebanese Army's objective has been and continues to be the preservation of civic peace. It has also never failed to face up to the Israeli Army at any border crossing to the south. As a result, it is a potent weapon that must be invested in and will be critical in determining a state's military policy.
4. Many of Hezbollah's agents have access to a substantial stockpile of weaponry and battle expertise. If Hezbollah chooses to dismantle its militias, the Lebanese Armed Forces may use these weapons, and experienced fighters might be integrated into the military, increasing the effectiveness of Lebanon's hard power and giving policymakers additional alternatives for developing a security strategy.
5. The Lebanese people's strong will to live is shown today in their ability to ensure their water and energy needs, light neighborhoods, and support their neighbors without any significant involvement from official institutions. Despite party officials' sectarianism and sectarian rhetoric, NGOs and civil society organizations have played a significant role in fulfilling the needs of the people, demonstrating a genuine intention to withstand and live together. This demonstrates that the Lebanese identity can be restored and built in collaboration with the Lebanese diaspora.
6. Increasing the position of the Lebanese media in the Arab and international arenas. Lebanon is regarded as one of the pioneers of Arab media, and its sons work in the most prominent Arab and international media outlets. The majority of Lebanese are quite engaged on social media. Strengthening and investing in the media sector, particularly online, for the benefit of a unified Lebanese mission and aim will provide Lebanese authorities with an influential soft power tool.

Alternative Structures

When confronted with a more powerful neighbor with hostile intentions, smaller powers such as Lebanon have two options: the first is to appease this neighbor by building economic and diplomatic relations and using international organizations to mediate the conflict and prevent any threat from its side. If they have sufficient financial and human resources, the second alternative is to establish their capacity. However, this approach would necessitate the state permanently investing in defensive capabilities to maintain a high level of deterrence against that state. The third option is to form a military alliance with other countries to act as a deterrent to this bordering country.

Lebanon opted for the third option in dealing with Israel by signing an Arab League mutual defense treaty. The problem is that the Arabs chose not to implement this agreement, and some of them signed peace treaties with Israel, leaving Lebanon with two options: join another military alliance, as Hezbollah is doing through the axis of resistance, or appease and normalize relations with Israel, as other Arab countries have done. The anti-Hezbollah party in Lebanon does not support this alternative. What is at stake is Lebanon's neutrality or a state that is neither for nor against anyone. A neutral strategy is difficult to implement without minimal contact with neighboring countries, whether commercial or diplomatic. Because Israel has a long history of aggression against Lebanon, it is difficult to implement a policy of neutrality toward Israel, at least by a large portion of the Lebanese. Change must also come from Israel, which is seeing the development of far-right forces and the continuance of its settlement-building policies.

On the other hand, we cannot ignore the issue of the Refugees, particularly Syrians, as estimates show that there are at least 1.5 million displaced Syrians on Lebanese soil. Their continued presence in such an *ad hoc* and unregulated manner, coupled with a high birth rate among them, will pose an existential threat to Lebanon as an independent country and its demographics. The failure of a political settlement in Syria, a dysfunctional Syrian vision, internal divides, and external interference have all contributed to the persistence of this catastrophe. If there was a strong central government, it would have included a mechanism for dealing with the Syrian crisis and the influx of refugees in its security policy and placed them in border camps away from residential areas, as Turkey and Jordan have done.






Defense policy is dynamic and is revised either annually or every few years depending on the volatility of the situation in the region. State relations evolve as a result of circumstances, and state priorities shift in response to social, economic, and security factors. However, these defense plans cannot be developed without internal unity, an inclusive national identity, and a basic level of human security. Lebanon's priorities today are not to develop a defense strategy, but to achieve civil peace and human security, to resurrect a social identity around which the majority of its people are united, and to put measures in place to prevent the continuation of daily violations of its sovereignty, as well as to place exclusive arms in the hands of security and military institutions. Only then would it be conceivable and logical to talk about how to form a defense policy and create a military plan to safeguard Lebanon.

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