

## **BILATERAL RELATIONS, SECURITY AND MIGRATION: LEBANESE EXPATRIATES IN THE GULF STATES**

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### **Abstract**

**Background:** Lebanon is a source country of migration; it is an exporter of human resources, which goes mainly to the Gulf States. Given that the Gulf States' bilateral relations with Lebanon have been deteriorating since the onset of the Syrian crisis, it is easy to see that there may be serious negative impacts on the wellbeing of the estimated 400,000 Lebanese expats in the Gulf States. In order to see if this is so, we conducted a survey of Lebanese working in the GCC, asking whether the weakening bilateral relations between the GCC and Lebanon was having a negative effect on their wellbeing. This research turns on the hypotheses that a), bilateral relations can be affected by population mobility and, in turn, that population mobility is affected by bilateral relations; b), when bilateral relations deteriorate between home and host countries, it negatively affects immigrants; and c), there is a clear correlation between bilateral relations and migrant wellbeing. Given the scarcity of data on residents and migrants in Lebanon, we explored our hypotheses using convenience sampling through social media, mainly Facebook and LinkedIn. Since Lebanese expatriates working in the Gulf countries are the ones most likely to be affected by the crisis, they were the focus of this research. To test the hypotheses, we used multiple methodologies and harnessed triangulated between literature on migrants, a media review, and our survey questionnaire. Our target population for the survey questionnaire consisted of all Lebanese working in the Gulf States. The questionnaire asked this cohort about their gender, religious affiliation and their origins by province in Lebanon; whether or not they were concerned over the deteriorating relations; whether they had made contingency plans should they be deported; and how they assessed the importance of the GCC to Lebanon. By triangulating with the literature and media review, we used our responses to obtain additional insights and relevant contextual information. In conclusion, we offer three findings:

- a) When bilateral relations deteriorate between home and host countries, it negatively affects immigrants;
- b) There is a clear correlation between bilateral relations and migrant wellbeing; and
- c) Bilateral relations can be affected by population mobility and, in turn, that population mobility is affected by bilateral relations.

Given these findings, we claim that Lebanon urgently needs to devise a policy that protects its long-term interest with the GCC and to formulate a comprehensive national emigration policy. Lebanon is distinguished by the high degree of skilled human capital it generates and exports, accounting for one quarter of its Gross Domestic Product. Given the size and importance of this factor, Lebanon should therefore deal wisely with the situation before it metastasizes.

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**Keywords:** Migration, bilateral relations, diplomacy migrant wellbeing, Lebanon, Lebanese, Gulf Countries, Gulf Cooperation Council

## I. BACKGROUND

The long-standing special bilateral relations between the Gulf States and Lebanon are undergoing some serious tensions. These tensions are now threatening to deteriorate a relationship that has always been fraternal, strong, and advantageous to both sides. One of the more important dimensions of this relationship has been the contribution of Lebanese expatriates to the development of the GCC countries, which has in turn spurred Lebanon's Gross Domestic Product.<sup>1</sup> These tensions are occurring in the rapidly changing geopolitical *milieu* of the Middle East since the beginning of the 'Arab Spring' and, in particular, since the onset of the Syrian crisis. The tensions intensified as the Syrian conflict divided the region into two camps along Islamic sectarian lines – Syria, Iran and Hezbollah in one camp, and the rest of the Middle Eastern countries with Turkey in the opposite camp (Helfont 2013). The tensions between the GCC and Lebanon mounted as Syria's allies in Lebanon, especially Hezbollah, threw themselves into a supportive role for Assad's regime and Lebanon failed to adhere to its self-declared "disassociation policy", enshrined in the Baabda Declaration, with regard to turmoil in the region, particularly the conflict in Syria.

The Baabda Declaration is an agreement among various Lebanese leaders from the 8<sup>th</sup> of March<sup>2</sup> and the 14<sup>th</sup> of March alliances<sup>3</sup> that came about as a result of the National Dialogue called for by President Michel Suleiman on June 11, 2012. The Declaration, which is composed of 17 articles, calls, in Article 12, for Lebanon to be neutral in regard to political polarization and regional and international conflicts, in order to spare the country the negative ramifications of intervention in regional crises. Remaining neutral is seen as a way of protecting Lebanon's supreme interest, national unity and civil peace (Re'asat Al Jamhouriat 2012). However, Article 12 was overtly breached by Hezbollah in the current Syrian crisis, and consequently by other Islamic fundamental groups in the country.

Due to the interference of certain groups in Lebanon in Syria, the Gulf Cooperation Council addressed a letter to President Suleiman that was delivered by the Gulf Corporation Council's Secretary-General Abdel Latif Bin Rashid Al Zayani. In the letter, the GCC expressed its "extreme concerns" over Lebanon's inability to apply the Baabda Declaration and its self avowed disassociation policy to its domestic parties and groups. In order to give further weight to the letter and show solidarity among the GCC countries in this matter, Mr.

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<sup>1</sup> Migration from Lebanon to the oil-producing countries began in the 1950 and increased between 1960 and 1970, when the emerging GCC markets desperately needed unskilled and skilled manpower in various sectors of their economies (Labaki 1992). The wars that ravaged Lebanon after 1975 forced more Lebanese toward migration particularly to the oil-producing countries in the MENA region, where their labor is well paid and the language and cultural mores present no large barriers. Lacking a large educated work force, the GCC have made up for it by hunting down brains and arms all over the world. Lebanon, which has been repeatedly buffeted by political and security turmoil, can supply the GCC with highly qualified and exceedingly adaptable human resources. The expatriate Lebanese, in turn, repatriate much of their earnings to Lebanon. . It is common knowledge that the Lebanese were among the first to have expatriated to the Gulf countries, particularly Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, especially because of their high standard of education (Al-Ostad 1986) and because migration has been part of Lebanon's collective psyche, arising from Lebanon's old merchant traditions. Being educated, adaptable, multi-lingual, and multi-cultural, Lebanese expatriates in the Gulf held key positions and were able from the onset to leverage their human capital into becoming indispensable elements of the economic growth and cultural development of the GCC countries. In his article on the Lebanese to the Gulf and Saudi Arabia, Marwan Maaouia wrote that in terms of job occupation, the Lebanese migrants in the GCC "tended to spread fairly evenly in different sectors..." and were in their majority educated workers "in the high salary bracket" (Maaouia 1992). In her article, Choghig Kasparian reported that a "multinational leader in the field of transportation and computer solutions with a regional office for the Middle East, North Africa, and the Indian subcontinent stated in 2008 "that 35% of the directorship positions in the Gulf countries are occupied by Lebanese" (Kasparian 2008).

<sup>2</sup> The March 8 Alliance is a coalition of various political parties in Lebanon that includes Hezbollah, the Free Patriotic Movement, and the Amal Movement among other political groups.

<sup>3</sup> The March 14 Alliance is a coalition of various political parties in Lebanon that includes the Lebanese Forces, the Kataeb Party and the Mustaqbal Party, among other political groups and individuals.

Al Zayani was accompanied by the ambassadors to Lebanon of the GCC member states, i.e. Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the UAE, Qatar and Oman.

The GCC's muscular letter was the result of reports that Hezbollah was increasing its military involvement on the side of Assad's regime against the Free Syrian Army in Syria. In addition a criticism by General Michel Aoun of the 8<sup>th</sup> of March coalition of Bahrain over Bahraini protesters was considered interference in the domestic affairs of the country and was condemned by members of the GCC. Bahraini Minister of Justice, Islamic Affairs and Endowments, Sheikh Khalid bin Ali al-Khalifa went on record as claiming that Hezbollah's "radical ideology" posed a threat to Gulf stability (*Naharnet Newsdesk* 2012). It was reported that the letter indicated that the Council "looks [to Lebanon] to abide by the [disassociation] policy in words and actions in order to prevent placing Lebanon's security and stability at risk or affect the interests of its people and their security" (*The Daily Star* March 05 2013).

At the heart of these tensions is the obsessive concern of the GCC States with security and internal social order. The GCC countries heavily depend on foreign labor, be they unskilled, semi-skilled or highly skilled, to maintain their economic growth and sustain their high standard of living. Because immigrants can and have been used by their countries of origin, by interest groups and by their host countries to advance political and ideological agendas (Casltes and Miller 2009), they are increasingly seen as carriers of potential threats.

Migration and security have become intertwined since 9/11 and its aftermath. Migration issues are now matters of both international political negotiation and national security policies engaging the attention of heads of states and key ministries involved in defense, internal security, and foreign relations (Weiner M. (1993).

Due to the present geopolitical context in the Middle East, the GCC-Lebanon relations are currently influenced mainly by the following concerns: a) national and regional security; b) the Sunni-Shia conflict; c) the Iran-GCC conflict over their domains of influence in the Middle East; and d) the role of Hezbollah in the regional affairs. These concerns are the causes of divergence in the bilateral relations between the GCC, the individual Gulf States and Lebanon. Consequently, security measures and national interests have become the main determinants of the GCC-Lebanon relations, especially when dealing with the issue of 'suspicious' Lebanese expatriates.

In the subsequent section II, we contextualize the strained bilateral relations between the GCC and Lebanon by chronicling the most meaningful and famous incidents from 2009 until 2013. In section III, we review Bilateral Relations and Immigration, and in section IV, we summarize the methods used to collect the opinion of the Lebanese expatriates in the GCC. Section V presents the results of the analysis. Section VI presents our conclusions.

## **II. CONTEXTUALIZING THE DETERIORATING BILATERAL RELATIONS BETWEEN THE GCC AND LEBANON**

The GCC letter mentioned above came about as the result of a series of events that, in all, display the growing division between Lebanon and the nations of that region. Consider the following most important public incidents between 2009 and 2013 as symptomatic of how affairs have escalated over time:

Between May and October of 2009, 45 Lebanese Shiites had either been denied re-entry visas or had been asked to leave the UAE, for "security" related reasons. However, some of the deportees accused the security services in the UAE of trying to coerce them into spying on their compatriots and on Hezbollah on threat of deportation (*NowLebanon* (2009). Others argued that the deportation was a reaction to the 2008 incidents when on the 7<sup>th</sup> of May a so-called civil disobedience movement backed by the 8<sup>th</sup> of March movement led to an attempt by Hezbollah to take over West Beirut (International Crisis Group 2008).

In March 2011, a GCC diplomat serving in London said that the GCC has received from the Bahraini, French and US intelligence information confirming the fact that Hezbollah

and the Revolutionary Guards members were among those participating in the demonstrations taking place in Bahrain and in the eastern region of Saudi Arabia (*Al Muharrer* 2011). The GCC countries were planning to collaboratively expel all Lebanese Shiites from the Gulf in the wake of statements made by Hezbollah's Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah in which he supported the Shiite-led demonstrations in Manama. The GCC condemned Nasrallah's statement, holding the Lebanese government responsible for any consequences arising from these antagonistic statements, especially as regards the fate of the Lebanese Shiite expatriate community in the GCC. These statements led to the perception among the GCC leaders that the Lebanese presence threatens their national security. The GCC diplomat further stated that this condemnation precludes the deportation of thousands of Lebanese Shiites from the Gulf (*Al Muharrer* 2011).

In April 2011, Kuwait followed suit and expelled Lebanese Shiites from its territory. In a public statement Kuwaiti MP Mohammad Barak al-Muttayir called on the security agencies of Kuwait and other Gulf States to blacklist all Lebanese, Syrian, and Iranian nationals expelled from Bahrain. Muttayir told the Kuwaiti newspaper *Al-Seyassah* that the agencies should "make a list of names, photos, and fingerprints of Lebanese, Syrian, and Iranian persons expelled from Bahrain after they were proven to be involved in inciting events in the kingdom." He also went further on to call upon immediate discontinuation of Iranian, Syrian, and Lebanese organizations, and immediate surveillance of these country's businessmen, especially those who hold important positions or are privy to sensitive information (*NowLebanon* 2011).

In April 2011, the Bahrain security forces expelled 16 Lebanese, 14 of them Shiite Muslims, after dismissing them from their posts and revoking their residency permits. Furthermore, Lebanese with GCC residency, which permits their holder the entry into any GCC country, were turned away at the Bahraini customs. The deportations were, however, suspended following high level Lebanese government interference and reassurances from the Lebanese government that it supports the stability of Bahrain and that the Lebanese expatriates in Bahrain will respect the sovereignty of the State (*Zawaya* 2011).

UAE, however, resumed its expulsion of 1 Lebanese from its territory. A total of 9 Lebanese from a Bekaa Village, Yehmor, were forced to leave within 15 days of the expulsion notice. The deportees have said that the security agents in the UAE have orally asked them to disclose information on Hezbollah, which, they maintain; they don't have (Mohsen 2012).

In May 2012, officials in the UAE said that they perceived Shiites as supporters of Hezbollah. On June 6 and 7, 2012, 1,000 Lebanese were slated for expulsion from the UAE (*The Daily Star* June 06 2012). The President of the Republic of Lebanon Michel Sleiman visited the UAE to discuss the relationship of the two states, saying that he would try to get to the bottom of the reasons behind the decision in order to resolve the matter in cooperation with Emirati officials (*The Daily Star* June 06 2012). In turn, President Michel Sleiman received a pledge from leaders in the UAE to review recent measures to expel Lebanese nationals, according to sources close to Baabda Palace (*The Daily Star* June 07 2012).

The Lebanese in Qatar are anxious that their fate will follow that of the Lebanese in the UAE. The Minister of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants visited Qatar, which created an environment of satisfaction and contentment for the Lebanese Expatriates (*AsSafir* 2012).

In December 2012, the UAE foreign ministry renewed its travel warning to Lebanon, advising its citizens "to avoid nonessential travel to Lebanon" ... "as a result of the difficult and sensitive political circumstances in sisterly Lebanon" (Wehbe M. 2013).

In February 2013, 125 Lebanese (majority Shiites) in the United Arab Emirates were informed that they must leave the country within one week or risk having their properties expropriated. However the Lebanese responded that they have not committed any violation

against the law or the Emirati government, and sought recourse in the courts (*AlMonitor* 2013).

In March 2013, there were reports that the GCC was planning to deport 2000 Lebanese over their links with Hezbollah. A diplomat quoted by *Al-Seyassah* newspaper stated that, even people who are affiliated with parties who are allied with Hezbollah would be denied visas, while those working in the GCC will be deemed *persona non grata*. Lists were said to have been drafted that would officially ban certain Lebanese political figures from entering GCC countries due to their hostility and interference in the countries' internal affairs (*Trade Arabia* March 09 2013). There are also talks in the GCC general secretariat to slash the number of flights bound to Lebanon by half. Qatar, the UAE, Bahrain and Kuwait are reportedly lobbying strenuously to have the Arab League convene a meeting at the end of March to freeze Lebanon's membership. According to the same diplomat, the Arab states intend to ask the Lebanese president and prime minister to sack Foreign Minister Adnan Mansour, who voiced pro-Assad stance in a recent ministerial meeting in Cairo. Mansour took it upon himself to demand the reinstatement of the Assad regime in the Arab League in order to help find a political solution to the conflict in the country; his was the single voice that went against the otherwise unanimous decision of the Arab League's members (*The Daily Star* March 05 and 06 2013).

In August 2012, a Kuwaiti national was kidnapped in Lebanon by unknown abductors in the village of Howsh al-Ghanam in the Bekaa valley. Although, the abduction was presumed to be apolitical, Kuwait and several other Gulf states consequently ordered their nationals to leave Lebanon in the face of potential threats (*Al Jazeera* 2012).

However, the key event signaling the deterioration of the relations between the GCC and Lebanon came in a letter addressed to the President of the Republic in March 2013, in which the GCC voiced its "extreme concerns" that Lebanon was failing to abide by its self-avowed disassociation policy toward regional events. The council," the letter stated, "looks to [Lebanon] to abide by the policy in words and actions in order to prevent placing Lebanon's security and stability at risk or affect the interests of its people and their security." President Sleiman, who welcomed the GCC delegation, which consisted of all the GCC ambassadors to Lebanon, reaffirmed his determination to make certain that Lebanese parties abided by the disassociation policy (*The Daily Star* March 05 2013).

Unconfirmed information circulated that the letter mentioned previously insinuated that failing to comply with the self-declared disassociation might jeopardize the GCC-Lebanese relations and as a consequence have implications on the fate of around 400,000 Lebanese expatriate employment and businesses in the various countries of the Gulf.<sup>4</sup>

In May 2013, the Foreign Affairs Ministry of the UAE asked citizens holding diplomatic, special or regular passports not to travel to the Lebanese Republic given the insecure situation in country. They have declared that holders of diplomatic passports have to obtain prior approval to travel and specify the limited period they desire to stay for special cases only. Regular passport holders are required to fill out a form at the airport clarifying that they bear their own responsibility for coming to Lebanon (*The Daily Star* May 12 2013). After two rockets hit Beirut's Shiite southern suburb wounding four people a day after Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah vowed to achieve victory in neighboring Syria, the Kuwaiti government urged its citizens to leave Lebanon as soon as possible due to the unstable situation in the country and advised its nationals not to fly to Lebanon (the *Daily Star* May 26 2013). Consequently, President Michel Sleiman urged Hezbollah to stop fighting in Syria and abide by the disassociation policy (*Naharnet* May 29 2013).

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<sup>4</sup> In an interview with *As Safir* newspaper in December 2008, Finance Minister Mohammad Chatah stated that about one-third of Lebanon's workforce or about 350,000 people were working in the Gulf. However, it is important to note that the total number of Lebanese immigrants in the Gulf countries is based on estimates. Different sources claim different numbers which ranges between 124 to 600 thousand migrant.

In June 2013, according to GCC chief Abdullatif al-Zayani, who was speaking to reporters at the end of a ministerial meeting in the Saudi city of Jeddah, the Gulf Cooperation Council "decided to look into taking measures against Hezbollah's interests in the member states. On the other hand, Bahraini Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Ghanim al-Buainain said that "nobody could cover up Hezbollah's actions in regional countries." "It is a terrorist organization and this is how Gulf States see it," he added. However, placing Hezbollah on the GCC's terror list was "a technical and legal matter that needs to be further studied" (*Now* June 02 2013). Saudi Arabia's ambassador to Lebanon, Ali Awwad Assiri, was asked if his country would move to expel Lebanese citizens, but said only that the GCC decision "affects those who support Hezbollah" (*Gulf News* June 22 (2013)).

July 2013, President Michel Sleiman and Caretaker Prime Minister Najib Mikati visited Qatar to congratulate the accession of the new leader, Qatar Prince Tamim bin Hamad al Thani. During the visit, President Sleiman praised the relations between Lebanon and Qatar. In turn, the new leader hailed the contribution of the Lebanese working in Qatar and promised that they would not be targeted (*The Daily Star* June 30 2013).

The 2009-2013 events have made the issue of migration from Lebanon to the GCC a security issue which triggered the involvement of heads of states, as well as the interference of high level officials (e.g. President Suleiman, the Prime Minister and the Speaker of the Parliament on the Lebanese side and Rulers and ministers in some countries of the GCC, as well as the GCC's Secretary-General), making it a grave regional and bilateral political matter.

The Gulf States have in the past threatened Lebanon by using the Lebanese expatriates or its influence in the Lebanon's economy as a means of pressure. In 2003, for instance, and following New TV satellite station airing a program that was critical of the Kingdom, Saudi Arabia "signaled to Lebanon that the economic conditions of Lebanese expatriates residing in the Kingdom were in jeopardy" (Salloukh 2008). Another incident took place during the US invasion of Iraq, when the Lebanese Foreign Minister "discussed a resolution supportive of Iraq; the GCC States hinted that Beirut might suffer economic consequences" (Salloukh 2008). Anecdotal information indicates that in 1969 some of the Middle Eastern countries threatened to deport the then 45-60,000 Lebanese expatriates from their respective countries to force Lebanon to sign the fateful Cairo Agreement which legitimized the armed Palestinian presence in Lebanon, allowing them to carry on their struggle against Israel.

The deterioration in regional and bilateral relations between Lebanon and the GCC states has caused uncertainty concerning potential economic sanctions, dread of deportation of Lebanese expatriates, and fright of closing Lebanese businesses. There are, as well, worries of banning Lebanese from entering the job market in the GCC states, fear of GCC investors and governments withdrawing deposits from Lebanese banks. Politically, among Lebanese officials, there is some distress over the possibility of recalling diplomatic representation. In a blow to Lebanon's tourist industry, GCC countries are cautioning their nationals against travel to Lebanon and threatening to suspend flights to and from Beirut from their countries. These threats and possibilities have created a miasma of fear among Lebanese expatriates living and working in the Gulf alike, which has fed back to Lebanese nationals in the homeland itself.

Events such as these and the growing perception by governments of the threat posed by certain immigrants to their security and internal social order have caused frictions in the bilateral relations between host and home countries. Host countries claim that they are forced to counteract threats posed by Lebanese Shiites by introducing policies and measures directed at Lebanon, aimed at the immigrant culprit profile, and even at immigration in general. Such measures include *inter alia* increased restriction of visas for the home country; growing scrutiny of visa applicants; increasing the hold period for visa applications; extensive border checks; intelligence gathering information on admitted immigrants; deportation; and incarceration. Whether these measures are a violation of human rights or not is immaterial

here. The issue, instead, is that these measures affect the admission of individuals seeking to visit, invest, join their families, work, or live in these countries. Whether we like it or not, international migration is now part of the security nexus and will continue to be for the foreseeable future.

The following section discusses three connected topics: The securitization of migration; how news from home affects migrants and residents of the host country and finally how bilateral relations affect immigrants' wellbeing.

## II. BILATERAL RELATIONS AND IMMIGRATION

In the twenty-first century, cross border human migration has become a principal aspect of the international political environment, yet it remains under studied and under-theorized in International Relations. International Relations (IR) have long overlooked international migration and its impact on relations between countries. It was not until migration and security collided with a bang on 9/11 and the subsequent attacks in London and Madrid that International Relations' scholars began paying serious attention to the relationship between human mobility and International Relations. This led to more attention for a paper that was published a decade prior to 9/11, Myron Weiner 1992 article, "Security, Stability and international Migration". This article has gradually changed the way International Relations scholars viewed migration in bilateral, regional and international politics. In his article, Weiner, a professor of political science at MIT, asserted that migration is no longer the sole concern of ministries of labor or of immigration and that it has become a matter of "high international politics, engaging the attention of heads of states, cabinets, and key ministries involved in defense, internal security, and external relations" (Weiner 1992). Weiner was followed by Mark Miller, who stated in 1998 that the increase in diplomatic activities on international migration related issues, the socio-economic and trade interventions that are instituted to reduce migratory pressures, as well as the enactment of laws and regulations concerning foreigners are all indicators that policy makers are becoming aware of the correlations between human international mobility and security (Miller 1998).

In recent years, the issues around immigration have been clarified through the use of the security framework of the Copenhagen School of security studies, which originated in Barry Buzan's book *People, States and Fear: The National Security Problem in International Relations*, first published in 1983. The Copenhagen School places particular emphasis upon the social aspects of security. Under this framework the literature on the 'securitization of migration' has become quite fashionable. The Copenhagen School framework "argues that instead of examining security as something tangible, scholars should consider the process by which actors construct issues as threats to security, a process they call 'securitization'" (Karyotic and Patrikios 2010).

Conventional discourses in migration studies have constructed immigrants as posing a 'multi-dimensional' threat to the host countries and communities (Lahav and Courtemanche 2012). Some of the 'multi-dimensional' threats that have been identified in migration discourse are economic and cultural (Cohen 2001), political (Tesfaye and Mavisakalyan 2013), national identity (*IJMS* 2005), sovereignty (Demo 2005), and security and terrorism (Ceccorulli 2009; Moens and Collacott 2008).

The perception that migration can host threats to national security and internal social order has made its way into the security agendas and national and foreign policies of not only developed countries, but also those in the developing and emerging economies niche. This has led to measures such as rigid visa policies and the keeping and sharing of databases that provide information on foreign nationals and their political affiliations and activities. These are used not only to keep out the unwanted, but also to enhance the surveillance of those who have been admitted in. Part of the current security strategies of countries that receive

immigrants or foreign labors is to use non-military, economic and political instruments as part of their defense mechanisms.

There are numerous examples of countries dealing with immigrants coming from countries with which the host country has public or secret hostilities or is even engaged in war. The Japanese and the Germans immigrants in the USA, Canada and Australia during World War II are a case in point, but there are many others that demonstrate the transformation from normal immigrant status to “enemy aliens” or ‘hostile aliens’, which arises simply by the fact that they come from ‘enemy’ or ‘hostile’ states (Panayi 1993).

It has been established that poor diplomatic relations discouragingly affect immigrants’ wellbeing (Safi 2010). It is argued that “any deterioration in diplomatic relations makes it more difficult for migrants to pursue their homeland interests” (Waldinger and Fitzgerald 2003). Bad diplomatic relations between states noted Waldinger and Fitzgerald (2003) “affect the conditions under which international migrants and their descendants can pursue their ‘homeland’ interests. In general, a peaceful world encourages states to relax the security/solidarity nexus. International tension, let alone belligerence, provides the motivation to tighten up on those whose loyalties extend abroad” (Armstrong, 1976). The specifics of the relationship between particular sending and receiving states matter even more and “homeland loyalties extending to allies or neutrals can be tolerated easily”, however “those that link to less friendly, possibly hostile states are more likely to be suspect” (Waldinger and Fitzgerald 2004).

Furthermore, given the interconnections that arise from global telecommunications, immigrants and residents are no longer so cut off from what is occurring on the national, regional and international levels. This connectivity between sending and receiving countries is therefore “an inherent aspect of the migration phenomenon...” (Waldinger and Fitzgerald 2004).

Immigrants are principally affected by bilateral relations, be they good or bad diplomatic affairs. Individuals, who are closely identified with both countries, i.e. the home and the host countries, can easily be either benefited or disadvantaged by good or bad diplomatic affairs.

Countries such as the members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) that have intense migratory flow and are geographically located in a volatile political environment tend to use migration as a trump when it comes to their own security and social order.

This situation makes Lebanon particularly vulnerable, as Lebanon depends heavily on the GCC for the employment of its young and brightest, as well as for remittances inflow, tourism receipts, banking and finance, real estate, and direct investment flows. It is estimated that 400,000 Lebanese work in the GCC states remitting up to 58% of the total \$8.2 billion Dollars remitted to Lebanon in 2011. As such, the total amount remitted by Lebanese come from the Gulf countries. The UAE was “the main source of inward remittances with 24% of the total in 2009, followed by Saudi Arabia with 13.5%, Qatar with 9.3%, Kuwait with 8.8%” (*In Focus* May 2011).

In a report published by *Al-Iktissad Wal-Aamal* (Economy and Business Lebanese Magazine) in October-November of 2012, the negative repercussions of strained relations between Lebanon and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) were illustrated by reference to various indices: for instance, there had been an extraordinary drop in tourism from the GCC countries by 45% in 2012 compared to the numbers in 2010, which couldn’t be explained by the economic downturn (*The Daily Star* November 28 2012). The report indicated that tourists hailing from Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirate and Kuwait represent 35% of the total number of Middle East tourism in Lebanon and about 12% of the total tourists for the year. Saudi tourists alone represent one fourth of total tourist spending in Lebanon. As for the Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in Lebanon, 75-80% of it comes from nationals of the GCC countries. In addition, the value of Lebanese exports to the Gulf countries accounts for an

average of 20% of the total export. According to the Center for Economic Studies at the Chamber of Commerce of Beirut and Mount Lebanon, estimated cumulative investment of the GCC in Lebanon for the period between 1985 and 2009 comes to \$11.3 billion dollars. The largest share of these investments originating from Saudi Arabia (\$4.8 billion dollars), followed by the UAE (\$2.9 billion), Kuwait (\$2.8 billion) (Abi Ghanem 2012).

As we have seen “power differentials between sending and receiving states count” (Waldinger and Fitzgerald 2004). This research aimed at answering some of the questions pertaining to the concerns of the Lebanese in the GCC; their sense of the importance of the GCC in relation to the Lebanese economy; their stance in regard to the ramifications of the strained relations with the GCC; their plans should the worst happen; and their suggestions as to how the Lebanese government should respond to the GCC countries. These questions are answered in a non-comprehensive survey that targeted Lebanese expatriates working in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, Bahrain, Qatar and the UAE. This research evaluates the hypotheses that a) when bilateral relations deteriorate between home and host countries, it negatively affects immigrants; b) there is a clear correlation between bilateral relations and migrant wellbeing; and c) bilateral relations can be affected by population mobility and, in turn, that population mobility is affected by bilateral relations.

#### **IV. METHODS**

Given the scarcity of data on residents and migrants from Lebanon, we explored the research hypothesis using convenience sampling through social media mainly Facebook and LinkedIn. Since Lebanese expatriates working in the Gulf countries are the most affected by the crisis, it was only natural that they be the focus of this research. To test the hypotheses, we used multiple methodologies and triangulated our survey responses with literature and media reviews. The survey was undertaken between March and April of 2013 at the height of the crisis. The assessment was weighed via a questionnaire that was sent through emails to more than 1300 Lebanese working in the Gulf countries. The media review covered related events from 2009 until August 2013. The primary data sources were the database of the Lebanese Emigration Research Center, Facebook and LinkedIn. Of the 1300 questionnaires emailed, 608 filled out the questionnaire and 457 were deemed usable, giving a high response rate of 35%. The quantitative data reported in this research were collected from Lebanese working in the Gulf (N= 457), who were surveyed on the topic. Survey Monkey was used as a web-based survey to gather quick insights into the issue. Individuals interested in expressing their opinion filled out the survey anonymously.

In the section below, we present the findings of descriptive statistical analyses to address the main hypotheses.

#### **V. RESULTS AND DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS**

##### *Status in the GCC*

In regard to their status in the GCC, 81% of the respondents indicated that they were currently working in the GCC, 10% owning a business in the GCC and 9% looking for a job in the GCC.

##### *Lebanon's Dependency on the GCC*

The responses indicated that 74% of the respondents believe that Lebanon is very dependent on the GCC for employment, 67% said that it is very dependent in terms of tourism, 57% in terms of deposits and investments, 40% in terms of development aid relief (40%), while 42% and 39% of the respondents believe that Lebanon is dependent on the GCC for export and real estate respectively.

	<b>Very Dependent</b>	<b>Dependent</b>	<b>Somewhat Dependent</b>	<b>Not Dependent</b>	<b>Total Respondents</b>
Tourism	67.12% 294	23.06% 101	7.31% 32	2.51% 11	438
Relief	39.34% 168	32.32% 138	24.36% 104	4.45% 19	427
Real Estate	36.70% 160	38.53% 168	19.72% 86	5.28% 23	436
Exports	27.74% 119	41.26% 177	26.34% 113	5.13% 22	429
Employment	73.38% 328	18.57% 83	6.04% 27	2.68% 12	447
Development Aid	41.49% 178	35.90% 154	19.58% 84	3.50% 15	429
Deposits/Investments	55.61% 243	31.58% 138	11.90% 52	1.83% 8	437

### *Primary Concerns over the Deteriorating Relationship*

In Table 1, the respondents were asked to identify what concerned them most regarding the deteriorated relationship between the GCC and Lebanon. Deporting Lebanese working in the GCC was the main concern (87%) followed by fear of sanctioning Lebanese from entering the GCC (82%), worries about closing Lebanese businesses in the GCC (57%), nervousness about pulling out deposits from Lebanese banks (52%) and trepidation about banning GCC citizens from visiting Lebanon (50%).

<b>Answer Choices</b>	<b># of Responses</b>	<b>% of Responses</b>
Deporting Lebanese working in the GCC	388	87%
Banning Lebanese from entering the GCC	366	82%
Closing Lebanese businesses in the GCC	255	57%
Pulling out deposits from Lebanese banks	229	52%
Banning GCC citizens visits to Lebanon	223	50%
Banning GCC imports from Lebanon	137	31%
Suspending flights to and from Lebanon	169	38%
Suspending development aid to Lebanon	167	38%
Calling back the GCC ambassadors	69	16%

### *Return or Re-migrate*

Of the 446 who answered this question, the majority or 37% did not know what choice to make at the time of the survey, 22% said that they planned to return to Lebanon, 22% indicated that they planned to go to another country in which they hold either a citizenship or a permanent residency and 20% will go to another country for which they have an entry visa. The data indicates that of the 446 respondents only 98 persons will return to Lebanon.

<b>Table 2: Respondents' destination in worst case scenario</b>		
Answered: 446 Skipped: 11		
<b>Answer Choices</b>	<b># of Responses</b>	<b>% of Responses</b>
Return to Lebanon	100	22%
Go to another country from which I hold a citizenship or permanent residency	96	22%
Go to another country I have a valid visa for	87	19%
Don't know what to do	163	37%

There have been many waves of Lebanese migration to the Gulf countries, of which three occurred during important conjunctures in the history of both countries. The first wave took place prior to the 1975 war, during the height of the oil boom in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia; the second wave was the one that flowed in during the Civil War years; and the third was that which was ushered in after the end of the 1975 war and has continued to the present. This was due to economic growth and development projects in the GCC and the continued insecurity and economic downturn in Lebanon (Hourani 2010, 2011).

Choosing a destination for re-migration is not a spontaneous decision; it is done according to the person's careful consideration and prioritization. Our results showed various factors that go into making this choice -- 36% would choose a destination that has better future for their families; 32% would select a place with better employment opportunities; 17% with better standard of living and 14% with better security. Some Lebanese emigrants use the Gulf countries as a transit point or a stepping stone to permanent migration to other countries that provides dual citizenship such as Canada, the USA, Australia and some of the countries in Europe.

Re-migration/secondary migration is a tactic used by migrants to move from their first migration destination to another. In the case of the Lebanese in the Gulf States and prior to the GCC-Lebanon deteriorating relations, two main push elements make them re-migrate –firstly, citizenship is difficult to obtain in the Gulf States, and secondly, going back to Lebanon is problematic, due to the protracted insecurity and instability there. Having acquired good educations in Lebanon and professional skills and experience in the Gulf, they have the kind of qualifications that are sought after in countries where citizenship acquisition is permissible.

The economic situation in the home country is a push factor for migration, as well as a deterrent to return. Participants in the survey were asked how they would rate the current economic situation in Lebanon. 47% rated it as very poor, 42% rated as poor, 10% rated it as average and less than 1% rated it very good.

#### *Impact of Any Types of GCC Sanctions on Lebanon*

In order to gauge the perception of figures familiar with both Lebanon and the GCC economies, we asked our cohort to judge what the impact of GCC sanctions on Lebanon might be: negligible, weak, strong, very strong or devastating.

<b>Table 4: Respondents' views on the level of impact of any type of sanctions by the GCC on Lebanon</b>	
Answered: 457	
Skipped: 0	
<b>Answer Choices</b>	<b>Responses</b>
Negligible	1.75% 8
Weak	2.63% 12
Strong	20.79% 95
Very Strong	33.92% 155
Devastating	40.92% 187
Total	457

The majority of the respondents (41%) indicated that such sanctions will be devastating, followed by 34% who said that it will be very strong, 21% said it will be strong and only 3% and 2% indicated that it will be weak or negligible respectively.

#### *Responsibility for the Crisis between the GCC and Lebanon*

In terms of blame, the majority of the respondents specified that they blame the 8th of March coalition first (79%), the Lebanese government second (76%), Syria and Iran respectively third (39%) and the 14th of March coalition fifth (34%).

#### *Proposed Interventions*

In regard to suggestions to ameliorate the situation, 71% of the respondents indicated that the Lebanese government should reconcile with the GCC, 44% advised to conform to the disassociation policy.

#### *General Characteristics of Respondents*

The data showed that of the 457 respondents 79% male and 18% female. In terms of religious affiliation, of the 396 who answered this questions 46% were Christians and 41% were Muslims (we did not ask whether they self-defined as Sunni or Shiite). In regard to the geographical origin of the respondents: 36% were from Mount Lebanon, 28% were from Beirut, 15% from the North, 14% from the South and 7% from the Bekaa.

## **VI. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

The research has a number of limitations; the first limitation concerns the lack of a national minimum database on Lebanese expatriates. The second limitation is the small size of the sample and the short timeframe set for conducting the survey, which eliminated potential respondents who might have been busy or traveling. The third limitation is the fact that by not being able to administer the questionnaire face-to-face, we were deprived of the opportunity of probing the interviewees for further information.

Lack of compliance with the self-imposed disassociation policy compounded by the GCC's heightened perception of security threats is shaking the confidence of Lebanese expatriates in the continuing viability of working in the Gulf. Lebanese governments and policy makers should take into consideration the impact of bilateral relations on the wellbeing of the Lebanese emigrants or expatriates living and/or working abroad.

Despite the above mentioned limitations, the research has a number of strengths. First, it assessed the responses of some of the Lebanese expatriates in regard to the topic at the height of the crisis, which allows them the privilege to share their candid feedback. Second, complete anonymity freed them from any self-censorship they may have felt in regard to the questions asked. Third, it showed how important the GCC threats are on the well-being of the Lebanese expatriates. Finally, since there is very little if any published literature on the impact of bilateral relations on the immigrants in the Gulf in general and on the Lebanese in particular, this research provides a groundbreaking glimpse into this phenomenon and its implications.

Based on the above findings, this study suggests that when relations deteriorate between home and host countries, it negatively affects immigrants. Hence, there is a clear correlation between bilateral relations between home and host countries and migrant welfare and safety. The deteriorating relationships between the GCC and Lebanon and the Gulf individual countries and Lebanon are affecting the wellbeing of Lebanese working in the GCC and alternatively the livelihood of thousands of Lebanese homeland residents who count on the remittances from the Lebanese expatriates in the GCC countries or the Gulf market for the employment of Lebanese and the Gulf countries' economic and financial role in the Lebanese economy.

The policies of the countries of origin remain significant for the immigrants' wellbeing in the host countries. Deteriorating bilateral relations between home and host countries has considerable effect on the immigrants. Every public event or incident that impacts the countries of migration has the potential to affect the wellbeing of the immigrants, an effect that is now magnified through the real-time environment of the internet and telecommunications. Furthermore, increasingly national politics and economies are heavily intertwined with security, making migration into a fraught political issue. Countries are therefore compelled to balance security with their needs for foreign labor (Givens 2010); thus "good relationships between home and host countries generate significant well-being externalities for those who live abroad" (Becchetti, Clark and Ricca 2011).

The findings of this research support the hypotheses with which we started out: the deterioration of bilateral relations between home and host countries: a) negatively affects immigrants; b) gives us a clear correlation between bilateral relations and migrant wellbeing; and c) is effected by population mobility and vice versa.

Despite the fact that it is unlikely that the GCC would engage in the mass deportation of Lebanese nationals because of the detrimental effects this action will have on various sectors of their economies, Lebanon should pay attention to these bilateral relations, if for no other reason than it has hundreds of thousands of nationals working in the region. Hence, there is an urgent necessity for Lebanon to wisely adopt a policy that protects its long-term interest with the GCC and to formulate a comprehensive national emigration policy, especially as the Lebanese themselves are one of Lebanon's main natural resources and their earnings and remittances the source of one quarter of its Gross Domestic Product. Lebanon should therefore deal wisely with the situation before it metastasizes.

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