



# Lebanon's Stability between International Resolutions and Regional Tensions

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General Hamade holds a degree in Command and General Staff from Fouad Shehab Command and Staff College of the Lebanese Army (1998-1999) and a Diploma in the Combined Joint Forces Staff course from "Istituto Superiore di Stato Maggiore Interforze" in Rome (2000-2001). He also holds a Postgraduate Diploma in Political Sociology from the Lebanese University (1995) and a Master's Degree in International Strategic-Military Studies from the University of Rome (2001).

He took over several positions during his military service, most notably Assistant of Commander of South Litani Sector (2008), Director of Training in the LAF Headquarters (2009-2013) and Director of Research and Strategic Studies Center (2013-2014). He also presided the Regional Conferences Organizing Committees at the Lebanese Army from 2011 to 2014.

He has organized a series of seminars about cyber security, petroleum resources in east mediterranean, anti-money laundering, stability in the Middle East and counter-terrorism.

As a result of his efforts to establish a partnership between the Lebanese Army and the French Armed Forces, he received the Order of Merit from the Republic of France.

Currently, he is working as a director of the Regional Forum for Consultancy and Studies (RFCS), President of the Modern Association for Better Society (MABS) and Editor-in-Chief of Al-Liwaa newspaper.

He participated in several events organized by international and national studies centers, in particular Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS), La Maison du Future (MDF), Carnegie Middle East, The Institute for Palestine Studies (IPS), Issam Fares Institute for Lebanon (IFCL) and the Lebanese Center for Policy Studies (LCPS).



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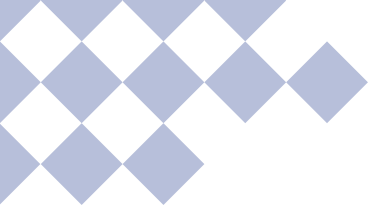
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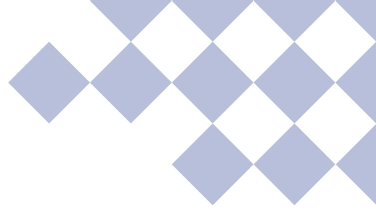


**Lebanon's stability has depended on the influence of external powers and actors. Over the past few years, several factors put the fragile balance in Lebanon at stake, notably Hezbollah's control over the political and economic decision of the Lebanese government, the growing expansionist tendencies of Iran which has led to the involvement of Hezbollah in the Syrian conflict and its full control on the eastern borders, and the emergence of Russia as a regional player dominating the military decision in Syria & on the path of political settlement.**

**The future of Lebanese stability especially its internal and border security, the fragile domestic balance, the international financial support, and its future role in a changing regional system, will always remain critical if foreign interference persists.**

Stability in Lebanon, whether at the security or political level, has never been the product of local political parties alone. International and regional powers have always exerted substantial influence on Lebanese parties which failed to ensure national coexistence and unity, deemed as a pillar for establishing Lebanon as a nation-state. The local term "Lebanese Entity" evoking the artificial nature of Greater Lebanon's declaration and adopted by local politicians, is still the reasonable description of the current situation of Lebanon: a country still "under construction".

The creation of Greater Lebanon as a state, proclaimed by the representative of the French mandatory power, General Gouraud, on August 31st 1920, was the result of an international settlement agreed upon at the San Remo Conference of April 28th that put Syria and Lebanon under French mandate. The capture of Damascus by France on July 22nd of that same year ended the war between France and Syria over the validity of the French mandate. France tightened its grip over the region after 1920, solidifying the creation of Greater Lebanon. The Lebanese Constitution written in 1926 and the National Pact written in 1943 were also the outcomes of many foreign interventions that led to two distinct political movements: The first included pro-Western forces, while the second was largely made up of pro-Arab forces.

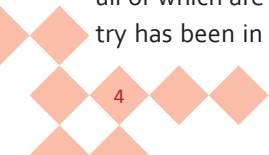


In the following years, Pan-Arabism increased due to the success of the Egyptian revolution; the election of President Gamal Abdel Nasser in 1952 and the creation of the "Baghdad Pact" (1955) served not only as another anti-Soviet Cold War alliance but also promoted Pan-Arabism, which had negative impacts on Lebanon where it caused an ideological split.

These events led to the revolution of 1958 and to US-Egyptian political arrangements, paving the way for the Lebanese election of President Fouad Chehab. No sooner had Lebanon stabilized than the 1967 Arab-Israeli war began, the Cairo Agreement was signed (1969), the Lebanese Civil War erupted (1975), the May 17 Agreement (1983) was negotiated, and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) withdrew from Lebanon in 1982.

After 1982, Damascus assumed power in Lebanon and its decisions tended to align with US policies. Syria ensured the stability of the northern Israeli boundaries and provided US forces with logistic support during the second and third Gulf Wars. During this period, Lebanese political decisions were "Syrian-made". Damascus became responsible for the political balance and stability of Lebanon; and beginning in the 1980s, the Islamic Republic of Iran emerged as a partner through its ally, Hezbollah. Despite many international and regional attempts to mitigate the chaos and conflict in the country, especially those of the Gulf and Europe, Lebanon's stability remained affected by external actors. These players were able to gain and maintain a firm footing in the country because of the sectarian and political structures. Recent events in the region have only increased the influence of external forces, notably the armed conflict in Syria, the rapid emergence of terrorism, the increasing Iranian influence, the recession of the Sunni Arab role, the decreasing of the European engagement, and Russia's relevance in regional affairs through Syria.

Stability in Lebanon has been affected by a plethora of actors and events, all of which are essential to understanding the constant state of flux the country has been in since its inception. Foreign aspirations, be they regional or in-



ternational, take advantage of the fragmented political and social structures in Lebanon. Our approach to understanding Lebanon's fragile stability will rely on reconsidering all incidents that occurred in the past year, analyzing the role of international and regional circumstances, and examining the expected repercussions.

The political compromise that was reached in order to elect the Lebanese President General Michel Aoun on October 31st 2016 will be the initial event from which this analysis begins. This settlement is the starting point, not because it was the beginning of a new presidential term, but because it was the conclusion of a series of compromises expressing regional consensus, notably a Saudi-Iranian one supported by the international community, that aimed at finding a solution to the two and a half year power vacuum. This regional accord was solidified through the visit of Lebanon's President Michel Aoun to Saudi Arabia, despite his alliance and support from the Iranian-backed Hezbollah. The abrupt end to King Salman and President Aoun's meeting, as well as the Lebanese President statement in Cairo affirming the role of Hezbollah weapons in securing Lebanon, indicated the failure of the compromise. Reassessing and analyzing the most significant internal, regional, and international changes that came after can help determine the repercussions for Lebanon's stability.

**First: Lebanon witnessing, for the first time, a phase of convulsion from the Gulf countries.** Due to the continuity of Hezbollah's military operations in Syria and Yemen, and its extensive media campaigns against the Gulf countries, especially Saudi Arabia, the Gulf isolated Lebanon. It is worth noting that both Lebanon's President, in his speech after taking oath, and the Prime Minister in the ministerial statement stressed the necessity of abiding by the Taif Agreement, the Charter of the League of Arab States, and the International Resolutions, namely Resolutions 1559 and 1701, to distance Lebanon from regional conflicts. With Hezbollah acting independently and despite protests from the Lebanese state, tensions mounted between Lebanon and Saudi Arabia. Shortly afterwards, the Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri, abruptly announced from

Riyadh his resignation on December 4th 2017, rescinding it soon after. Although he reiterated that Lebanese politicians should behave according to the self-distancing policy, Hezbollah's military engagements in many Arab countries have not stopped, nor have the field visits of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and Shiite militias to southern Lebanon, notably UNIFIL's work station. All of these actions violated Resolution 1701. Consequently, relations with Saudi Arabia be-came increasingly strained, as Yemen's Houthi forces continued to launch ballistic missiles over the capital. Several reports have accused Hezbollah fighters of participating in the Houthi forces training<sup>1</sup>. The outcomes of these tense relations with the Gulf countries are likely to have negative and critical impacts on Gulf investments in Lebanon, job opportunities for the Lebanese youth, and the future of the 350,000 Lebanese investors and employees therein. The greatest danger of this deteriorating relationship is the threat of the Gulf ending its financial contributions to Lebanon during the Rome conference, aimed at supporting the Lebanese Army, and at the "Paris IV" donor conference held in Paris on April 6th.

**Second: the continuing "security vacuum" and lack of control over the Eastern borders.** Lebanon is still facing a "security vacuum" despite the Lebanese Army's demonstration of strength during the "Fajr Al-Jouroud" operation against Daesh (ISIS) positions on August 30th 2017, during which they proved that the Lebanese army is the most capable of defending Lebanon. Unfortunately, the Lebanese government was not able to use this show of force and unity by the Lebanese Army as an opportunity. They did not push for greater army control over border crossings in order to halt weapons smuggling operations and the passage of fighters and goods to and from Syria, could not implement security plans, nor regain full control over central and northern Bekaa. The "Fajr Al-Jouroud" operation ended with a Hezbollah and Syrian regime deal with Daesh. While this operation was the ideal moment to show the capacity of the Lebanese Armed Forces to protect Lebanon, it became another excuse to ques-

<sup>1</sup> Al Arabiya. (2016). VIDEO: Evidence of Hezbollah coaching Houthis, planning attacks on Riyadh, retrieved from: <https://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2016/02/25/VIDEO-Evidence-of-Hezbollahcoaching-Houthis-planning-attacks-on-Riyadh.html>



tion the capacity of the Lebanese government and its Armed Forces to control their own security and political decisions.

**Third: the ongoing situation in the south of Syria.** With all of Western Ghouta under their control, the Syrian Army and Hezbollah triumphed over the opposition, which extended as far as the occupied borders on the Golan Heights. Subsequently, the Nusra front withdrew to Idlib, following an agreement signed with the regime. According to many information reports, Russian President Vladimir Putin worked to maintain an unspoken agreement<sup>2</sup> between the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and the Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad to establish a buffer zone of 40 km<sup>2</sup>. This implies that Russia is committed to ensuring the security of northern Israel on the Syrian front, and that Hezbollah fighters can move freely between southern Syria and southern Lebanon. If implemented, this would aggravate the situation in southern Lebanon and increase Hezbollah's control over peace and war in the country.

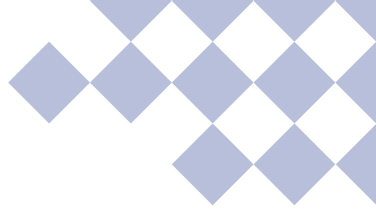
**Fourth: the capacity of Lebanon to implement international commitments.** The Paris Joint Statement, issued by the International Support Group (ISG) on December 8th 2017, voiced that Lebanon must be capable of following through on its international commitments. The permanent Members of the UN Security Council, the League of Arab States, Italy, Germany, the European Union, and the UN Special Coordinator for Lebanon took part in this meeting. They reaffirmed the necessity of implementing and respecting international resolutions; especially resolutions 1559<sup>3</sup> and 1701<sup>4</sup> that were transgressed by

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<sup>2</sup> <https://aawsat.com/home/article/1055986>

<sup>3</sup> Resolution 1559 issued on 02/09/2004: it calls for the strict respect of Lebanon's sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity, and political independence under the sole and exclusive authority of the Government of Lebanon throughout the country, as well as for the disbanding and disarmament of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias.

<sup>4</sup> Resolution 1701 issued on 12/08/2006: It calls for "full implementation of the relevant provisions of the Taif Accords and of the Resolution 1559 (2004), as well as it requires the disarmament of all armed groups in Lebanon; there will be no weapons or authority in Lebanon other than that of the Lebanese state." And, "It calls upon the Government to secure its borders and other entry points to prevent the entry, without its consent, of arms or related material."



Hezbollah when they violated the conditions of the presidential compromise, namely their direct involvement in external crises, and when Prime Minister Saad Hariri resigned from Riyadh. In his introductory speech, the President of the French Republic Emmanuel Macron, who played a major role in the crisis, discussed the current predicament Lebanon is in, as well as European commitments, and Lebanon's obligation to find solutions: *"Lebanon is a country in which many of the whole region's balances are played out, and that is why we are gathered here today, at your side. The international community will step up to the plate, because Lebanon is a strategic country which we are defending... In order for Lebanon to be protected from these crises, it is essential for the Lebanese parties and all the regional players to adhere to the fundamental principle of non-interference."* Regarding Hezbollah's role in regional conflicts, he stressed that: *"Recent events have demonstrated that the Lebanese militia's involvement in the clashes tearing apart the Middle East could not continue without exposing all sectors of the Lebanese population to collateral damage."*

The International Support Group reiterated in its ministerial meeting the need for the full implementation of the resolutions issued by the cabinet, notably those concerning the self-distancing policy agreed upon by all Lebanese parties. Likewise, the Group stressed the need to fully respect UNSC Resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1701 (2006). The President of the French Republic Macron mentioned as a priority that, in addition to the commitment of Lebanese parties, regional actors shall not intervene in external conflicts in order to safeguard Lebanon's sovereignty, unity, and territorial integrity. He also drew attention to the impending threat of the US President to declare Jerusalem the capital of Israel, an action that would be highly destabilizing to the whole region. The Group called on Lebanese parties to resume discussions towards a consensus on a defense strategy that would enable the disarmament of Hezbollah. Efforts to find a solution will continue at the "Rome II" meeting, held on March 15th in support of the Lebanese Armed Forces. According to President Macron, the economic situation, in addition to security challenges, is the greatest difficulty Lebanon faces. In order to address the economic crisis, the ISG needs to be sup-



ported during the "Paris IV" Donor Conference in April, at which time all members should reaffirm their intention to implement commitments made during the last conference.

**Fifth: international and regional stances on the expansion of Iranian influence.** The position of various countries on Iranian expansionism was expressed through several phone calls made by the President of the French Republic to a number of international and Middle Eastern leaders. They discussed the situation in the Middle East, specifically how to restore calm and bring peace to the region<sup>5</sup>. The U.S. President Donald Trump has been involved as well in countering Hezbollah's operations and Iranian induced instability in the region. President Trump's stance was consistent with that of the members of the Paris conference: that Iran is destabilizing the strategic balance in the Gulf.

As the French Minister of Foreign Affairs and the President of the French Republic Macron revealed, France has a number of vital economic interests in the Gulf countries, such as armament deals<sup>6</sup>. As such, they cannot disregard Saudi fears of growing Iranian power, namely the acceleration of the Iran's developing rocket arsenal, its aggressive foreign policy, and its search for a hegemonic status in the region.

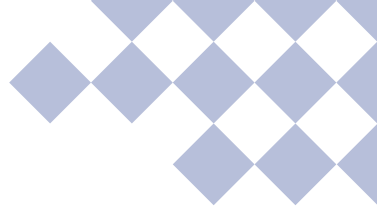
The urgent meeting of Arab Foreign Affairs Ministries in Cairo last November, held at the request of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to discuss Iran's interventions in the region, occurred as a result of Iran's destabilizing involvement in the region. The meeting took place straight after the last attack against Bahraini petroleum pipes by Iranian-backed militants, not to mention the attacks against more than 200 educational institutions and vital facilities such as electricity stations, communication towers, public parks and commercial banks<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> <http://en.rfi.fr/middle-east/20171119-macron-calls-trump-other-leaders-after-meeting-lebanons-hariri>

<sup>6</sup> Guisnel, J. (2017). *Armement : la France, supermarché de l'Arabie saoudite*, *Le Point*, retrieved from: [http://www.lepoint.fr/editos-du-point/jean-guisnel/armement-la-france-supermarche-de-l-arabie-saoudite-20-03-2017-2113291\\_53.php](http://www.lepoint.fr/editos-du-point/jean-guisnel/armement-la-france-supermarche-de-l-arabie-saoudite-20-03-2017-2113291_53.php)

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/bahrain-claims-oil-explosion-manama-pipeline-iranian-terrorism-middle-east-latest-a8050716.html>



Iranian interference in Yemen has caused remarkable destruction, notably the Houthi attack against international shipping routes in the Red Sea, before the Arab alliance was able to foil the attack on the Yemeni Island of Bawadi.

Likewise, there are Iranian-backed militias fighting in Syria and Iraq, as the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) seems to be exporting the “Hezbollah party- militia model” in every Arab country around the region. According to a report by the Global Risk Insights Institute, attempts to replicate Hezbollah-type groups throughout the region have empowered Tehran, and the route from Tehran to Beirut allows the IRGC and its Al Quds force to transfer not only weapons and supplies, but also ideology and influence deep into Arab lands<sup>8</sup>.

**Sixth: Russia’s comeback on the international stage and the contradiction of Russian–Iranian interests:** The powerful return of Russia on the global stage has filled the vacuum and disorder left by the US. Russia guaranteed its control over the political decisions regarding Syria, its coasts, and airspace by commending Assad’s regime and building a naval military base at Banyas and an air base in Hmeimim, renewable for fifty years. Russia established exceptional diplomatic relations with Tel Aviv, explaining the recent Israeli strikes in Syria which could not have happened without a tacit Russian agreement. At the same time, it played a role in helping pro-regime forces to secure the borders of the occupied Golan Heights and safeguarding northern Israeli borders. After declaring victory during its counterterrorism operations and maintaining strong relations with Ankara, it succeeded in bringing both Turkey and Iran under its umbrella, despite their opposite stances on the Assad regime. Putin’s visits to Egypt and Turkey, and the decision to cooperate at the nuclear level, the installation of pipes in the Black Sea to facilitate the transport of gas and oil to Russia, and Russian control over the Syrian coast have defined new dynamics of reshuffling and recalibrating strategic alliances in the Middle East.

Russia, which has extensively benefited from geo-political advantages and

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<sup>8</sup> <https://globalriskinsights.com/2017/11/iran-export-hezbollah-model-influence-middle-east/>

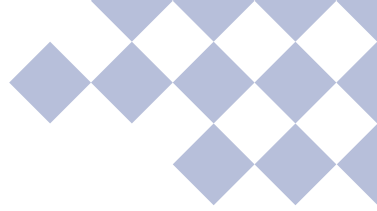


pushed for the creation of four de-escalation zones in Syria, after several rounds of negotiations in Astana and Sochi conducted at the same time as Geneva Conference, has not sought to have equal partners following the reshuffling of the current political settlement order. Russian sponsored Turkish influence in northern Syria has shown its intention to compete with the USA through the Kurdish conflict. Supporting Turkey has been an attempt to counter US influence rather than condone Turkish presence in Syria, which is criticized by the Syrian regime and considered a direct act of aggression. The final political settlement in Syria will need to reconcile the influence of the United States and Russia, so there will be no military presence of regional players. It is likely that Russia will seek Turkey's exit from the north in order to preserve the interests of the regime. Similarly, and in accordance with its strategy, the United States will demand the withdrawal of Iranian forces from Damascus and its environs. In other words, the US-Russian rivalry on the Syrian territories may lead, after the approval of a political settlement, to the withdrawal of Iranian militias as well as Kurdish militias in northern Syria.

These ongoing circumstances may hamper Lebanon's stability if the conflict spills over, and could lead to critical challenges:

**Firstly:** The capacity of Lebanon to resist external conflict, maintain solidarity and cohesion among its various groups while it is being isolated by the Gulf countries, and the subsequent deterioration of its economy and ability to gather necessary financial donations.

**Secondly:** The capacity of Lebanon to fulfill its commitments made to the international community during the Paris Meeting, particularly regarding the implementation of the self-distancing policy by all political parties and in light of Hezbollah's continued violation of UNSC Resolution 1701. In the event of its failure to do so, Lebanon will suffer consequences during the "Paris IV" Donor Conference aimed at supporting its economy, at the "Rome II" Meeting held in support the Lebanese Armed Forces, and at the "Brussels" Conference seeking to resolve the refugee crisis.



**Thirdly:** The capacity of Lebanon to reach a consensus on how to deal with border control, namely closing all illegal pathways on its Eastern border that contribute to Hezbollah's economic activities and the smuggling of weapons and fighters. If Lebanon does not address this issue, it will remain vulnerable to spillovers from the Syrian conflict, not to mention the economic repercussions if the international community were to cut off its support.

**Fourthly:** The implications for Lebanon of the final settlement related to Syria, namely the unclear future role of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) operating in Syria and the fate of the Beirut-Tehran axis.

**Fifthly:** Lebanon's place and future in terms Russian ambitions in the region. After Russia has successfully established strategic defense and energy relations between Turkey and Egypt, set up military bases in Syria, assumed a role in safeguarding Israel's security, and defined its sphere of influence from the Black Sea through the Mediterranean to the Red Sea, and in light of US ambiguity and confusion, where will Lebanon stand? How will it maintain its stability and remain distant from the American–Russian cold war in the region?

