

## THE CONTRIBUTION OF “CRITICAL GEOPOLITICS” IN THE UNDERSTANDING OF THE LEBANESE SOCIO-POLITICAL LABYRINTH

*Francisco Salvador Barroso Cortes*

Assistant Professor of International Relations and Geopolitics at the Higher Institute of Political and Administrative Sciences, Holy Spirit University of Kaslik (USEK), Lebanon

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### Abstract

Why is it important to study the distribution of power in Lebanon, whose theoretical framework is offered by “Critical Geopolitics”? In an attempt to answer this question we must analyze the distribution of settlements of different minorities, and communities, which will help us understand the impact they have on Lebanon, and the Geopolitical pressure that the war in Syria from the north side is presenting, and the pressure that could erupt again if a war between Hezbollah and Israel from the southern flank starts once again.

This paper also provides a description and an explanation of the confessional community map of Lebanon. To do this, we will use the main ideological and cultural factors that affect the complex interplay of local and regional factors on Lebanese security and defense concerns. Using the theoretical framework of “Critical Geopolitics” we will present the mosaic of communities that reflects the Geopolitical pressures experienced by this country from all its flanks and how domestic and foreign policies respond to this Geopolitical pressure.

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**Keywords:** Geopolitics, Lebanon, Critical Geopolitics, Confessionalism, Communalism

### Introduction

Since the War in Syria started in January 2011, the relationship between Lebanon and Syria became more dangerous due to traditional links between the two countries. In fact, Lebanon is slowly getting closer to becoming involved in this war because of the participation of the Shia militia of Hezbollah, in favor of Bashar Al Assad’s regime. This participation is further proof of the escalation of tension between the Shia and Sunni communities that we are currently witnessing within the Middle East.

Because of this war we are obliged to pay attention to the connection between religion and power. Indeed, the religious factor can be used to explain how power is distributed in a certain area or territory. Be that as it may, we cannot afford to forget that both countries are bound by a group of minorities, which consist of different communities, each of which has a different perception of the country, its reliance on power, and its understanding of democracy.

When we talk about Lebanon we have to consider the many problems that the country is facing, in regard to stability and security; such as, state weakness, sectarian tensions, clashes at the border areas, political assassinations, abductions, as well as the impact of the refugee flows from Syria, which all add up to make a highly complicated situation. Beirut’s inability to cope with these problems further highlight how weak and unstable the situation of successive governments have been in this nation.

This is a country where political instability and chronic insecurity linger because of so little attention to remedy the confessional system was introduced since its independence in 1943. Likewise, successive governments’ inability to emend the political Power-Sharing

mechanism, edified around 1943 National Charter, underscored its ineffectiveness. The existence of large coalitions of political parties, the system of mutual veto, proportional representation of different religious groups, and the segmentation of autonomy, all have caused Lebanon to suffer from a social and political instability that could be critical for any future system. We also cannot forget the weakness that the state itself represents, which is justified by the same regulatory framework that does not allow it to operate normally.

The situation that Lebanon is going through at present is a good example of what has been dominating the country as the revenge of geography, postulated by Robert Kaplan (2009). Lebanon's location is establishing itself as one of the guidelines to understanding the permanent instability that is constantly present. In fact, many geopolitical factors affect the increase of insecurity, as well as the increase in demands in the field of defense. Therefore, we opt to use a critical approach of conventional Geopolitics if we want to carry out a more efficient analysis. Thus, it may be useful to develop a theoretical framework offered by "Critical Geopolitics"<sup>274</sup>, which will help us draw a map of the distribution of power while taking the ideological and cultural factors into account along with its geographical nature.

This study analyzes the distribution of settlements of different minorities and communities to understand their impact on Lebanon and the Geopolitical pressure that the war in Syria from the north side is inflicting, and the pressure that could erupt again if a war between Hezbollah and Israel starts once again, in the south.

My aim is to describe and explain the confessional community map of Lebanon. To do this, we will look at the main ideological and cultural factors that affect the complex interplay of local and regional factors on Lebanese security and defense concerns. After understanding these factors, we will be able to see a mosaic of different communities that represent the country and reflect Geopolitical pressure experienced from all sides; and how policies, domestic and foreign, as well as other regional socio-political factors that the Lebanese are subjected to, lead citizens to respond to this dilemma from a geopolitical perspective.

This paper suggests the vital importance that is presented by the distribution of different communities in Lebanon, based on confessionalism, to better understand the current political game of alliances and rivalries displayed in it. For this reason, we are going to consider territoriality as a strategy and as it manifests itself (Novak, 2011:742). Such an approach, will allow one to better understand power politics, as practiced by different local actors.

Once, we have submitted the incidence of confessionalism and communalism on the socio-political reality of Lebanon, and after the theoretical framework of "critical Geopolitics" is clarified, we are able to get into the analysis of the conflict between Hezbollah and Israel from a critical and Geopolitical viewpoint. Below, we tackle the importance presented by both, communitarianism as well as confessionalism, in the analysis of the northern border between Lebanon and Syria. This will allow us to understand how the settlements of the different communities in the border areas would partly explain the geopolitical pressure experienced by the Lebanese. This geopolitical pressure would have influence on the patterns of Lebanese security in the context of its defense. Finally, we

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<sup>274</sup> We can consider the born of this discipline when the book of Simon Dalby was published in 1990 under the title: "Creation the Second Cold War: The Discourse of Politics", Guilford, New York.

In general we can point out three main textbooks where you can find a definition of Critical Geopolitics. The textbooks are the next:

Agnew, John. Geopolitics: Re-visioning World Politics, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, Routledge, London, 2003; Doods, Klaus. Global Geopolitics: A critical introduction, Harlow: Pearson, 2005; Ó Tuathail et Al. The Geopolitical Reader" 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, Routledge, New York, 2006.

address some conclusions concerning the Lebanese Geopolitics trends in the medium and long terms.

### **Critical Geopolitics and the distribution of Power : The incidence of Confessionalism**

Lebanon is sublimely defined by critical Geopolitics. A new way, that takes into account not only the purely geographical elements but also notes the economic, environmental, and cultural elements as well<sup>275</sup>, avow to its intractable dilemmas. Indeed, the main purpose of this new perception of Geopolitics consists in gathering the ideas of the political and symbolic and territorial boundaries that exist in a specific territory. In this way, we will be able to understand properly the political space as, highlighted by the contribution of Dr. John Agnew who linked the meaning of knowledge with the notion of space. Dr. Agnew provides us with five new manners to use the geography of knowledge to understand what is happening in the world of politics. For our study, we are going to focus on the hegemonic thinking (Agnew, 2007:142-146), because it will help us understand the competition of ideas and practices concerning the use of power in specific areas keeping the religious factor in mind.

Geopolitics cannot be understood by only paying attention to geographical factors and the behavior of the State as an actor in charge to execute sovereignty (Agnew, 1994). Yves Lacoste suggests an explanatory theory for understanding the concept of Geopolitics where he argues that it is necessary to study the rivalries of power that are taking place in a certain place (Lacoste, 1995:3). Lacoste points out that it is essential to get away from the geographical determinism. For this reason we are going to use for our analysis the contribution of Robert Sack, concerning the concept of territoriality. For him, territoriality is *“an attempt by an individual or social group to affect, influence, and control people, phenomena and relationships by delimiting, and asserting control over a geographical area”* (Sack, 1986:19). Our main goal is to try to analyze the control over a certain territory using the ideological and religious factors.

The idea is to consider political ideology and political culture prevailing in each geographic area to better understand the distribution of power and the formation and consolidation of identities and feelings of belonging to a community. In order to do a right analysis of the cultural influence we have to take into consideration the definition of Geopolitical culture provided by O’Loughlin, ÓTuathail and Kolossov. Indeed, they understand Geopolitical culture as a combination of factors among which we could stress, for instance, on the network of power that exist in a given society, debates concerning national identities, the kinds of geopolitical codes, the varieties of foreign policy measures devised by the state, etc...(O’Loughlin et Al., 2005:324). All these factors will provide the basic information to understand how culture affects the distribution of power based on ideology.

Therefore, we will explain the importance of territorial settlements based on a community identity and / or present religious landscape, in relation to the Lebanese security and defense. In this sense, it’s important to remember that the civil war changed considerably the location of the sectarian composition of the population. This issue is very important to take into account because it will help us understand the framework of alliances and rivalries that exist nowadays throughout Lebanon. Furthermore, Lebanon is presented as a special case study in order to go in depth concerning Beirut as a politicized space of competing meanings. Indeed, we can talk about “Beirutization” in comparison with the “Balkanization process” as

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<sup>275</sup> We are facing a concept constantly updated due to a number of factors, among which we should highlight the phenomenon of globalization Thanks of this, we are obliged to reconsider our conception related to the relation between sovereign and territory. In fact, we cannot conceive Geopolitics as a simple geopolitical struggle or competition for territory. For instance, we are astonished attending to the phenomena of international terrorism which attempts to expand globally a particular ideology.

a space of destruction and sectarian warfare (Nagel, 2002:718). Consequently, how power centers operate in certain regions gains additional value, which assist in understanding the ways critical Geopolitics affect the game of rivalries on specific spaces.

Confessionalism's predominance and the Lebanese State's weaknesses are making us think about the problem of effective sovereignty in relation to the legitimate exercise of power and authority. Concerning this idea we have to mention differences that exist between *de jure* and *de facto* sovereignty. Indeed, we can consider the fact that the Lebanese State has the jure sovereignty provided for being a State. On paper, Lebanon should enjoy a full sovereignty over all its territory and population. If we conform to the reality, we have to admit that Lebanon as a "State" is sharing its quotas of sovereignty with the 19 communities which are playing on the Lebanese socio-political scenario and with some fundamentalist and insurgent movements, which are out of Lebanese control as could be the case of Hezbollah, Al Qaeda, Fatah al Islam, and others. In addition, we have to mention the *external dependence, assent of cooperation among Elites*, corrupted practices that are socially accepted, *poor level of infrastructure*, and the independent refugees' camps (Agnew, 2005:445). All of these factors are, for the Lebanese State, resting quotas of sovereignty.

I would hypothesize that three contextual factors have interacted to reproduce the dominant view about the distribution of power among the different communities who compound the Lebanese socio-political system. The first one is related to the impact of confessionalism and communalism on the Lebanese political system. As we already know, it relies on a kind of consociational democracy in which communalism assumes an important role in the political game. Thus, confessionalism is presented as the cornerstone to understanding the distribution of power between the nineteen communities that affect the Lebanese socio-political reality. In fact, the religious communities and not the people, as stated in the preamble of the Lebanese constitution, are those who exercise sovereignty. Therefore, the distribution of power is encouraged on ideological basis for the triumph of political confessionalism, and political Power-Sharing mechanism. In relation to this idea, we have to take into consideration the impact of some structural problems which are affecting the latent instability suffered by this country. Among these problems, and according to Professor Mounir Corm, we could point out: feudalism, communalism, social sclerosis, corruption, political and economic patronage, foreign interventionism, etc... (Corm, 2012:89).

For this reason, it is crucial to delve into this distribution of power with ideological basis for understanding the transformations that settlements of different communities behave toward the establishment of alliances, military assistance, participation in armed conflicts, etc.... We will focus on critical geopolitics to elucidate how power is exercised in terms of the community that predominates in a specific geographical area. This will allow us to understand the pressure that Lebanon is subjected to from all its geopolitical sides.

The second factor is related to the geopolitical codes that are found when analyzing the Lebanese case. We can assert that the next geopolitical codes are increasing the impact of the first structure. In this sense, we have to point out that Lebanon would register a special and particular construction of us and them. The last point stresses the importance of carrying on a discourse analysis of political and religious elites, who are committed to establishing a stubborn defense of the identity of their respective communities. Indeed, the prevalence of any community's identity surpasses, national identity, which is probably unique to Lebanon<sup>276</sup>. However, if we consider the case of the "Party of God" (Hezbollah), the rhetoric of service to the state as a main force of resistance to the threat of invasion by Israeli forces falters now more than ever, especially when party leaders compromise the stability of

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<sup>276</sup>To go in depth in the exploring of the Elites role concerning the promotion of geopolitical discourses in regional conflicts, see: Ó Tuathail, Gearoid. Localizing geopolitics: Disaggregating violence and return in conflict regions, *Political Geography*, 29, 2010, pp. 256-265.

Lebanon with their participation in the war in Syria. In this sense, Hezbollah's speeches always pose the same question, either you are with me or you are against me. However, it is worth to point out that other communities display, more or less, a similar trend of behavior when they protect and promote their intrinsic interests.

The second geopolitical code that is bringing up importance within the Lebanese political system is related to the special construction of space, place, and time. In this sense, we have to refer to the civil war which took place between 1975 and 1990, where the leader of each community arose as a true "Lord of War" (Warlord), and politically and militarily controlled a certain area of the country<sup>277</sup>. For this reason, warlords continue to perceive that the sources and use of power, in a specific territory are directly tied to their possession of said territories. Lebanon is still claiming certain areas based on a religious justification. In fact, Fatah al Islam, that is allegedly a cell of so-called Al Qaeda, operates on Lebanese soil through the use of Palestinian refugee camps. It aims to restore Palestine, and expel Jews from the Holy Land as a prerequisite for the imposition, through the use of violence, of the Islamic *Ummah*, as a community of believers throughout the Levant (Agnew, 2006:93).

The third structural geopolitical code concerns the Syrian war. Actually, Lebanese stability is being compromised by what is happening in Syria, since the civil there has become a transnational conflict where the participation of the Shiite militia Hezbollah is compromising Lebanese security and defense. Such participation is based on the historic debt that Hezbollah seems to have towards Syria due to the political, military, and logistical Syrian support in its fight against Israel. Such participation would justify the need to defend the "axis of resistance" composed of Iran, Syria and Hezbollah. It is presented as a clear example of the increase in the hostilities between Sunni radicalism and Shiite fundamentalism in the context of the destabilization that the region suffers from. In this regard, this war is bringing up the main geopolitical factors to understand how the geographical knowledge is being used by the states and powers.

In relation to the persistence of political imagination, we must emphasize the fact that the borders have gained unusual prominence, as they have emerged as one of the essential elements to understand the origin of the current conflict. In fact, the boundaries are presented as strategic elements where traditional geopolitics is founded, but are now used to explain the formation and implementation of certain policies of identities that can be used to cause the outbreak and continuation of armed conflict.

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<sup>277</sup>The leader of the Progressive Socialist Party (PSP) Walid Jumblat, who is also the leader of the Druze community, became strong in the Chouf area where he was one of the main protagonists of the well-known "War of the Mountain". This war took place between Druze and Christians for the control of certain parts of the Chouf. Concerning Dr. Samir Geagea, who is the current leader of the Lebanese Forces (FL), he was strong in the Bsharre area, and other northern areas of the country, and was accused due to his participation in the execution of four political killings during the civil war. In this case we have to highlight the assassination of the former Prime Minister Rashid Karami. Related to the current Lebanese parliament Speaker Mr. Nabih Berri, who was one of the leaders of the Shiite Amal movement, had the leading role in the heavy fighting with the Druze in Beirut area. Regarding the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) leader, General Michel Aoun, who as a commander of the Lebanese armed forces carried out numerous military episodes which were, sacrificed in vain the lives of many Lebanese soldiers. Finally, concerning the figure of Hezbollah leader, Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah, to point out that during this time his insurgent movement was responsible for numerous attacks on U.S. and French interests, as well as, the confrontation that occurred between Hezbollah and the Amal movement, both Shiites, for the control of certain areas near Beirut. These clashes provoked a rise of the political and sectarian violence in Lebanon.

The critical geopolitics would be focused on identifying resources, practices, and representations that allow the control of territory and extraction of resources<sup>278</sup>. It also could allow us to understand the dynamics of struggle in relation to regional and global domination<sup>279</sup>. In the case of Lebanon, this point has demonstrated crucial importance because it is presented as a space where competition from opposing regional interests, different views of Islam, and different types of democracy are all noticed.

### **The incidence of Confessionalism on the Lebanese socio-political reality**

The impact of confessionalism can be noticed in every single field of Lebanese life. The Lebanese constitution recognizes the importance of the confessionalism on the Lebanese political system as communitarism and confessionalism appear as the cornerstones of the political system in place. There is a consociational democracy model that rests on a clear confessional political system. For the Lebanese case we could point out the link existing between sectarian politics and traditional political clientelism (Rigby, 2000:178).

Concerning the feasibility of this kind of political system, we have to pay attention to the regional factor because it can be used to cease the Elite consensus (Seaver, 2000:249), and therefore, it can involve the failure of the “Power-Sharing” formula as a political mechanism. In relation to this, we have to stress that the current political situation is demonstrating the triumph of the tendency of dissociation at intra and inter confessional levels. Thus, at the present day, we have to pay attention to this challenge because if it finally happens, we will be able to see the end of the current stability.

Lebanon is nowadays the battle field between jihadist Sunni and Shia fundamentalism. In fact, we can consider that Lebanon is an example of what is happening in the whole region. As a matter of fact, it is impossible to understand what happens in Lebanon without understanding what is happening in the region and what are the international trends that influence this small and divided country.

To better highlight this complex game and assess the impact that confessionalism exerts on its own politics, we have to mention the constitutional articles, which justify this influence. The most important article where the legitimation of confessionalism can be found in articles 22<sup>280</sup> and 24. The latter would make reference to the phenomenon of the religious families. This concept would justify the distribution of major elective and administrative functions in response to the religious obedience factor<sup>281</sup>. Indeed article 24 is presented as the key aspect to understand the impact of political confessionalism<sup>282</sup> because it presents

<sup>278</sup> Ó Tuathail, Gearóid et Al. *Rethinking geopolitics*”, Routledge, Nueva York, 1998; Ó Tuathail, Gearóid et Al., *Geopolitics Readers*, Routledge, Nueva York, 2006; Doods, Klaus. *Political Geography III: Critical Geopolitics after 10 Years*, *Progress in Human Geography*, 25 (3), 2001.

<sup>279</sup> Para profundizar sobre las nuevas formas que están asumiendo los estudios de la geopolítica crítica, véase: Jones, Laura et Al., *New directions in critical geopolitics: an introduction*”, *GeoJournal*, 75, 2010, pp. 315-325.

<sup>280</sup> In the Senate, all religious communities have to be represented when the members of House of Deputies are no longer elected on a confessional basis (art. 22).

<sup>281</sup> Related to religious obedience we have to point out the incidence of well-known concept of spiritual families. Indeed, this concept is presented by the Article 22 of the Lebanese Constitution. This article would serve to justify and legally enshrine religious communities. This dimension of confessionalism that could brand as a politician, we should highlight the other side of confessionalism, the administrative type that would focus on the jurisdiction applicable to the personal status of each citizen. In fact, as can be deduced from Article 9 of the Constitution, the law of each community stands as the essential jurisdiction in relation to personal status of each person. Therefore, we can imagine the impact of this confessionalism on the private and daily life of Lebanese. This is important in order to understand the manipulation which is carried out by some political leaders in order to take advantage of this link based on identity.

<sup>282</sup> The distribution of the seats of the House of Deputies or Parliament equally between Christians and Muslims and proportionally among each of them until such time as the House of Deputies has enacted an electoral law not on the basis of religious representation (art. 24).

equality between Christians and Muslims. In fact, of the 128 seats that the Lebanese parliament has, 64 are for Christian deputies, and the other 64 are for Muslim MPs.

In relation to this, we should highlight the article 12 of the Lebanese constitution, which refers to the impact of the religious factor on the distribution of public jobs, stresses that the religious factor predominates. Regrettably, such a system promotes immobility and, inevitably, increases political clientelism.

Nevertheless, concerning the impact of confessionalism on the Lebanese political system we have to point out the fact that Lebanon has a patriarchal society. This issue is important to take it into account because it would justify individual obedience to the authority of the family and the community. For this reason, we have to analyze jointly the impact of confessionalism and communitarism.

An important aspect to keep in mind is related to the *Ta'if Agreements*, signed on October 22, 1989 in Ta'if, Saudi Arabia and ratified by the Lebanese Parliament on November 5, 1989. These agreements were presented as a sorely needed emendation of the power-sharing mechanism introduced in 1943. It picked up the new confessional equilibrium where Shiite community was partially recognized, their aspirations to achieve a balance between population and their share of political representation. Shias were recognized before too. What Ta'if did was to introduce parity between Muslims and Christians, which the Shias reject. They prefer the Thulathiyyah (trilateralism) in which Christians form a third, Sunnis a second third, and Shias the last third. Such a system will erase the Ta'if parity. Thus, after these agreements we have a new balance among the nineteen Lebanese communities.

In spite of this advance concerning the stability of the country, we have the incident of confessionalism without solution. We still face one of the most important contradictions in the Constitution. In fact, this contradiction affects the new preamble of the Lebanese Constitution, where we can read "*the abolition of political confessionalism is a vital national goal*"<sup>283</sup>. But, what actually happens is that it is encouraging and justifying the intrusion of religious communities in the political game<sup>284</sup>. This issue, still without resolution, reflects what the 2005 Cedar Revolution attempted to address but, perhaps, left unfinished (Safa, 2006:37).

Still, the impacts of the Ta'if Agreements were of vital importance, but it must be acknowledged that its effectiveness has been undermined ever since the early 1990s. In fact, Ta'if indicated the end of the civil war and the formulation of a new constitution for the Republic of Lebanon. The Ta'if Agreements supposed the end of sectarian violence in Lebanon but failed to promote cooperation among the different Lebanese groups with respect to the restoration of sovereignty. The Ta'if Agreements reinforced the principle of political confessionalism, because instead of strengthening government institutions, it allowed communities to strengthen their internal bonds by promoting sectarian ideology and commissioning practice of political clientelism, and further differentiated in relation to the other groups (Haddad, 2002:293).

Lebanon has proven effective to have an inability to govern itself, and this is not due to poor wording of its constitutional documents, but rather, to the failure and the ambiguities presented by its officials. Consequently, the Constitution was purposefully kept ambiguous, and the absence of a hierarchy of norms meant that Lebanon failed to create an authentic, as well as an effective rule of law. All this contributes to the political instability that seems chronic, that in turn, has been used by various insurgent movements operating in Lebanon.

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<sup>283</sup>The New Preamble of the Constitution was established by the constitutional law of 21/09/1991 in order to pick up the political principles established by the Ta'if accords that were signed on November 5, 1989.

<sup>284</sup>Actually, Sovereignty is exercised by religious communities. In fact, we have 64 deputies Christians, and other 64 deputies Muslims.

In any case, we have to pay attention to the link between confessionalism and the increase of sectarianism (Kota, 2012:103-104)<sup>285</sup> and religious fundamentalism. Likewise, we have to analyze how the foreign intervention tries to reinforce the level of sectarianism and religious fundamentalism. Lebanon is a good case to analyze how the regional and international powers are using the different communities to display the corresponding influence on the Lebanese game board. In this sense, we could think that in Lebanon the positive attitude towards sectarianism means also to have positive attitude towards fundamentalism, trust only within the community, and being favorable related to the foreign intervention (Moaddel et Al., 2012: 27).

### **The Geopolitics pressure from the Southern Flank: Hezbollah Versus State of Israel**

When we want to ask about the relationship between Lebanon and Israel, there are many factors that, from a Geopolitical viewpoint, would display an important role. On one hand, we have to mention the type of border existing between these countries. In fact, if we accept the thesis of Agnew, who argues that borders makes the nation and not vice versa (Agnew, 2007b:399), we shall talk about the “improvised states”(Jeffrey, 2013:2). Indeed, the most probable changes of this border demonstrate that we are facing a "state improvised" due to the weak State and the problems of the Lebanese and Israeli governments to implement their respective quota of sovereignty over all the territory and population. In fact, we might ask in relation to Lebanon, if we are truly in front of a State or not, as the Lebanese state has neither the monopoly on the use of force, nor has it the legitimation to act concerning its population. We also have to add the fact that the Lebanese government is not capable to carry out control over all the territory that makes up the Lebanese space.

According to the logic of Geopolitics small countries assume two stances: either a passive or an aggressive position. In our case of study, Hezbollah and above all, Israel have carried out a considerable change for radical actions<sup>286</sup>. At this point, we can stress the importance of the religious factor. Indeed, if we take into consideration the confessional factor to be a normal factor, then the logic of conflict between both countries would make sense. Moreover, since Lebanon accounts on a multi confessional system, whereas the State of Israel accounts on an exclusive religious one. The importance of Critical Geopolitics becomes clearer given that we could explain the relations between these two actors according to the distribution of power based on ideological factors.

Another element to take into consideration is related to the Palestinian cause and the entire Arab-Israeli conflict<sup>287</sup>. Indeed, this conflict has unfortunately marked the history of Lebanon. In fact, we could say that the settlement of Palestinian Fedayeen in the Lebanese territory since 1948 has been used as a political pretext by Israel to carry out a series of reprisals, and two great invasions, which took place in 1978 and 1982. The settlements of Palestinians, predominantly Sunnis in Lebanon, and in which certain radical jihadist groups operate, such as Fatah Al Islam, come to form about 10% of the Lebanese population. The different Palestinian refugee's camps appear as one of the main focal points of instability for

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<sup>285</sup> Dr. Suechita Kota pointed out the existence of three kind of Sectrarianism: Firstly, we would find the sectarian identity due to the clientelism mentality and mutural distrust among the sectarian groups. Secondly, we could talk about sectarian practice based on the political Elites behavior, and finally, we shall talk concerning the sectarian as an institution due to the strong link between confessionalism and the Lebanese political System. Dr. Suechita Kota stressed the interaction among these three kinds of sectarism. In no way, these types are mutually exclusive.

<sup>286</sup> Since January 2013, Israel bombarded Syrian territory in three occasions. The latest attack took place on May 5, when they bombarded an arsenal located at west of Damascus, where it seemed that they were a series of missiles, of Iranian origin, ready to be transferred and delivered to the Shiite militia of Hezbollah .

<sup>287</sup> In Lebanon when the conflict between the Palestinians and the Israelis was internalize, the country set up, at this moment, the first stone for its civil war (from 1975 till 1990).



Israel. This problem must be contextualized like one of the most influential sources of instability operating in the country. Therefore, the settlement of the Palestinian refugee's camps distributed throughout Lebanon, for its location, and taking into account the faith of the community that predominates in each zone, will allow us to point out, that the Palestinian cause will still be one of the most important elements of destabilization in relation to the Lebanese constant precarious stability.

Without any doubt, Hezbollah is one of the most important threats for Israel's security and Defense. In fact, Hezbollah, or Party of God appears nowadays as the face of Arab resistance against Israel. Till now three armed conflicts have been registered between the State of Israel and Hezbollah in 1982, 2000 and in 2006.

Hezbollah is more than a simple political party. It can be classified as a terrorist group, Islamic religious movement, Lebanese national party, or a puppet in the hands of Iran and Syria (Samaan, 2007:7). It can also be all of these things simultaneously. At the same time, we can consider that we are talking about one important social movement which represents the stronger insurgency movement in Lebanon. We also have to point out that Hezbollah had decided to increase its efforts on the political arena, which would count against its insurgency activities.

Regardless of Hezbollah's origins which presented its militia and political party as a formation that sought to achieve higher levels of representation and power for the Shiite community due to its population growth during the 80s and 90s. Nowadays, Hezbollah has emerged as the largest community within the mosaic of communities that is present on the Lebanese scene; besides the legitimacy it was granted as a result of its victory against Israel in the 2006 war.

Today, the image of resistance used in a biased way has deteriorated as a consequence of its participation in the war of Syria. Despite of signing the "Baabda Declaration", where the Lebanese political forces pushed for dissociation in relation to any kind of conflict or crisis that can be displayed in any Arab country, Hezbollah did not keep its pledges and began sending troops and technical assistance forces to the regime of Bashar Assad. In this way, the Shiite militia breached again another national agreement.

We have to point out that the Shiite community is mainly located in the south and in the north of the country. This distribution affects Beirut, where Hezbollah has a considerable military capability, and which gives the party the chance to control all the geopolitical dynamics registered on Lebanese soil. Therefore, we will continue analyzing the day by day, in order to devise whether Hezbollah is going to continue improving its arsenal, due in part to aid dispensed by Iran and Syria. Another factor to follow is concerning its transformation in terms of expansive and aggressive impulses that present this militia in relation to the State of Israel. We should not forget that its main goal is to eliminate Zionism completely.

In the management of this border, we have to pay attention to the role that the United Nations Interim Forces in Lebanon (UNIFIL) has been playing in the area. Had it not been for UNIFIL the period of relative stability and safety which we are living nowadays would have been impossible. However, there are a few more points to take into consideration when we analyze the conflict between the State of Israel and Hezbollah. For instance, we have to point out the problem of the "Golan Heights" and "Shebaa Farms". Both areas are still pending of being resolved concerning which country has sovereignty and where Hezbollah can play an important role in relation to the security and defense of Lebanon, Israel and Syria.

The "Golan Heights" and the problem of the "Shebaa farms" area present a significant challenge to Lebanese security affairs<sup>288</sup>. As a result of Hezbollah's involvement in the war of

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<sup>288</sup> The Golan Heights are occupied by Israel since "the Six Day War" in 1967, and then again, from the "Yom Kippur War" in 1973. This plateau is located among Israel, Syria, Jordan and Lebanon. The Golan Heights is presented from a geostrategic viewpoint as a cornerstone due to what can happen in the War of Syria. If the

Syria, its leader Hasan Nasrallah delivered a clear and explicit message in relation to the support that Hezbollah is going to offer to Bashar El Assad regime's forces in order to recover the Golan Heights for Syria, a commitment which increases the possibility of fresh confrontations at two levels. On one hand, we can witness an interstate conflict between Lebanon and Israel. In fact, for Israel the security control of the Golan Heights is presented of vital importance, not only for military reasons, but because 35% of the supply aquifer of Israel comes from that area. From a military viewpoint, in addition to this control and if Israel could penetrate into southern Lebanon, Israel will have two fronts to attack Syria (Seaver, 2000: 260). Thus, this factor will involve a rise of the tension level among Lebanon, Israel and Syria. On the other hand, it is possible to notice an intrastate conflict among the Shiite community and the Sunni and/or Salafist communities. In the attempt to recover the Golan Heights, it is likely to think that Hezbollah is going to face a fierce resistance from these communities.

Another actor to take into consideration is the Free Syrian Army (FSA), which is composed, in its majority, by Syrian Sunni rebel groups and Lebanese Sunni and Salafist rebel groups coming from Lebanon. These groups are operational on Syrian soil and it could be seen how some forces belonging to the Palestinian and Syrians refugees' camps could fight against Hezbollah on the border with Israel. On Lebanese territory it is equally likely that this conflict can also be registered in the border areas with Syria and the Bekaa Valley. Regarding the southern flank it could indicate that it is more than likely that clashes can be seen in the most important cities of the south of Lebanon like Saida and Tyre, between Hezbollah's supporters and followers of the "Assiri movement", led by the Sunni Salafist leader Sheikh Ahmed Al Assir.

At this moment in time, an important increase in the climate of confrontation has been observed. This issue is backed by what is happening in Syria because it could be used to spark off a new armed conflict between Israel and the Shiite militia. In this sense, we should emphasize other elements that are increasing the climate of tension in that area. For example, we would have to highlight what is happening in the "Golan Heights" where the United Nations Force Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) is missing components after the withdrawal of Croatian soldiers, and soon the same will happen with the Austrians contingent. This issue coupled with recent Hezbollah threats, best expressed in the intention to help Bashar al-Assad's forces to recover the Golan Heights, certainly compromises the safety of the whole area. In this sense, we have to stress on the importance of this area because if finally Hezbollah could recuperate it for Syria, the Shia militia could make a corridor making a kind of Shia belt. As a result of this Shia corridor, Israel would increase its level of insecurity because Hezbollah would have a better position to attack it.

Another factor that is increasing the climate of tension results from continued violations of the Lebanese airspace by the Israeli Air Force. Lebanese authorities are powerless against this nearly daily breach of their airspace given inadequate defense capabilities. Even worse, Lebanese airspace, but, in certain cases, breaches in maritime boundaries as well, place UNIFIL forces in a difficult situation. The feeling of humiliation and ineffectiveness which UNIFIL is subjected to concerning the actions of Israel and

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armed forces of Bashar al-Assad's with the help of Hezbollah are capable to recover this plateau, Hezbollah could set a kind of corridor up, and that would connect the Golan area with the south of Lebanon under Shiite community control. Of this way, it would create a kind of common and united front to strengthen Hezbollah, in relation to its position and pressure control over their natural enemy, Israel. For this to occur, Hezbollah should recover the area of the Shebaa farms, which it is also under control of Israel, as a result of its victory in the "Six Days War". Over this area, there is a dispute regarding its sovereignty. This problem is affecting to Syria and Lebanon. In this sense, we will have to see if its traditional alliance with Hamas (Sunni), due to the fact that they share the same enemy, will continue or by the contrary it is going to deteriorate as a result of sectarian strife existing today between Sunni and Shiite respectively.

Hezbollah forces requires on one hand, the expansion and improvement of the functions of its mandate, and on the other hand, an improvement regarding the number of troops deployed to enhance its own military capabilities.

Of course, lack of coordination between UNIFIL contingents and the Lebanese Armed Forces hinder the situation because the European Union (EU) has included Hezbollah on its list of terrorist organizations. It is more than likely that if this initiative succeeds, there will be a substantial increase of attacks against UNIFIL forces.

To summarize, we have to point out the importance of the settlements of Palestinian and Syrian refugees because it would appear a more than likely conflict between the Sunni community and the Shia community led by Hezbollah. The traditional areas under control of Hezbollah can be threatened by the increase of Sunni community as a result of the increasing number of these refugees. Furthermore, we have to follow day by day what is happening in the Syrian war because Hezbollah is playing its own future there.

### **The Geopolitics pressure from the Syrian War**

There can be little doubt that Lebanese stability is being compromised by what is happening in Syria. The Syrian war has become a transnational conflict where the participation of the Shiite militia of Hezbollah is compromising Lebanese security. As discussed above, Hezbollah may be paying a historic debt to Syria because of the latter's political, military, and logistical support in its decades-old resistance against Israel. This participation would justify the need to defend the "axis of resistance", that is compounded by Iran, Syria and Hezbollah and appears to be a clear example of increased hostilities between Sunni radicalism and Shiite fundamentalism in the context of the destabilizing that the region is going through.

In this sense, we cannot forget the strong relationship existing between Syria and Lebanon<sup>289</sup>. Indeed, the Lebanese political system rests on two major coalitions of political parties. Both coalitions are organized around the kind of influence Syria could exert on Lebanon. This way, we can find on one hand, the "March 14<sup>th</sup> Alliance," which is contrary to any political interference or influence by Syria. On the other hand, we can find the "March 8<sup>th</sup> Alliance", which involves, for example, Hezbollah, and that it focuses on protecting Syrian interests in Lebanon. This group of political parties conceives Lebanon as a natural extension of Syria. In fact, together both would form the "Greater Syria". The whole process of interference and control, over the Lebanese political reality by Syria, had its peak during the period when Syria imposed a protectorate over Lebanon, which allowed it to strengthen its control over the country of the cedars in all the spheres of public life, including the rearmament of the Shiite militia of Hezbollah.

In addition, due to the instability and disorganization that Lebanon has displayed since its birth, Syria was able to improve its control and influence on the Lebanese chessboard. Syria's role as a "big brother" is becoming increasingly clear, and it makes us think that the war of Syria is taking place also on Lebanese soil. In fact, what is happening in Tripoli, and more specifically, in Bab al Tabane (mostly Sunni) and Jabal Mohsen (which concentrates the minority Alawite) is a true reproduction in Lebanese territory of the clashes that are taking place in the Syrian war.

In any case, the participation of Hezbollah forces in the Syrian war has provoked the prompt reaction on behalf of the Free Syrian Army (FSA). In fact, this rebel group has attacked some positions inside Lebanese soil at Aarsal and throughout the Akkar region. Both are located in the north abutting the Bekaa Valley, which compounds one of the hottest spots

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<sup>289</sup>Lebanon and Syria have already signed several cooperation agreements among which we would highlight on one hand, the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation signed in May 1991. On the other hand, the Agreement of Security and Defense signed in September of that year.

in the north of the country. In this case, we cannot forget that Aarsal is an area controlled by Sunnis within an area mostly controlled by Hezbollah. The geographical area close to the border with Syria comes as a geographical space where it performs a fratricidal insurgency. Moreover, the existence of diffuse boundaries and lack of control make it very easy to penetrate in these natural boundaries which have become a perfect area for weapons trafficking, ammunition, movement of soldiers, displaced refugees, illegal drugs, etc ..., which are being used by Hezbollah, the Free Syrian Army, some Sunni groups<sup>290</sup> and brigades linked to Al Qaeda fighting against the regime of Bashar Al Assad. Therefore, the Bekaa area is still presented as a risky area where the influence of Syria in relation to Lebanon can still be felt since the period between 1976 and 2005, also known as "Syrianization". In fact, during this period there was a significant presence of Syrian troops in the region, as well as statues of Bashar El Assad family members and giant portraits of the Syrian leader Hafez El Assad in areas like Chtaura and Baalbek (Bennafla, 2008:8). As a result of the Syrian domination the presence of the Lebanese Shia groups as Amal and Hezbollah was possible in certain areas as Baalbek and Hermel.

Therefore, if we describe the world in terms of territorial struggle, religion could be used to give legitimacy to such conflict. In this sense, we should highlight the fact that in general, trahe entities that blend geopolitics and religion are non-state actors, as it could be the case of Hezbollah, which does not have a clear geopolitical vision, because all that they want is to expel that does not of an area those who do not share a particular version of Islam. That is why, the religious factor even if it is not the main cause of the conflict itself, gains in importance once at territorial conflict starts. The entire northern region could thus be used as a clear example in which religion propels a struggle over territory.

All the border between Lebanon and Syria are configured as a conflictual space in which a kind of network could be established, where you could identify a whole range of complex interactions between a multitude of actors (Bashar's regime forces, the Free Syrian Army (ESL), Alawite community, Sunni and Shia communities, radical jihadists, related to Al Qaeda cells as Fatah al-Islam in Lebanon area, and Jabhat al-Nusra on the Syrian territory, transnational rebels<sup>291</sup>, etc ... This fragmentation of actors is presented as a fundamental challenge for two reasons. The first to guarantee the restoration of peace, and the second to explain whatever motivations, which may lead a particular group to participate in this armed conflict.

This conflictual space would understand the war as the result of political decisions made within a context where several states share a border, and where this fact offers limited opportunities for economic relations, political alliances, rivalries, and existing cultural ties (Flint et Al., 2009:829). The issue of alliances and rivalries, as refer to techniques, are vitally important to understand the extent and the level of increase of the conflict through the phenomenon of contagion. In this sense, and for the present case, the alliance between Bashar al-Assad's regime and Hezbollah could be interpreted as a network of relationships that have the ability to unite different geographical areas of different countries based on an identity and collective action in order to share the same preferences and respond to the same political incentives.

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<sup>290</sup> Free Syrian Army, Syrian Liberation Front and Syrian Islamic Front.

<sup>291</sup> When we are talking about transnational rebel groups, we would be talking about those rebels who not only act on its territory but deliberately cross borders, often without authorization of the second country involved. Its activity is enhanced by the fact that the regular armed forces of the countries involved are not able to control their insurgent activity. For the present case we have to emphasize the idea of operational deficit presenting the Lebanese Armed Forces. In fact, the presence of these forces, although are recorded in the city of Tripoli, are almost nonexistent on the border area that stand in an area without control.

### **Conclusions: Medium and long terms Geopolitical trends**

In response to current events and using emotions geopolitics as a way to apply the *modus operandi* of critical geopolitics, we could include Lebanon, as well as other Arab countries, within the category of a “culture of humiliation”. In fact, it is mostly due to the showing of impotence relative to the control of their present and their own future in the medium and long term. Indeed, there are many factors that have influence on and play a special role in the Lebanese checkerboard. Concerning these factors, we would highlight the preponderance of communalism, sectarianism, foreign interventionism, state and institutional weakness, potentially conflicting neighbors, triumph of particularism of national interest , failure of Power-Sharing as a political mechanism, frequent practice of political patronage based on certain neo feudal structures, leadership of the political game by "warlords" and an increased in religious fanaticism and extremism. In relation to these factors, I am convinced that its impacts will be increased when the Syrian war ends, and we will be able to observe how a new intercommunity equilibrium will rise in Syria and Lebanon. In addition, as a result of the incidence of porous borders, it will be possible to notice an increase of the presence of Al Qaeda cells on Lebanese soil.

The Geopolitical developments that are going to take place in Lebanon, over the medium and long term, will be determined by the new religious balance to be recorded in the region as a consequence of the end of Bashar’s regime. In this sense, we could point out that the downfall of Bashar’s regime would put Hezbollah in a total isolation because it would break the “axis of resistance”. Moreover, Syria will become a tough opponent to Iran because most probably we will have a Sunni republic. This issue will be translated in a rise of tension between Sunnis and Shiites. In fact, I believe that we will have a Sunni Islamist regime so much in Syria as in Lebanon in response to the new confessional equilibrium registered once the war ends.

Concerning the role of UNIFIL, we have to indicate that it is more than likely to see its tenure and responsibility increased in the Lebanese theatre of operations. In this sense, we cannot dismiss the notion that UNIFIL may have to expand its range of operations, and increase their participation in the management of the northern border between Syria and Lebanon. Therefore, it is presented as *condition sine qua non* to provide UNIFIL with the military, economic and logistical resources that this mission really deserves.

Syria in the post-Bashar Al Assad era is likely to have a “National Pact” based on the Power-Sharing political mechanism just like the one practiced in Lebanon. We will have to see then, whether the new Syrian system will be able to handle the management of minority communities that coexist in Syria at this moment.

Besides, we can realize internally, the lack of political reforms due to the incompetence of the Lebanese State and the effect of religious communalism. This confessionalism puts on top the particularistic interests over the Lebanese national interest. This issue will continue to demonstrate that we are facing a "State improvised", due to weak institutions and the problems of the Lebanese state to implement its sovereignty over all its territory and population. In fact, we might ask if we are truly analyzing a State or not, as the Lebanese State has neither a monopoly on use of force, nor the legitimacy to act in relation to the whole population, nor exercises control over all the territory that compounds the Lebanese space.

Geopolitical forces will continue to exert pressure on Lebanon from all its geostrategic flanks, especially because of its location and the distribution of power among its different communities. Thus, we will continue to record the current major geopolitical trends because of the fact that different communities and denominations continue making the future political developments in this country, and the increase of interventions at household level and interference by the local, national, regional and international actors.

The issue of the Lebanese geographic location provides this country with a very complicated neighborhood, which creates an ideal environment for the installation of a permanent structural crisis. This pessimistic landscape would only be resolved through intervention and protection by external powers. Thus, as Zahar argues, in Lebanon the Peace has lasted only when there have been foreign protectors (Zahar, 2005:219-240). So at the end, we will have to see if Lebanon will continue resisting or not, the triumph of a geopolitical clash of civilizations, and the hegemonic ambitions showed by foreign powers interested in managing its affairs.

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