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LEBANESE FOREIGN POLICY AND LEBANESE-SYRIAN RELATIONS UNTIL THE ASSASSINATION OF REFIK HARIRI IN 2005

Abstract

In its political history, Lebanon has been a country where religious and sectarian differences have come to the fore. These differences have had an impact on Lebanese political, economic and socio-cultural life as well as Lebanese foreign policy. This study argues that until the assassination of Rafik Hariri, "Lebanese foreign policy and Syrian-Lebanese relations were influenced by domestic political factors in Lebanon, while regional/global problems in the Middle East directly/indirectly affected Lebanese foreign policy and Lebanese-Syrian relations". In its relations with Syria, Lebanon is a country whose domestic factors are shaped together with foreign political processes, is known as the capital of crises and civil wars and is home to the Syrian-Israeli conflict. In other words, Lebanese domestic and foreign policy cannot be considered independent from Syria and Israel. However, Lebanon is the epitome of the Middle East and has been in the sphere of interest of both local, regional and global





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actors. In this study, the manifestations of external factors in Lebanon's domestic politics will be discussed by presenting the historical background necessary to understand the current debates, the importance of Lebanon for Syria, the reflection of the changing structure of the Middle East after the Iraq War on Lebanese-Syrian-Israeli relations, the assassination of Rafik Hariri and the consequences of the political division in Lebanon after the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon. In the study, this historical process is analyzed from an analytical perspective, and the relations between the actors and their consequences are analyzed from the perspective of Lebanon, Syria and the Middle East.

Keywords: Hezbollah, National Pact, Lebanese Civil War, Taif Agreement, Syria

LÜBNAN DIŞ POLİTİKASI VE 2005 REFİK HARİRİ'NİN ÖLDÜRÜLMESİNE KADAR LÜBNAN-SURİYE İLİŞKİLERİ

Öz

Lübnan, kendi siyasi tarihinde, din ve mezhep temelli farklılıkların ön plana çıktığı bir ülke olmuştur. Bu farklılıklar Lübnan siyasi, ekonomik ve sosyo-kültürel hayatı başta olmak üzere Lübnan dış politikasında da etkili olmuştur. Bu çalışmada, Refik Hariri'nin öldürülmesine kadar "Lübnan dış politikası ve Suriye-Lübnan ilişkilerinin Lübnan'daki iç politik faktörlerden etkilendiği, bunun yanında Ortadoğu'da meydana gelen bölgesel/küresel sorunların Lübnan dış politikası ve Lübnan-Suriye ilişkilerini doğrudan/dolaylı olarak etkilediği" öne sürülmektedir. Lübnan, Suriye ile ilişkilerinde, iç etkenlerinin dış politik süreçlerle beraber şekillendiği, krizlerin ve iç savaşların başkenti olarak anılan ve Suriye-İsrail çekişmesine ev sahipliği yapan bir ülkedir. Bir başka deyişle Lübnan iç ve dış politikası, Suriye ve İsrail'den bağımsız düşünülememektedir. Ancak bunların yanında Lübnan, Ortadoğu'nun bir özeti olup, hem yerel, hem bölgesel hem de küresel aktörlerin ilgi alanı içerisinde olmuştur. Dış etmenlerin Lübnan iç politikasındaki tezahürlerinin, mevcut tartışmaları anlamak açısından gerekli olan tarihsel arka planı ortaya koyarak, ele alınacağı çalışmada, Lübnan'ın Suriye için önemi, Irak Savaşı sonrası Orta Doğu'nun değişen yapısının Lübnan-Suriye-İsrail ilişkilerine yansımaları, Refik Hariri Suikastı ve Suriye askerlerinin Lübnan'dan çekilmesinin ardından Lübnan'da siyasi bölünmüşlüğü sonuçları ele alınacaktır. Çalışmada bu tarihsel süreç, analitik bir bakış açısı ile ele alınmış, aktörlerin birbirleriyle olan ilişkileri ve sonuçları hem Lübnan hem Suriye hem de Ortadoğu açısından incelenmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Hizbullah, Ulusal Pakt, Lübnan İç savaşı, Taif Antlaşması, Suriye

Introduction

Lebanon, shaped by its diverse ethnic groups and strong sectarian ties that are decisive in the formation of both the country's borders and the administrative mechanism, has emerged as the most violated country in the Middle East due to its geopolitical value, which stands out due to its geographical location, and its characterization as a power testing ground between Syria and Israel.

With the withdrawal of the Ottoman Empire from the region after the First World War, Lebanon became a satellite country where it was not possible to establish a stable structure, open to the intervention of foreign powers, and where Britain, France, the United States, Israel





and Syria, respectively, directed the governments of the country through their military units, and although Lebanon gained its independence at the end of the Second World War, it has become the center of both inter-state struggle and the power comparison of non-state mechanisms.

In Lebanon, which has been referred to as the "Switzerland of the Middle East" due to its economic potential and the large investments made by many Western countries, particularly France and the UK, different actors have periodically shifted the balance of power in its favor, and the countries that have gained control over large sectarian families have had the power to directly influence Lebanese political life.

In Lebanon, where governance mechanisms were allocated to families and opinion leaders belonging to various sects of Islam and Christianity, within the framework of the "National Pact" signed in 1943, the office of the Presidency was left to Maronite Christians, the Prime Ministry to Sunni Muslims and the Presidency of the Parliament to Shiite Muslims. The problems encountered in this distribution were met with the intervention of foreign powers, especially Syria and Israel, and these two countries came to the fore as the main actors of the Lebanese Civil War, which started in 1976 and lasted until 1991. In 1991, with the full implementation of the Taif Agreement signed in 1989 and the acceptance of Syria's effective control, Lebanon entered a period in which public order was restored, but Syria's military presence in Lebanon came into question, especially within the framework of the projections developed by the US within the framework of the Greater Middle East Project, and the country was dragged into a period of street demonstrations and small-scale conflicts. Parallel to this process, in which Syria's influence was broken and the ideal of "Greater Syria" (Pipes 1990) became difficult to revive, the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon led the country to a position where the influence of non-state actors increased.

This study argues that before the Refik Hariri Assassination, "Lebanese foreign policy and Syrian-Lebanese relations were influenced by domestic political factors in Lebanon, while regional/global problems in the Middle East directly/indirectly affected Lebanese foreign policy and Lebanese-Syrian relations". In parallel to this, the article will examine the relations between Lebanon and the actors who have a decisive role in Lebanon's political structure and foreign policy approach, the meaning of Lebanon in Syrian foreign policy and the historical perspective of Lebanon-Syria relations will be discussed in detail. The study will examine Syria's dominant position in both political life and non-state organizations in Lebanon, and discuss the role that will be assigned to this country of the Middle East, which has been shaken with the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri and has returned to the days shrouded in conflicts, in the near future.

1. Lebanon in the Historical Process





1.1. Period of Ottoman Rule in Lebanon (1516 - 1920)

Located on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea, the Republic of Lebanon has a mountainous geography and borders Syria and Israel. The mountainous terrain that forms the natural borders of today's Lebanon has historically been a refuge for many minority sects and communities. The current social structure of Lebanon is based on the fact that the minorities who found refuge in the region have settled in the border regions. Despite its relatively small geography of 10,000 square kilometers, Lebanon has historically been home to highly dynamic political and military events due to the coexistence of communities belonging to different religions and sects. (Cleveland 1994)

In the process of shaping its political and social life, Lebanon, where religious and sectarian differences have come to the fore, can be divided into two periods. The first of these is the period of the Ottoman Empire, during which the social structure was shaped and the foundation of the social system was laid, while the other is the period of French mandate rule, during which the political and administrative structure was formed (Palmer 1993: 69-98).

As a result of the economic and administrative policy pursued by the Ottoman Empire in the Arab geography, there were no large-scale conflicts between the different sects that inhabited the region. The method that led to this determination stems from the fact that the method of forcibly differentiating the social structure that existed in the Ottoman geography was not followed (Ortaylı 2000: 146-147). While the fact that the social structure of Lebanon was built on sectarian differences stands out as the main basis of all political mechanisms developed for the region, the fact that the Ottoman Empire granted autonomy to the region in return for a small tax and authorized the Lebanese administration to act freely in foreign relations, including commercial and diplomatic contacts, ensured that Lebanon had a period free from political turmoil during the Ottoman period (Turan 2003: 373).

As the Ottoman administration began to lose power in the region after the 17th century, European states, particularly France and Britain, began to penetrate the region. The fact that the Lebanon region was a geography where different groups were led by powerful families in parallel with social dynamics brought about the rapid settlement of European states, which directly contacted these families and created opinion leaders close to them. The economic relations that had been maintained in the Ottoman sphere of influence since the 16th century turned into systematic efforts to influence the internal dynamics of the region due to France's efforts to spread Catholicism through the Jesuits, England's efforts to develop Protestantism and Russia's efforts to create Orthodox communities. As a result of European countries pursuing a colonial policy and entering into one-to-one relations with the families with an active position in the Lebanese geography, an area of contention was created in Lebanon due to religious differences (Ortaylı 2000:104).





Another factor that was as effective as the breakdown of Ottoman influence in the destruction of political stability in Lebanon was the artificial introduction of inter-sectarian conflicts as mentioned above. In this parallel, it is seen that all administrative mechanisms shaped in the region since the 18th century have been sectarian-based. The sectarian conflicts that emerged along with the sectarian preferential formations in the administrative picture in Lebanon not only damaged political stability but also deeply affected the social structure. In 1842, the Ottoman Governor Asad Pasha introduced a system of "two district governorships" for the sake of social stability, which was based on the Maronite-Druze conflict (Turan 2003:374-375; Tümer and Küçük 2002:315). With this practice, Lebanese territory was divided into two separate administrations, one for Maronite and the other for Druze settlements. Thus, the ethnic groups in the region gained partial autonomy in their own regions. (Mandfield 2012)

Following this arrangement, a process of increased intervention by France, Britain and Russia in decisions regarding the region began to take place through the families and sects they patronized. As a result of the suggestions of the lobbies formed to put pressure on the Ottoman administration and the increasing social turmoil in Lebanon, a charter granting autonomy to Lebanon was adopted in 1861 (Ortaylı 2000:104). The Sanjak of Lebanon, the administration of which was transferred to a Maronite Ottoman citizen, included the area excluding Muslim-majority settlements such as Sayda, Tripoli and Beirut. It is possible to evaluate this situation as the registration of the division in Lebanon after the "two district governorates" system. Considering the fact that the current dilemmas in Lebanon are rooted in sectarian strife, it can be concluded that this process was shaped under the control of European states. By the 1870s, Germany and the United States were included in the category of countries with which the religious groups active in the region interacted in order to protect the Protestants. The Jews residing in Lebanon, on the other hand, had intensive relations with Britain (Moore and Diller 1994:470).

Until 1910, Muslim groups, who had always declared their loyalty to the Ottoman rule, found it appropriate to act together with Arab nationalists at the beginning of the First World War and to get closer to France and Britain. In particular, the announcement by the Saudis and the Hashemites that they would act together with Britain and France, and the support of Sharif Hussein of Mecca and his sons Abdullah and Faisal for Britain in exchange for the promise of an independent Arab state weakened the Ottoman authority in the region. (Goldschmidt and Davidson 2011)

Towards the end of the war, the Ottoman troops withdrew from Lebanon and Syria and were replaced by Faisal, who entered Damascus. In March 1920, Syrian politicians gathered in Damascus and elected Faisal as the king of the independent Syrian state, and Faisal appointed a governor to Lebanon, signaling that Lebanon was a province of the independent Kingdom of Syria. Taking steps in line with Britain's pre-war promises, Faisal agreed at the





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1919 Paris Peace Talks - in line with the provisions of the Sykes-Picot Treaty of 1916 (Sander 2003:382). He was greatly disappointed when France's sovereignty over Syrian territory was recognized and France intervened in the region. On July 25, 1920, when French troops occupied Damascus and Faisal was expelled, the French administration decided to divide Syria into five political units: Alawite Region, Druze Independent Government, Aleppo State, Damascus State and Lebanon (Sander 1998:76). Thus, an independent structure was built in Lebanon. The removal of Lebanon from Syrian sovereignty and the granting of an independent state status to Lebanon with the support of France were developments that fulfilled the expectations of the Maronites, who had been in good relations with France since the 18th century, from the Lebanese geography (Moore and Diller 1994:470).

1.2. Lebanon under the French Mandate (1923 - 1946)

Despite the opposition of the Syrian Arabs, France shaped the geography of Lebanon in August 1920, covering Beirut, Bekaa and Tyre. With the drafting of the Lebanese Constitution in May 1926, the concept of the Lebanese Republic entered the literature, but Lebanon remained under French mandate rule. During this period, Lebanese Muslims organized demonstrations for reunification with Syria and took actions to the point of civil disobedience. The years 1923 and 1926 were marked by the most important demonstrations for a united Lebanese-Syrian state, and in 1932 the Syrian National Party was founded in Lebanon. The main policy of the Party was to ensure the unification of Lebanon with Syria and to contribute to the formation of a Syria-centered Arab League (Grayson 2004).

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In order to prevent the unstable situation in the Lebanese Republic, the French mandate administration made constitutional amendments in 1927 and 1929 and tried to satisfy the opinion leaders of various sects. However, as the Maronite-Druze dispute continued and the demonstrations organized by the Muslim population to unite with Syria by showing resistance against the French mandate administration turned into clashes, a treaty was signed between the Lebanese authorities and the French mandate administration in 1936 that all mandatory powers would be transferred to Lebanon. In 1937, the Lebanese Parliament elected the Maronite leader Emil Edde as President. With Edde's appointment of Hayreddin Ahdab as Prime Minister, the tradition of the President being a Christian and the Prime Minister being a Muslim, which continues today, came to life. However, the Lebanese Parliament was dissolved and the constitution was suspended after the French Parliament refused to ratify this treaty (Moore and Diller 1994:471). In Lebanon, which was once again under French mandate rule, Muslims started demonstrations against Edde and the French administration. (Grayson 2004).

The Free France Movement, organized for the liberation of France under the leadership of Charles De Gaulle following the German invasion of France at the beginning of the Second





World War, promised to grant Lebanon its independence at the end of the war in return for the recognition of its authority. Upon this approach of France, parliamentary elections were renewed in Lebanon in 1943, and Muslims who were against the isolation policy and Maronites who reacted against Edde's mandatory management approach acted in alliance. With the election of Bikhara al-Khoury, a Maronite, as President and the appointment of Sunni leader Riad al-Sulh as Prime Minister by Khoury, the system of 1937 began to function again. With the addition of the Shiite formula for the Speaker of the Parliament, an unwritten but unbroken tradition of a "National Pact" began in Lebanon in 1943. According to this pact, the President would be a Maronite Christian, the Prime Minister a Sunni Muslim and the Speaker of the Parliament a Shiite Muslim (Turan 2003:376-377).

1.3. Effects on the Historical Development of Lebanon's Social Structure

In the Republic of Lebanon, 93 percent of whose population is of Arab origin, there are 22 sects clustered around the religions of Islam and Christianity. The main Islamic sects in the country are Sunnism, Shiism, Druze, Nusayris, Ismailism, Jafarism and Alawism (Alkan 2000:290). Maronites, Greek Orthodox, Catholic Melkites and Catholic Armenians also constitute the sects where the Christian population is clustered in Lebanon. These sects are predominantly dominated by powerful families and these families shape Lebanese political life as important political symbols (Armaoğlu 1994:49). Until the 1989 Treaty of Taif, each of these families maintained their existence in a position where they created their own security areas to some extent by hosting a militia force within their own structure. (Goldschmidt and Davidson 2011)

The fact that in the structure emphasized as the "National Pact", Christians, who are a minority today, share the Presidency, while Shiites, who are the majority and are estimated to constitute 32 percent of the population, share only the seats of the Presidency of the Parliament, can be traced back to the census conducted by the French mandate administration in 1932. According to this census, Maronites constituted 32 percent of the population, Sunnis 22 percent and Shiites only 18 percent, and the political picture in Lebanon has been based on the balance indicated by this census since 1932 until today (Turan 2003:378).

The fact that Maronites and consequently Christians came to the forefront in Lebanon, which came under French rule after the Ottoman rule, and that the presidency and the command of the army were left to Christians stands out as one of the triggers of the unrest in the country. The Maronites' support for the French thesis that Lebanon should separate from Syria and become independent led to the sectarian conflicts in the region even after independence. The ongoing conflict between the Druze and the Maronites, who have the ideal of reuniting with Syria and establishing the Great Arab State, is the most important internal issue in Lebanese political history with its current domestic policy reflections in Lebanon.





Today, the Druze, whose population is around 430,000 and constitutes 10 percent of the country, hold a political power disproportionately large to their population. (Turan 2003)

With the independence of Lebanon and Syria as separate states, the Druze cooperated with Syrian nationalists to break the Christian domination in Lebanon. The Druze leader Kemal Canpolat, who took a stance against the Bikhara al-Huri administration, expressed the thesis that the "National Pact" should be changed and the system should be revised, arguing that Muslims had a demographically superior proportion in the country (Zamir 1999:89). With the rise of Arab nationalism and pro-Nasser movements in the country, the Muslim population began to demand new constitutional arrangements from the Maronites, and tensions reached serious levels, especially in the late 1950s. In 1958, the overthrow of the monarchy and the proclamation of the republic in Iraq by the leftist coup d'état led by Abdelkarim Qasim (Sönmezoğlu, 1996:223) and the merger of Syria and Egypt to form the "United Arab Republic" (Turan, 2003:331) brought the Arab nationalist movement in Lebanon closer to the thesis of Lebanon joining the United Arab Republic. In this period, the emphasis on Arab identity was based on the aim of breaking the Maronite influence in Lebanese political and social life, and stemmed from the goal of directing the entire Arab population towards a single common goal (Zamir 1999:90).

In 1958, as the conflicts flared up and the political power faced a legitimacy problem to the extent that it could not use its position, Lebanon requested the United States to intervene in Lebanon within the framework of the Eisenhower Doctrine. Upon this invitation, the US landed in the country with its Marines and intervened in order to protect the political status quo, the "national pact" and the constitution (Sander 2003:278). Following the intervention of American forces in Lebanon, Muslim groups had to postpone their demonstrations and demands for constitutional change for a while (Tetik 2023: 105).

Following the 1948 and 1967 Arab-Israeli Wars, Lebanon received a massive Palestinian immigration. With the addition of the Fedayeen who were expelled from Jordan in September 1970, the number of Palestinian immigrants in Lebanon reached 500,000. As the Maronites, who were in the administrative levels, wanted to develop an oppressive control mechanism over the Palestinian population settled in the southern part of the country, the Palestinian immigrants became partners in the ongoing power struggle in Lebanese territory and took part in the front formed against the Maronites. The Muslim population, which increased significantly especially after the Palestinian immigration, joined the Druze against the Maronite authority. (Salık 2016)

The aim of the "national front" formed by Muslims of different sects against the Maronites was to amend the Lebanese Constitution in favor of Muslims. The armed struggle for this purpose intensified in 1975 and the national front started to gain significant superiority





over the Maronites. During this period, Syria provided military equipment to the Muslim group led by Canpolat and Israel provided military equipment to the Christian forces (Chomsky 1993:224). However, the escalation of the conflict and the Maronites' threats to divide the country and create an independent Maronite state caused Syria to take a step back (Salık 2014).

This attitude of the Maronites, who were losing ground in the war, changed the course of the 1975-1976 Lebanese Civil War. General Hafez al-Assad, who became the President of Syria after the 1970 coup d'état supported by the Baath Party, built a policy based on the necessity to approach the Lebanese issue as an internal problem (Yıldız 2002:51). In Lebanon, the Assad administration sided with the group advocating the thesis of Arab nationalism and reunification with Syria, and in this parallel, it supported the Druze leader Jannopolat at the beginning of the 1975-1976 civil war. The desire to see Lebanon as a whole as a part of Syria and the reality that a possible division in Lebanon would benefit Israel and formalize the Judeo-Christian alliance in the region put Assad in a difficult situation in the face of the Maronite threat to divide the country, and Syria had to adopt a pragmatic stance to cut off the support given to Janjolat in order to protect the territorial integrity of Lebanon (Turan 2003)

With Syria's withdrawal of support from the national front, Druze leader Jannabolat and Yasser Arafat, the representative of the Palestinian people, were left alone against the Maronite and Israeli forces. The national front, which lost important positions in a short time, suffered a heavy defeat towards the end of 1976 and a ceasefire was reached in the region, albeit for a short time (Turan 2003:380).

By the 1980s, Lebanon, whose civil war conditions continued into the 1980s, had become a geography completely open to the influence of Syria and Israel. Before discussing both military events and political movements in Lebanon's relations with regional states, it would be useful to reveal the factors that directly affect Lebanon's foreign policy in order to evaluate the current position of Lebanon-Syria relations and to comment on future projections.

2. Political Actors Influencing Lebanese Foreign Policy

2.1. Syria

The fact that Syria's territory under Ottoman rule encompassed the entire geography of both Lebanon and Palestine is a historical fact that should be kept in mind in order to understand Lebanon-Syria relations today. After the First World War, Syrian nationalists, who were struggling to reincorporate Lebanon, which had been granted the status of an independent state by the French mandate administration, back into Syrian territory, organized pro-Syrian structures in Lebanon in line with their goals and aimed to unite Syria and Lebanon. (Rabil 2003)





The Syrian administration, which supported the Lebanese nationalists after the independence of Lebanon, adopted an attitude that supported the division between the groups in Lebanon and the Palestinian refugees as a result of the American intervention in 1958. As the Maronites increased their pressure on the Palestinian refugees, the Syrian government worked to create public pressure for the recognition of the political rights of the Palestinians and increased its arms aid to the Muslim organizations in Lebanon. (Rabil 2003)

Syria, which sided with the Druze and the Palestinians until the Maronites threatened to establish an independent state in the 1975-1976 civil war, withdrew its support for the preservation of Lebanon's territorial integrity and took a position against the Druze (Rabil 2003:51-52). As a result of the increase in Israel's activities in Lebanon after the civil war, the Assad administration decided to support the anti-Israeli groups again and reiterated its support for the Druze and Palestinian groups in the aftermath of Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon, which is one of the issues we will discuss in detail below. (Pollock 1986)

In parallel with Syria's influence in the Lebanese political arena, its significant number of supporters, especially in the Muslim public opinion, and its military capabilities, all presidents in Lebanon, without exception, have taken care to take decisions in favor of the Syrian-Israeli balance and have taken steps to maintain the balance of power. During the 1982 Israeli invasion, following Syria's involvement in the process, Lebanese President Amin Jamayel announced the annulment of the Lebanese-Israeli Treaty signed to protect the Maronite sphere of influence (Pollock 1986:261).

The inability to reach a consensus among the sects and the fact that the periods of stability in the Lebanese political structure are limited to a matter of months draw attention as facts that increase Syria's influence over Lebanon. Syria, which has the chance to conduct policy both through different Muslim elements in Lebanon and through Palestinian refugees, has influenced Israel to be constantly on its toes, to increase its defense expenditures and to keep the internal political structure of Israel in an unstable situation through the groups it supports in Lebanon, without coming into hot contact with Israel. In the 1980s, the Assad administration, which was able to directly influence the internal and external politics of the country through the Lebanese Prime Ministers, who were Sunni Muslims, pushed back the Israeli troops, which had reached Beirut on June 6, 1982, to the south of the country, as far as the Litani River, in late 1985. (Pollock 1986)

Between 1986 and 1989, a period of conflict began in Lebanon in which it became difficult to distinguish sharply between the parties. The Shiites, who make up the majority of the population, with the support of Iran, clashed with Sunni groups with whom they had long been allied, while the Maronites clashed with Palestinian refugee groups and Syrian troops. At a time when the internal unrest in Lebanon once again reached significant proportions, Syria, showing its influence, pushed the parties to seek reconciliation and brought all the





groups active in Lebanese political life together in Taif, Saudi Arabia in 1989. During the negotiations where it was accepted that the presidency would remain in the hands of Christians, a Prime Ministry and the Presidency of the Parliament were established with expanded powers, and the demands of the Muslims for changes in the administrative structure were incorporated into the Taif Agreement as a result of Syrian guidance (The Taef Agreement, 1989). With the Taif Agreement, the executive powers of the Presidency were transferred to the Prime Minister and the sectarian quotas in the military and civil service were abolished, confirming that the majority of the country's population consisted of Muslims (Alkan 2000:304).

Following the Taif Treaty, which was convened under the leadership of Syria and in which decisions were taken to confirm the demographic structure in the country, the "Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Coordination" was signed between Syria and Lebanon on May 22, 1991 despite the opposition of the Maronite leaders (Lebanon-Syria Treaty of Cooperation 1991). With this Treaty, binding decisions were taken for the senior bureaucrats of the two countries to act in coordination in various disciplines. With this Treaty, Lebanon and Syria decided to adopt the Syrian model as an example in the administrative structuring process. (Cleveland 1994)

Although the withdrawal of Israeli troops from Lebanese territory in 2000 brought into question the position of Syrian troops in the country, the lack of a final peace treaty with Israel and the continued military presence of Hezbollah led to a process in which Syria could maintain its military presence in Lebanese territory under the Hariri administration. Until 2004, the opposition voices, which remained at a low level, increased after the Druze leader Walid Canpolat declared that Syrian troops were no longer needed and a proposal supporting the pro-Syrian factions to extend the presidential term from 6 to 9 years was brought to the Parliament on September 3, 2004, and as a result of this process, Hariri and his two ministers resigned (Kazanç 2005:4-5).

The rising voices of opposition against the Syrian armed forces in Lebanon had some shocking consequences within the country. With the assassination of Rafik Hariri, who became the spiritual leader of the opposition movement after his resignation as Prime Minister in September 2004, on February 14, 2005, both Lebanon and Syria became part of a new international scenario and Lebanese-Syrian relations entered into an irreversible process of change. (Goldschmidt and Davidson 2011)

2.2. Israel's Influence and the Problem of Palestinian Refugees

The fact that Orthodox Jews see the southern region of Lebanon as part of "Arz-ı Mevud" is one of the underlying reasons behind Israel's interest in this region after its establishment in 1948). In this parallel, Israel's first Prime Minister Ben Gurion and then the Revisionist Jews came to the conclusion that it would be appropriate to expand up to the Litani





River in Lebanon, and in this axis, they adopted a political understanding primarily in the direction of allocating Christian sovereignty in Lebanon. (Orallı 2005:1-59)

The current goals that shaped Israel's Lebanese policy on the grounds of international relations and brought Israel to the forefront in Lebanon's foreign policy perception were to break Syria's influence in Lebanon, to put an end to the Palestine Liberation Organization's (PLO) actions through Lebanon by eliminating the Palestinian refugee presence in Lebanon, and to ensure the continuation of the political balance in Lebanon in favor of the Maronites that emerged according to the results of the 1932 census (Pollock 1986:263).

The reflection of these objectives on Lebanese foreign policy approaches has followed a variable course in line with the differentiations in the country's administration and the functioning of the regime. After a period in which relations with Israel took place in the form of a Maronite-Jewish alliance as a result of the presidential mechanism, which was left to the sovereignty of the Maronites, holding the administrative tools until the Taif Treaty of 1989, the prominence of the prime ministerial authority with the Taif Treaty made this alliance illegal and replaced it with a functional cooperation mechanism with Syria. (Chomsky 1993)

Apart from its mystical goals in the Lebanese geography, Israel's primary concern in Lebanon has been the necessity to prevent cross-border attacks by Palestinian refugees. The limited measures that the minority Maronite administration could take against the Palestinian refugees, who had been engaged in an armed struggle against the Lebanese government since the early 1970s, pushed Israel to intervene in Lebanon individually. The Israeli army, in cooperation with the Maronite Phalangists, organized a large-scale attack on the Palestinian refugee camps in 1978. The Maronite-Jewish military alliance, acting with the logistical support of the militia of Major Saad Haddad, a discharged soldier from the Lebanese army, inflicted serious damage on the Syrian-backed Palestinian and Druze militias in southern Lebanon. In the process, the ideal of a Christian state in Lebanon, which the State of Israel had been dreaming of since its establishment, came to fruition. In 1979, Saad Haddad declared the establishment of "Free Lebanon" in the southern part of Lebanon, south of the Litani River, and stated that this country would be in alliance with Israel (Chomsky 1993: 223).

As a result of the intervention of Syria, which had troops in Lebanon since 1976, and its support for Palestinian and Druze troops, Israeli troops began to withdraw and Palestinian refugees regained control of southern Lebanon. The alliance between Israel and the predominantly Maronite government of Lebanon, which was established after Ariel Sharon was appointed as the Minister of Defense in Israel following the 1981 elections, resulted in Israeli troops entering the south of the country in June 1982 to expel Palestinian armed elements from Lebanon. After the Israeli armed forces and the Maronite Phalangists advanced to the front of Beirut and laid siege to the city in a short period of time, the resistance of the al-Fatah forces under the leadership of Arafat began. After nearly 2 months of resistance, Arafat





left Lebanon on August 30, 1982 under the protection of France and Italy, thus ending the Israeli-Palestinian struggle in Lebanon in September 1982. (Turan 2003)

One of the most important events that marked this period in which Israel had the luxury of determining Lebanese domestic politics was the Sabra and Shatila massacres. The massacre of thousands of Muslim settlers by Maronite Phalangist militias, who entered the Sabra and Shatila settlement camps under the control of the Israelis in mid-September with the knowledge of Israeli soldiers, was recorded as an unprecedented atrocity in the history of the Middle East (Turan, 2003:382). Although Israeli soldiers avoided taking responsibility for these incidents, it was revealed after a while that Israeli military officials supported the Phalangist militias (Aras 1997:44).

With the exit of Fatah-affiliated forces from Lebanon, Israel's military presence in the region began to be questioned and the Shiite alliance with Syria found its identity at this point and was shaped around the slogan of expelling Israel from Lebanese territory. In the south of Lebanon, the intensity of the clashes increased as the militias under the command of Haddad supported the Israeli troops, but in parallel with Iran's support for the Shiites in Lebanon, especially with the Khomeini government, the Israeli army (Goldschmidt and Davidson 2011)

Israel, which was in an indirect alliance with the presidency and the army command in the 1982-1989 period, had to cede its political and economic superiority to Syria with the Taif Treaty of 1989. The balancing of the Maronite sphere of influence by making significant changes in the administrative mechanism, the removal of Israeli troops from Lebanon's borders, and the restructuring of Palestinian groups to create elements acting under the guidance of Syria not only reduced Israel's influence in the region but also restricted al-Fatah and Arafat's room for maneuver. (Mansfield 2012).

The Palestinian refugees, whose power diminished significantly after 1982, lost their political influence in Lebanon to a great extent after this date. However, the Palestinians, who number around 900,000 today, continue to exist as an important political symbol, both as an important demographic element and due to the mission and vision bequeathed to them by history, with a ratio of close to twenty percent of the country's population, although their political sphere of influence has narrowed. (Goldschmidt and Davidson 2011)

The fact that the Palestinian refugees have significantly lost their military power in parallel with the internal turmoil and sectarian power struggles in the country has, for a long time, taken away the legitimacy of Israel's ability to intervene, especially in southern Lebanon, and has been a driving factor in the withdrawal of Israeli troops from the region. However, with the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri on February 14, 2005 and the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon due to pressure from the international community, Israel has once again become a dominant factor in Lebanese politics - through the use of militarist rhetoric. (Mansfield 2012)





3. Recent History of Lebanon - Syria Relations

3.1. The Place of Lebanon in Syrian Foreign Policy

The spirit of the charter of the Baath Party, which is in power in Syria today, is the establishment of a single Arab state in the lands where Arabs live and dominate. When the thesis that Lebanon has been perceived as a part of Syria's territory since the Ottoman period is compared to the current charter, one reaches the thesis that Lebanon has the same meaning in Syrian foreign policy, regardless of the wide range of changes in history.

After the Ottoman rule, the Syrian National Assembly, which convened in 1925 under the French mandate, adopted a resolution recognizing Lebanon as part of Syria. In parallel to Syria's approach, the "Syrian National Socialist Party" was founded in Lebanon in 1932, and the Arab nationalism discourse was legitimized and became a widespread view in the country. Immediately after the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, Arab nationalists who wanted to unite with Syria and establish a new structure under Syrian rule attempted a military coup in Lebanon, but failed. In the late 1950s, it was the Lebanese Muslims who took up arms to unite first with Syria and then with the United Arab Republic, breaking the power of the Maronite President in the country. It was the demands for a revision of the 1943 National Pact and the Maronite model of oppressive rule that pushed both Druze, Sunni and Shia Muslims to act together in Lebanon during this period. In 1958, with the increase in armed protests and the loss of stability in Lebanon, the intervention of the US Marines at the invitation of Lebanese President Suleiman Franji (Sander 2003 :274) led to the suppression of the pro-Syrian movement in Lebanon once again.

Hafez al-Assad, who took power in Syria with the coup d'état in 1970, stated in a speech in 1972 that it was not possible to see Syria and Lebanon as two separate states. In parallel to this, the Assad administration, which supported the opposition groups in order to prevent a stable political picture in Lebanon, fueled the conflicts between the groups and often acted as the main arms supplier of these conflicts. (Sander 2003)

Syria, which was involved in the Lebanese Civil War in support of the Maronites in order to prevent the disintegration of Lebanon and to balance Arafat, changed its position after the Maronites entered into a rapprochement with Israel, and returned to its policy of supporting Muslim elements and promoting instability in the country (The Washington Post, 1990). With the intensity of the civil war and the pragmatic shifting of alliance relations between the parties involved, Syria's policy towards Lebanon changed sharply in the late 1970s - in terms of action rather than rhetoric - and its policy of seeking the unification of Lebanon with Syria was replaced by Syria's goal of establishing complete control over Lebanon (Azar, 1998:331). The policy of keeping Lebanon under control politically, economically and militarily has been effective in Syria's long-term projections, and with the 1989 Taif and 1991 Lebanon-Syria Alliance Agreements, Syria gained an important position in





this direction and gained the opportunity to keep Syrian troops of 30,000 soldiers in Lebanon until 2005 (Odeh, 1986:297).

3.2. Lebanon - Syria Relations until the 1989 Taif Treaty

3.2.1. Reflections of the 1975-1976 Lebanese Civil War and the Israeli Occupation of Lebanon on Syria

As the violent clashes that started in Lebanon in 1975 turned into a civil war, the role of the Maronites in the social control mechanisms disappeared and the country drifted into a structure open to international interventions. The Assad administration, which stated that it would stand against all structures that were against Greater Syria, actively supported the Muslim militias in the first months of 1975. The Syrian-backed Muslim militias, which were involved in the armed struggle of the Maronites against the Palestinian refugees in the country, tipped the balance against the Maronites and formed a unity among them and gathered all Muslim elements under one roof under the name of the Lebanese National Movement (LNA) (Armaoğlu 1994, Cleveland 1994).

However, when the Maronites threatened to divide the country after falling back in the face of the regular attacks of the LNA - a threat that would lead to a map that would destroy the dream of a Greater Syria - Syria cut off its military support to the Muslims and soon began to pursue a policy aimed at weakening Fatah leader Arafat and Druze leader Canpolat, thinking that such a strong appearance of the LNA would disrupt Syria's policy of governing Lebanon. Assad's accusation of the LNA and his declaration that he would not allow any structure that wanted to divide the country or cause it to do so (Cleveland 1994) constituted the turning point of the first phase of the civil war (Pipes 1990).

After a compromise was reached between Lebanese President and Syrian President Assad, Syrian and Lebanese troops organized joint operations to eliminate the LUH after the Syrian-backed Maronite leader Elias Serkis won the May 1976 elections. At this point, the LNA forces led by Canpolat began to decline and lost significant positions in the areas they controlled (Armaoğlu 1994: 524).

The heads of state of Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia came together in Riyadh on October 18, 1976 in order to stop the conflicts and reestablish stability in the country. With the Riyadh Agreement signed on the basis of the compromises reached, it was decided that an Arab Deterrence Force of 30 thousand people would be formed for Lebanon and that the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) would respect the Lebanese administration (Ismael and Ismael 1998; Armaoğlu 1994). Thus, while the PLO found the right to shelter in Lebanese territory, Syria created a legal basis for its military presence in Lebanon by sending 28,000 soldiers to the 30,000-strong armed forces to be formed. Hafez al-Assad, the last representative of the "Greater Syria" project that started with King Abdullah, succeeded





Lebanese Foreign Policy and Lebanese-Syrian Relations until The Assassination of Refik Hariri in 2005

in controlling the Lebanese administration for a while by first deploying his military presence in Lebanon, which he considered as a part of Syrian territory, and then legitimizing this situation on a legal basis. (Goldschmidt and Davidson 2011)

The assassination of Kemal Canpolat, the leader of the LNA, in 1977, the assassination attempts against Arafat and the Syrian takeover of the country pushed the LNA into a process of disintegration. As the unity among Muslim groups came to the point of disappearing and the Shiites organized themselves under the Amal organization and became a party to small-scale conflicts in the south of Lebanon and targeted the Maronites, the steps towards cooperation between the Maronites and Israel strengthened in the country. With the right-wing Likud Party (founded in 1973 under the leadership of retired General Ariel Sharon) coming to power in the 1977 elections in Israel and Menahem Begin becoming Prime Minister (Orallı 2005 :40), the Israeli policy of expelling the Palestinians from the region - contrary to the rights recognized in the Riyadh Treaty - came to the agenda again (Pipes 1990).

Under the leadership of hard-line politicians such as Prime Minister Begin and Defense Minister Ariel Sharon, Israel launched a comprehensive military operation on June 6, 1982, in order to break Syrian influence in the region and remove Palestinian refugees from the region. The ongoing conflict in Lebanon between the Phalangist guerrillas and Syrian forces (Chomsky 1993:304), the declaration of "Free Lebanon" under the leadership of Major Saad Haddad in 1979 despite the presence of the UN Peacekeeping Force deployed to the south of the country in March 1978 by the United Nations Security Council, and the search for support by the Lebanese Maronites created the preconditions that pushed Israel into the 1982 operation. (Cleveland 1994)

The operation launched by Israeli troops on June 6, 1982 with an army of 90,000 and the siege of Beirut within two days, surpassing the UN forces, made the city of Beirut the center of the war, and the PLO and Israeli soldiers in this region. They engaged in a street war that would last for 2 months. Despite Israeli Prime Minister Begin's statement that he has no eye on Lebanese territory and that there is no situation that requires Syria to intervene, serious clashes took place between the Syrian troops and Israeli forces and thousands of Syrian soldiers lost their lives, and as a result of the conflicts, Syria suffered a great loss. lost power and prestige (Cleveland 1994)

After intense clashes and the occupation of Beirut for nearly two months, the parties came together under the mediation of the United States and agreed on the Habib Plan prepared by US and Israeli officials (Pollock 1986:264). According to this plan, Arafat and PLO military forces numbering more than 10,000 left Lebanon on August 30, 1982 and Syria lost its influence over Lebanon to a great extent (Chomsky 1993:400). Thus, in Lebanon, which Israel entered with the aim of establishing a lasting peace, it succeeded not in establishing peace, but in breaking the influence of the PLO and Syria. (Mansfield 2012)





After this period in which Israel occupied Lebanon and postponed the power of the administrative authority, Israeli troops decided to withdraw gradually. Following the agreement signed in 1983 with the new president of Lebanon, Amin Jamayel, who was elected with the support of the Israeli administration, Israeli troops withdrew first to Sayda and then from the whole country in 1985. However, the pro-Israeli structure under the command of Saad Haddad, consisting of Christian Phalangists, maintained its presence south of the Litani River under the name of a security strip until 2000, and withdrew the troops it had been harboring there in May 2000 and assumed control of the pressure mechanism created on Syria to remove its troops from Lebanon. (Turan 2003:382).

3.2.2 Syrian-led National Reconciliation and the Taif Treaty

The Maronites, who explicitly approved of Israel's occupation of Lebanese territory in 1982, created public opinion in favor of Israel's withdrawal from the occupied territories in line with their frustration with the increase in clashes between Muslim groups in the country with Israeli troops after the PLO and their inability to exercise their democratically elected power. Following the signing of the agreement on Israel's gradual withdrawal of its troops from Lebanese territory, the Lebanese army, under the command of the Maronites, embarked on operations in the Druze enclaves in order to restore control in the pre-civil war form (Devlin 1986: 306). The armed militias of the Druze, strengthened by the support they received from Syria, especially for the withdrawal of the Israeli army, started a fierce resistance against the Maronites, and thus, the two-year temporary ceasefire period in the country ended in 1985, and the country found itself in a new civil war before the smoke of the Israeli occupation cooled (Armaoğlu 1994:19-20).

In 1985, while Shiites and Druze took up arms against Sunnis in Beirut, Maronites in other parts of the country were divided into two, accusing each other of pursuing pro-Syrian and pro-Israeli policies. The Syrian troops, who tried to avoid confrontation with Israeli troops during the occupation and suffered heavy casualties in armed conflicts, took a stance in favor of providing military equipment to the groups in the region from outside and not entering the conflict directly again, despite the persistent demands of the Maronite President Samir Gagea, who was elected in March 1985. (Devlin 1986)

One of the main actors in the tensions during this period was the organized Shiite population, which remained in the background in other conflicts and was involved in hot conflicts with the Sunni population in the country in the lead up to the Taif Treaty. Moussa Sadr, who came to the fore as the actor created in Lebanese politics by the Iranian Islamic Revolution in 1979, created an important center of attraction in the country both politically and militarily with his Hezbollah organization. Syria's support for Hezbollah against Israel during the 1982-1984 period, when Syria was not involved in Lebanon, and the paving the way for Hezbollah in the axis of the rapprochement in Syrian-Iranian relations, led this





organization to inflict heavy losses on the Israeli armies in the south of Lebanon through its armed forces and to come to the fore as the most organized actor in Lebanon after Israel left the country in 1985. (Turan 2003:385)

During the 1985-1986 period, when the Shiite population also resorted to armed force in an organized structure, the Sunni population in the country was fighting against both Syrian troops and Shiite militias with the Islamic Tawhid Movement formed under the leadership of Sheikh Said Shaaban. Especially in 1983, the cooperation of this organization with Fatah and its clashes with the Shiites was a rehearsal for the chaos of the post-1985 period. In the fight for the reform of the political system, when the Sunni organizations, which were on the opposite front of the National Pact that had existed since 1943, came into conflict with the Maronites, Syria took action and put pressure on the Maronites and called on them to compromise on a new political system (Devlin 1986:308).

In response to Syria's invitation, Lebanon's new President Amin Jamayel broke the National Pact and appointed Maronite General Michel Aoun as prime minister, which greatly increased the tension in the country. As the clashes intensified, the Maronite rulers asked Syria for support and announced that they would share some of their political powers with the Muslim population in the country if the clashes were stopped, and all groups agreed to come together under Syrian leadership.

In October 1989, the talks took place in Taif, Saudi Arabia, where the demographic structure of the country had changed significantly since the 1943 National Pact. As a result of the Taif talks, where Syria asserted its dominance over Lebanon in front of all Arab countries and dictated some changes in the Lebanese administrative mechanism in its favor, it was agreed that the presidency would remain with the Maronites, but the executive powers of this office would be transferred to the Sunni prime minister and the Shiite parliament speaker. The number of deputies in parliament was increased from 99 to 128, with equal representation for Muslims and Christians.

As a result of the 1989 Taif Agreement, all militias except Hezbollah were disbanded, the armed structures of sectarian organizations were dismantled and their weapons were confiscated. The fact that the Taif Treaty did not include any article on the withdrawal of Syrian troops from the country gave Syrian military units legitimacy within Lebanese territory, and in a sense, Syria implemented the structure that Israel could not realize after the invasion in 1982 in line with its own conditions (Alkan 2000: 304). Although the biggest reaction to the terms of the Taif Agreement came from the Maronite Phalangist groups and General Michel Aoun, the harsh attitude of the Syrian troops against the military groups under the command of Aoun and the suppression of the armed resistance with harsh interventions narrowed the scope of Aoun's resistance and General Aoun had to leave the country by taking





refuge in the French Embassy (Cleveland 1994:444). As a result of the suppression of the Phalangist groups in the country, the Lebanese Civil War, which lasted for fifteen years, ended in 1991 (Turan 2003:388).

3.3. Lebanon - Syria Relations after the 1989 Taif Treaty

3.3.1. Rafik Hariri - Hafez al-Assad Alliance

A special relationship between Syria and Lebanon started with the Treaty of Taif. In the presidential elections held under Syrian supervision, the Maronite leader Rene Muawad, who was known to have good relations with Syria, won the presidential elections, but he was assassinated shortly afterwards and replaced by the pro-Syrian Elias Harawi. In 1991, Harawi appointed forty new members to the Parliament, equalizing the number of Muslims and Christians, thus creating a structure in line with the spirit of the Taif Treaty. Parliamentary elections, also envisaged in the Taif process, were held on August 23, 1992, for the first time since 1972. In this direction, Lebanon began to host a process in which Syria's control increased both on political and military platforms (Alkan 2000:304).

This special relationship was also an important tool to overcome the rupture in Syria's relations with the United States in the Lebanese restructuring project. In line with the US demands regarding Lebanon, the Lebanese market was parceled out by Saudi and Syrian businessmen, and at this point, Syria-Saudi Arabia cooperation, in parallel with the fact that the negotiations were held in Saudi Arabia, put US-Syrian relations in the direction of improvement. It became evident that the statements that the presence of 35,000 Syrian troops in the country might worry the United States did not reflect the truth, as the Lebanese people demanded the presence of Syrian allied forces within their borders and contributing to the stabilization process rather than the occupation of a foreign power, and the Syrian forces, which were characterized as an occupation force by Israel, became the protector of the Lebanese people (Cleveland 1994:445).

The implicit cooperation process in Lebanon-Syria relations was formalized on paper with the treaties signed between the two countries in 1991. As of August 1993, the Syrian-Lebanese High Council, which was established within the framework of the "Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Coordination" signed on May 22, 1991 and the "Security and Defense Pact Treaty" signed on September 2, 1991, started its activities. In the framework of these agreements, which gave Syria a say in all kinds of economic and administrative arrangements in Lebanon, a number of framework agreements were signed to develop mutual cooperation and encourage investments of businessmen, and Lebanon was included in the Syrian hinterland economically (Lebanon-Israel-Jordan Country Report 1995:3).

After the 1992 parliamentary elections, Rafik Hariri, who became prime minister, attracted significant investments to Lebanon, which was in ruins, with the full support of Syria, and the country, especially Beirut, entered a reconstruction process. Emphasizing at every opportunity that the Syrian military presence was of great importance for the security





of the country and the elimination of Israeli threats, Hariri took important steps to improve and maintain relations with Syria. Again during Hariri's term, important administrative arrangements were made and a conciliatory attitude was followed in order for the Christian groups, which boycotted the 1992 elections, to take their place in the Lebanese political scene again. With the second term of Hariri's rule, the ice between Muslim and Christian groups in the country melted. By participating in the 1999 parliamentary elections, the Maronites adopted the method of political representation and indirectly accepted the Taif order with a Syrian perspective. (Mansfield 2012)

It would be appropriate to say that a "Pax Syria" was established in Lebanon in the period after the Taif Treaty. In fact, the armed operations of the Shiite Hezbollah, which emerged as the only group that did not lay down arms in the country, against the Israeli-backed South Lebanese Army in the south of the country and the fierce clashes with the Israeli troops stationed around the Golan did not end in this period. Syria's support and encouragement of Hezbollah to fight against any element that could be associated with Israel and to undermine Israel's territorial integrity has led to Hezbollah's representation in the Lebanese Parliament as a political party. With Syrian support, Hezbollah, which is the most organized group of Shiites, estimated to make up approximately 28 percent of the country, is both represented in the political arena and able to carry out periodic operations against Israeli troops and the South Lebanese Army in the south of the country. (Alkan 2000)

While Israel's close relationship with the Maronites aimed to break Syria's sphere of influence over Lebanon, the Syrian administration, which developed an alliance relationship with non-state organizations in Lebanon, suppressed Israel by using these means. By forming a front against the Christian-Jewish alliance with both Sunni and Shiite organizations, Syria aimed for the complete removal of Israeli troops from Lebanon during the Hafez al-Assad era, and in this parallel, it increased its support for Hezbollah, especially in 1999, and sent hardline messages to Israeli domestic politics. The Israeli government took another domestic political step and left Lebanese territory completely in May 2000 due to concerns about the need to withdraw Israeli troops from Lebanon and the economic difficulties in the country. (Goldschmidt and Davidson 2011)

3.3.2. Syria-Lebanon Relations under Bashar al-Assad

Shortly after Israel's withdrawal from southern Lebanon, Hafez al-Assad died in June 2000 and his son Bashar al-Assad was appointed as the President of Syria by the Baath Party. Under Bashar al-Assad's rule, Syria adopted a different approach from Hafez al-Assad's stance in Syria-Lebanon relations -on the basis of rhetoric- and stated that Syria could withdraw its troops from this country in line with Lebanon's request (Ercan 2000:93). However, such a statement, which was made during a period when Syria stood out as the main pillar of Lebanon in terms of its political, economic and military presence, did not carry any concern other than stretching the tensions in Syrian-Israeli relations. (Mansfield 2012)





Although Israel's withdrawal of its troops from Lebanon in May 2000 raised the question of the necessity of Syrian troops in the Lebanese public opinion, the absence of a group that would carry this discourse to the public, both at the ethnic level and on the political platform, and the Syrian influence on effective political organizations postponed the questioning of the legitimacy of Syrian troops in Lebanon for a while. With Syria's neutralization of pro-Yasser Arafat and pro-Fatah Palestinian groups in Lebanon and its engagement of Palestinian groups formed within a policy with a Syrian perspective as the main actors in regional politics, Syria's influence in Lebanese political life and its ability to use armed forces outside politics have greatly increased (Blanford 2002:10).

The main basis for the presence of Syrian troops in Lebanon during the Bashar al-Assad era can be traced back to Israel's policies towards the region. Following Israel's military operations targeting the Palestinian territories, Palestinian groups based in Lebanon and acting from a Syrian perspective launched rocket attacks against Israel through Lebanese territory. This attitude of the Palestinian groups pushed Lebanese Hezbollah to carry out operations against Israel and Syrian-backed Palestinian and Shiite groups launched military attacks directly targeting Israeli groups through Lebanon. Bashar al-Assad, whom Israel blamed for these attacks, declared that he would not accept responsibility for these events that took place outside his territory and threw the ball to the Lebanese government, which put the Lebanese government and Prime Minister Rafik Hariri in a difficult situation, but a period emerged in which Hariri needed Syria's military presence more, taking into account the balances within the country. (Blanford 2002)

Especially considering the Syrian-Israeli relations that broke down as a result of the Second Intifada and the positions of Syria and Israel in the Golan region, the Lebanese territories turned into a land where Syria and Israel implicitly clashed and conflicted their interests under Bashar al-Assad. This process took on a different dimension with the Druze leader Walid Canpolat's approach that Syrian troops were destabilizing Lebanon and pointing to Syria's presence in Lebanon as the sole reason for the strained relations with Israel. The US operation in Iraq within the framework of the Greater Middle East Project (BOP) and the projection of eliminating Syria's military presence in Lebanon within the framework of the BOP, which took shape in a parallel process with this outburst of the Druze leader, pushed the Assad administration into a difficult process until September 2004. On September 3, 2004, Lebanon's Maronite President Emil Lahoud, who pursued a policy of strategic partnership with Syria and was one of the biggest advocates of the Syrian military presence in the country, proposed to amend the constitution on September 3, 2004 to extend his term of office from six years to nine years - in line with Syria's demands - and Rafik Hariri was added to the anti-Syrian structures in Lebanon. Hariri and two Ministers of State, who opposed this approach of Emil Lahoud and Bashar al-Assad, resigned as a result of this process and Hariri became the symbol of the anti-Syrian opposition organization in Lebanon in a short period of time. (Mansfield 2012).





The change in the repressive attitude pursued under Hafez al-Assad, the withdrawal of Israeli troops from Lebanese territory and the changing Middle East perspective in the international arena caused Syria under Bashar al-Assad to significantly change its perspective on Lebanon and brought about the transformation of the opposition movement in Lebanon into an organized structure. The political discourses in Lebanon, which diversified with the perspective of the US Greater Middle East Project, gathered the Lebanese opposition under a single umbrella in September 2004, and with the assassination of Rafik Hariri on February 14, 2005, Lebanese-Syrian relations entered into an irreversible process of differentiation under the pressure of the international community. (Kazancı 2005).

3.3.3. Reflections of the Assassination of Rafic Hariri on the Middle East

The United Nations Security Council Resolution 1559 of September 2, 2004 demanded the withdrawal of Syrian forces from Lebanon, the disarming of Palestinians in Lebanese refugee camps and the disarmament of Hezbollah in order to protect Lebanon's territorial integrity and national security (Security Council Resolution 1559 2004). It is possible to say that this resolution was influenced by the United States, which claimed that it would take steps to stabilize the region within the framework of the Greater Middle East Project, and France, which made significant investments in Lebanon and occupied Lebanon for twenty-five years between 1918 and 1943.

This UN resolution stands out as the most noteworthy step taken to force the Syrian troops, who were deployed in Lebanon under the name of "Arab Preventive Force" after the rejection of the ceasefire agreement proposed by the Arab League in 1976 by the warring parties in Lebanon, to leave Lebanon, the number of which was gradually reduced to 14,000 in September 2004. As a result of the US policy of pressure on Syria after the invasion of Iraq and France's step taken to ensure that a decision was taken at the UN in order not to be left behind in the Middle East the political balance in Lebanon shifted and the anti-Syrian mass in this country started to raise its voice with the moral support it received from the US and the UN. . (Kazancı 2005:4)

Rafik Hariri, who served as prime minister of Lebanon for ten years with the support of Syria and resigned in protest against President Emil Lahoud, whom he accused of being pro-Syrian, and the decisions he took in a process parallel to UN Security Council Resolution 1559, became the representative of all opposition groups that met on the same ground for the removal of Syrian troops from Lebanese territory. Hariri, who continued to make statements that drew Syria's reaction, was accused of pursuing a policy in line with the US and the Greater Middle East Project, and while he lost popularity in the Arab world, he was appreciated by the Lebanese opposition and Western countries, especially the US and France.

The death of Hariri in a bomb attack on February 14, 2005, just a few months after his resignation and the beginning of his opposition stance, turned all the arrows to Syria and the Lebanese government, which was accused of pursuing a Syrian-led policy. The fact that the





name of the group that claimed responsibility for this terrorist act, which was condemned by Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, included the phrase "Damascus Beldeleri", brought Syria, which was the usual suspect, to the brink of a dangerous turn (Hürriyet Newspaper 2005:12). The demonstrations organized in parallel with this, in which many Lebanese, Muslim and Christian, participated, were aimed at breaking Syria's influence over Lebanon and demanding Syria to withdraw its troops from Lebanon, and the Syrian government was held responsible for Hariri's assassination.

Rather than examining the preceding events of the process, which was constructed to point to Syria, looking at what happened as a result of the assassination of Rafic Hariri seems to be the method that should be used in order to better see the parties to the assassination.

The proposition that Syria, the Lebanese government and Hezbollah were behind Hariri's assassination is a proposition strongly supported by Western states and Israel. Despite the efforts of Lebanese President Emil Lahoud and Prime Minister Omar Kerami to keep Syrian troops in the country, Syria was forced to withdraw all its troops from Lebanon on April 30, 2005. Even on March 5, 2005, Lebanese Defense Minister Abdelrahim Mirad's statement that Syrian troops should remain in the Bekaa Valley for the sake of Lebanon's territorial integrity did not prevent the Syrian military presence from leaving the country. In Lebanon, where there is no armed militia except Hezbollah, Syria's position in Lebanon, which is the biggest supporter of Hezbollah and the Palestinian refugees, has weakened to a great extent, leaving Hezbollah under serious pressure to lay down its arms. Israeli pressure on Palestinian groups increased and small-scale clashes broke out in the Seba Farms in southern Lebanon and the Golan region.

In essence, this is how the death of Rafik Hariri reflected on the Syrian front. Syria withdrew its troops from Lebanon, the ideal of "Greater Syria" with all its dominance over the government came to the point of completely disappearing and the Assad government started to be questioned within the country. The question to be asked at this point is how rational it would be for Syria to undertake such an assassination without the ability to anticipate all these developments that are highly likely to occur. Moreover, in an environment where Syria was worried that it would be its turn to intervene after Iraq, it is worth questioning the possibility that Syria would have organized such an assassination despite knowing that it would draw the reaction of the entire international community and that the arrows would be directed against it.

The need to address the US Greater Middle East Project and its concerns about ensuring Israel's security in the region is also important in order to examine the parties to the Hariri assassination in detail. Israel's short-term gains in the aftermath of the Hariri assassination include Lebanon becoming the fourth country in the Greater Middle East Project after Afghanistan, Iraq and Kyrgyzstan to enter into good relations with Israel, Israel's potential to suppress armed groups in Lebanon and the prevention of periodic attacks on its territory.





Taking into account the fact that Israel's hand was greatly strengthened while sitting at the table with both Lebanon and Syria in the name of "Middle East Peace" as a result of the intense pressure on the Bashar al-Assad regime, it became clear that in the post-Yasser Arafat era, until Hamas would change the balance, in parallel with the Palestinian-Israeli rapprochement, the peace negotiations in the region would work in Israel's favor and Israel would have the power to transform the Middle East peace into Pax Israel. Although Israel failed to turn this process in its favor as a result of its pro-democracy and anti-conciliation attitudes, it has largely pulled the strings in the region and has had considerable freedom of action.

After the Iraq intervention, the US, which initiated a constitutional process for the establishment of democracy in the country and organized general elections, but has not yet been able to ensure the establishment of a stable structure, has also made some important gains after the Hariri assassination. First of all, Syria's military structure in Lebanon, which could pose a direct threat to both Israel and Jordan in the event of a possible Syrian intervention, was eliminated and Syria's frontline defense line was eliminated. With the end of Syria's presence in Lebanon, Syria has lost its ability to direct this country to a great extent.

Syria, which was accused by the US of providing the greatest support to the Iraqi insurgents, received intense reaction from the international public opinion after the Hariri assassination and was drawn into a great psychological war (Orhan 2003). In fact, 29 senior Baathists, including Ibrahim al-Hassan al-Tikriti, one of Iraq's wanted former Baathists and known to be close to Saddam Hussein, were handed over to the American forces with Syrian help. The Assad regime, accused of pursuing policies aimed at dragging Lebanon back into a civil war and of nurturing international terrorism, was forced to enter into a tacit cooperation with the United States in order to avoid seeing the tragedy in Iraq on its own soil, and was directly implicated in the Hariri assassination and became a prisoner of a trial whose verdict was handed down by the UN Commission of Inquiry on the Hariri Assassination headed by Detlev Mehlis (Mehlis Report on the Hariri Assassination 2005).

When we evaluate the actors associated with the assassination of Rafic Hariri and the creation of the unstable structure in the Middle East in the light of current developments and weigh them in terms of the repercussions of the Hariri assassination, it becomes clear what kind of benefits this process has brought to which actors and what it has cost countries. In the light of these answers, it is possible to reach a certain conclusion in the analysis of the countries that hope to benefit from the disruption of balances in the Middle East, the emergence of unstable processes and terrorist acts. (Mehlis Report on the Hariri Assassination 2005).

Conclusion

Lebanon remains the most politically complex and sectarianly fragmented country in the Middle East. When this position is coupled with the legacy of a bloody civil war from the past, Lebanon is a bomb that is always ready to explode in a geography like the Middle East





where crisis scenarios are perpetual. The fact that Lebanon is far from a nation-state identity and that people of different religions are in such a position to be manipulated by external actors is one of the main factors that create a favorable environment for civil war in Lebanon.

In a process in which the definition of national interest could not be brought to a common ground as a result of the incompatibility and differences of expectations between the sects, and as a result, regional and global actors were able to direct the definition of interests on the Lebanese political ground, the government headed by Fouad Siniora, who won the parliamentary elections held after the assassination of Hariri with a significant advantage, took office with the main objective of accelerating Syria's withdrawal from Lebanese political life.

The difficulty of achieving a unity in Lebanon based on sectarian ties or ideological unity and the impossibility of possible alliance searches to meet in an amalgam structure have been evaluated on the axis of detailed examples above. The March 14th Coalition, which emerged as one of the pillars of the artificial cooperation umbrella formed in the region within the framework of the Greater Middle East Project, in which the US aims at a structural change in the Middle East, and the Siniora Government, which was announced as a pragmatic reflection of it, appear to be the product of this type of artificial unity.

The March 14th Coalition, named after the date when people took to the streets with an anti-Syrian rhetoric after the assassination of Hariri, is generally composed of Sunnis, Druze and a large portion of Christians. The main elements that bring this structure together are anti-Syrian and anti-Iranian sentiments, a pro-Western political philosophy and the disarmament of Hezbollah. Led by Fouad Siniora, the Druze leader Walid Canbolat and Saad Hariri, the son of Rafik Hariri, they are backed by the West and Sunni Arab regimes. The most influential wing of the March 14 Coalition is the "Future Movement", which represents a Sunni structure under the leadership of Saad Hariri. Hariri's close relations with Saudi Arabia in particular have a negative impact on the view of the Shiite bloc in Lebanon towards Hariri (Gambil 2006).

The opposition bloc against the power structure consists of the Shiites led by Hezbollah, which includes the Amal organization, and Michel Aoun's "Free Nationalist Movement" (FNM), which is supported by some Christians. As it can be seen, it is difficult to say that the entire Christian population is part of the anti-Syrian bloc. There is a significant group among the Christians who fear a growing Sunni-Saudi influence in the country and the consequent radicalization of the country into a radical Islamic discourse, and this group plays the main driving role in Aoun's conjunctural cooperation with Hezbollah. Michel Aoun's participation in the opposition front gives Hezbollah an opportunity to show that the opposition is not exclusively Shiite and to refute claims that it is supported by Syria. This front is supported by Iran and Syria. On February 6, 2006, Aoun and Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, leader of Lebanese Hezbollah, cemented their alliance by reaching an agreement to weaken the political power of the March 14 coalition.





In the absence of Syrian and Israeli troops, the political power in Lebanon to dominate the entire country and to be able to act within the framework of a consensus on political guidance was the main expectation of both European states that advocate democracy and stability in the country and the US, which was preparing to put Lebanon forward as a model within the framework of the BOP. In parallel with this, the disarmament of sectarian political groups and families in the country, the marginalization of Hezbollah and the need for the Shiite population to interact positively with the Lebanese government have emerged as the primary political goals in Lebanon.

While lobbying efforts were being carried out to carry out the developments in this direction, pressure on pro-Syrian President Emile Lahoud to leave office was intensifying and Western influence on Hezbollah and Syria was increasing, a serious break in the "legitimization of the pro-Western government", which had reached a certain stage, occurred when Hezbollah kidnapped two Israeli soldiers and killed eight of them on July 12, 2006. In addition to the kidnapping of the soldiers, Hezbollah-affiliated armed forces in southern Lebanon launched missile attacks on Israeli territory, which Israel characterized as an act of war against Lebanon and responded by launching air and ground attacks against Lebanon. On July 12, 2006, Israel declared war on Lebanon for hosting Hezbollah, which it claimed had attacked its territory, and blockaded Lebanese ports from the sea and dealt a heavy blow to the Lebanese economy. In response, Hezbollah intensified its missile attacks on northern Israel from southern Lebanon.

After more than a month of fighting, following dramatic denunciations by Lebanese Prime Minister Fouad Siniora and pressure from the international community, the parties ceased hostilities on August 14 in accordance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1701 of August 11, 2006. Following Resolution 1701, which stipulated an immediate ceasefire between Israel and Hezbollah, the full and uninterrupted assertion of Lebanese government authority throughout the country, the disarmament of militias other than the Lebanese army, and the assertion of Lebanese government authority by the Lebanese army with the support of the UN task force UNIFIL (Rogers 2006), Israel lifted its blockade of Lebanon on September 7, 2006 and left the area it had occupied up to the Litani River in parallel with the deployment of Lebanese and UNIFIL (United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon) troops.

Between July 12 and August 14, 2006, the armed conflict left over a thousand Lebanese civilians dead, Lebanon on the brink of a severe economic crisis and Lebanese infrastructure badly damaged. Louise Arbour, the Chairperson of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, stated that Israel may have committed war crimes during the conflict. Following this process, Israel was heavily criticized in the international arena and was drawn into a process in which it was largely isolated in the world public opinion as a result of its





disproportionate use of force and the damage it caused to the civilian population, from a platform where it could legally claim its rights.

The Israel-Hezbollah war brought about a redefinition of the balance of power in the country. The plan to disarm and politicize Hezbollah, which overlapped with the isolation of Syria and Iran from the region and was an important part of Israel's and the US's goals for the Middle East, was largely disrupted by Israel's disproportionate use of force and the reaction it faced on the international platform. Hezbollah, which had recently been marginalized, gained popularity not only among the masses of different religions and sects in Lebanon but also among the public opinion of Middle Eastern countries. With the resignation of Hezbollah's members in the government in November 2006, an important pressure mechanism was created for the resignation of Prime Minister Fouad Siniora and the formation of a "National Unity Government". According to a public opinion poll conducted by the Beirut Center for Research and Information, ninety-four percent of Shiites and fifty percent of Christians think that Siniora's government has lost its legitimacy (Fisk, 2006). Seventy-seven percent of Christians, according to the same survey, support Aoun's search for cooperation with Hezbollah.

The process in Lebanon, which forced the government to resign and was mainly driven by civilian initiative, brought about developments in which the legitimacy of Syria and Hezbollah increased as a result of their efforts to draw Israel back into Lebanon. In this way, Syria, which has ceased to exist militarily but continues to dominate politically, and Iran, with its support for Hezbollah and its anti-Israel political stance, have once again expanded their spheres of influence in Lebanon. In the emerging picture, it is seen that Israel's hardline stance has ended the process in Lebanon, which was working in its favor and in parallel with the BOP. In a way, the crisis in Lebanon is a consequence of this new power sharing. In Lebanon, where the weakness of the central government and the state and the consequent weakness of every part of the society continues to take up arms in search of ensuring its own security, the demonstrations that took place in order to bring down the government clearly show how serious the Lebanese people are polarized and how this has the potential to turn into an armed struggle. The current process in Lebanon, which is completely open to external influences in its political, economic and security dimensions, can be described as an "unarmed civil war". On the axis of an approach to interpreting the present and the near future based on the possible outcomes, the answer to the question of which forces would benefit from a civil war that may erupt as a result of the continuation of the current armament will help us identify the forces that want Lebanon to be destabilized.





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