Pax-Syriana?
The Origins, Causes and Consequences of Syria's Role in Lebanon

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The motives for Syrian intervention in Lebanon were shaped by geopolitics, not domestic politics – primarily by the struggle to forestall Israeli intervention in Lebanon. Syria's apparent success in establishing hegemony was due to its neutralisation of external rivals, the exhaustion of Lebanese factions, its use of the rising Shi'i forces, and Syria's centrality to ending the strife. The Syrian-dominated order in Lebanon rests on its links to a variety of Lebanese forces, the division of power in the Lebanese government which allows Syria to play the role of arbiter, its near-monopoly of force and its marginalization of militant Maronite nationalists. Syria's role in Lebanon enables it to use the conflict in south Lebanon to exert pressure on Israel in the wider Syro-Israeli struggle over the Levant.

This study examines the motives for Syrian intervention in Lebanon, the causes of its apparent success in establishing a Pax Syriana and the consequences of its role. Syria's motives are inseparable from the wider Syro-Israeli struggle for the Middle East, in which Lebanon has been the major pawn, while its success is symptomatic of the unevenness of state formation in the region.

Two rival images purport to explain inter-state behaviour in the Middle East. In the 'realist' model, impermeable states balance external threats and engage in power struggles over geopolitical interests. In the 'domestic politics' model, the poor fit of state boundaries with national identity, making states highly permeable to transstate forces and vulnerable to domestic subversion, means that foreign policies are chiefly designed to serve domestic political survival.

One would, perhaps, expect Syrian–Lebanese relations to exemplify the second model: a single society until recently, intimate trans-state ties survived separate statehood while state identity faced strong supra- and sub-state competition in both countries. Yet, the Syrian and Lebanese twins

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have, in the years since their separate statehood, evolved in diametrically opposed directions.[1] In Syria, where the state was relatively consolidated, a foreign policy approximating the realist model emerged, while in the Lebanon, state permeability and collapse engendered an extreme case of trans-state penetration which made Lebanon the arena of the Syro-Israeli conflict and eventually allowed Syria to subordinate its neighbour.

State Formation and Foreign Policy Decision-Making in Syria

The post-independence Syrian state, semi-pluralistic and susceptible to trans-state penetration, closely resembled that of Lebanon and was, like it, a frequent arena of rivalry by stronger external powers [Seale, 1964]. However, the Ba'ath revolution, army-party rule and the struggle with Israel led to the creation of an authoritarian national security state, largely impermeable to trans-state forces. The consolidation of the state under Hafiz al-Asad also gave the leadership sufficient autonomy of society to conduct a foreign policy shaped by geopolitical imperatives which turned Syria from a victim to an actor in the regional arena.

Asad concentrated power in a 'Presidential Monarchy' through a policy of levelling and balancing. Under the radical Ba'athists (1963–70), the regime achieved autonomy of the dominant classes by expropriating key means of production and incorporating a salaried middle class–peasant alliance through the Ba'ath party. In seizing power in 1970, Asad used the army to free himself from party ideological constraints; then, building up a *jama'a* of largely Alawi personal followers in the security forces, enhanced his autonomy of both army and party. Subsequently, the fostering of a state-dependent *new bourgeoisie*, linked to the state by corporatist and patronage ties, as a fourth leg of support, minimised dependence on the others. The regime's diversified economic base – a mixed public/private economy, oil reserves, and external aid from a multitude of sources – also gave it relative economic autonomy of internal social forces and minimised its vulnerability to external economic pressures [Hinnebusch, 1990].

The result is that domestic constraints on foreign policy-making have been minimised. Decision-making is confined within elite circles insulated from societal interests; nor is it subject to intra-elite bureaucratic politics in which hawkish or dovish factions can shape or veto the president's decisions. Thus, the 1976 decision to intervene in Lebanon was taken within a small elite circle, and although Dawisha [1978: 245–67; 1980: 70–3] depicts Asad engaged in consultation within the elite to achieve a consensus, his views prevailed and no factional opposition contested them.

Nor is public opinion a direct constraint: Asad has taken several very unpopular foreign policy decisions, beginning with the Lebanon

intervention against the PLO. He has not let the domestic costs of this venture, including arguably the Islamic uprising of the eighties, deter him from continued pursuit of his objectives in Lebanon. To be sure, there are *indirect* constraints on the regime: political wisdom dictates Asad take account of the fact that what legitimacy the regime enjoys rests on its consistency in defending Syrian and Arab interests against Israel; but if unpopular decisions can be justified as part of the chess game with Israel, the regime appears to believe the costs can be contained and events have so far sustained this calculation.

As such, the domestic conditions for a realist foreign policy exist and at least part of the explanation for Syria's success in Lebanon is arguably a 'rational actor' policy combining consistency of attainable goals with flexibility of tactics:

(1) Goals: Asad replaced ideological aims such as liberating Palestine or creating a Greater Syria, with the more realistic, if still ambitious aim of recovering the Golan Heights and rolling 'greater Israel' back behind its 1967 boundaries. As the Golan front was stalemated, the struggle was channelled into rivalry over spheres of influence in the Levant and, in particular, low intensity war over control of Lebanon. But Syrian policy in Lebanon was never purely Syro-centric or detached from the wider Arab nationalist struggle with Israel over the Middle East [Seale, 1988].

(2) Means: Rational calculation is evident in Asad's tactics which display caution, dictated by the usually unfavourable balance of power, and flexibility in mixing military and diplomatic means, above all alliances, as conditions dictated. In Lebanon, Syria maximized low cost reliance on Lebanese proxies, while phasing major military interventions with the deft neutralisation of resistance from external powers. Asad's tactics were not always properly calculated: for example, his 1976 intervenion alienated traditional allies while strengthening his natural Maronite rivals. But, over the long term, he prevailed – in Eyal Zisser's [1993: 254] assessment – from a combination of 'perseverance in pursuing goals', the careful calculation of moves, and 'infinite patience' – precisely the ideals of the foreign policy 'rational actor'.

Explaining Syria's Intervention (1976)

Geopolitics, not domestic politics, offers the best explanation of Syrian intervention in Lebanon. Syria's policy was conditioned by its view of Lebanon as an artificially detached part of historic Syria, and, therefore, its natural sphere of influence, but operationally, it was determined by Asad's

strategy in the Arab–Israeli conflict. Lebanon became a main object of conflict between Syria and Israel once the post-1973 peace process stalled and especially after Egypt embarked on a separate peace, leaving Syria exposed and in need of alternative allies.

The strategic motives for Syrian involvement in Lebanon arose from Asad's bid to lead a Levant coalition of neighbouring states which shared with Syria the insecurities of a border with Israel, a stake in rolling back the Israeli occupation, and the common heritage of *Bilad al-Sham*. This alliance would both guard against Israeli flank attacks on Syria through Lebanon or Jordan and deter attempts to draw these parties into separate negotiations with Israel. Lebanon was a special danger spot, particularly vulnerable because of its civil war and the Palestinian presence, to Israeli military and political penetration. Syria's 1976 intervention was most immediately motivated by the grave security *threat* from the prospect that civil war and partition would open the door to Israeli penetration but the conflict also presented an *opportunity* for Damascus to insert itself as arbiter and draw Lebanon under its political-military wing.

Given the PLO presence there, Lebanon was also key to Asad's drive to control the 'Palestinian card': Syria's bargaining leverage in the Arab-Israeli conflict would be greatly enhanced if it enjoyed the capacity to veto any settlement of the Palestinian problem which left Syria out or to overcome rejectionist Palestinian resistance to an acceptable settlement; who controlled Lebanon was in a strong position to control the PLO. To interpret the intervention as a bid to break resistance to a separate Syrian peace with Israel at the expense of the Palestinians goes too far, however; although the intervention, in curbing Palestinian power and demonstrating Syrian moderation to the US and Israel, better positioned Asad for such a settlement, he continued to insist on Palestinian rights and a comprehensive peace.

When the civil war broke out in 1975, Syria tried to both contain and exploit the crisis. Initially, Syria bolstered its traditional allies, the Palestinian-Muslim camp, and in January 1976, blocked a drive of expansion and partition by militant Maronites[2] [Avi-Ran, 1991: 22]. It imposed an end to the fighting and sponsored reforms meant to appease each side: a mild redistribution of power in the Muslims' favour, Palestinian respect for Lebanese sovereignty. But when Syria's own allies rejected its reforms in the name of a secular radical state and appeared intent on a military defeat of the Maronites – inspired, Asad charged, by sectarian revenge – Syria forcefully intervened against them in mid-1976. Asad was aware of efforts by some Maronites to draw Israel into the fighting on their behalf and feared the conflict would throw the Christians into the hands of Israel and balkanise Lebanon. He hoped to win over the Maronites by

demonstrating Syria's unwillingness to countenance a sectarian triumph over them. As the Palestinians defied him, Asad sought to deprive the PLO of the autonomous Lebanese stronghold from which it could evade Syria's pressures for strategic 'co-ordination' as well as prevent the emergence of a 'rejectionist' Palestinian-dominated Lebanon, sponsoring guerrilla war against Israel, giving the latter an excuse to evade peace pressures, and, in alignment with rejectionist Iraq, constraining Syria's peace diplomacy. This scenario would give Israel an excuse to intervene militarily, realize its supposed historic ambition to seize southern Lebanon, and, conceivably, invade Syria through the Biqaa Valley, splitting the country and encircling Damascus. Asad had no intention of incorporating Lebanon but he was determined to assert an exclusive sphere of influence there and to position his army in the Biqaa Valley to guard Syria's Western flank [Chalala 1985; Dawisha 1980 ; Deeb, 1980: 122–8].

Some analysts [Pipes: 1990; Lawson: 1996: 76–97] have claimed Syrian domestic forces drove its intervention. A sectarian explanation argues that the minority Alawi regime feared Sunni Muslim success in Lebanon against the dominant Maronite minority would encourage Sunni rebellion against Alawi rule in Syria, that sectarian conflict would seep across the border and de-stabilise Syria's similar mosaic polity, or that the regime needed irredentist adventures to disguise minority rule at home.

The weakness of this explanation is that intervention was far more likely to inflame than appease or contain domestic opposition. Intervention against the PLO was seen by many, notably the regime's own supporters, as a betrayal of its Arab nationalist commitments to Palestine. The regime's enemies put it on the defensive in claiming that it sought to smash resistance to a settlement with Israel in which Syria would abandon the Palestinians. Widespread dissent in the party and army, even periodic refusal by troops in Lebanon to obey orders and anti-Asad plots were met with waves of arrests, eroding the regime's own support in the face of opposition.

Secondly, the regime's conservative and Islamist rivals depicted the intervention as a drive by heretical Alawis against Sunni Muslims on behalf of Christians, a charge which cost the regime legitimacy among the Muslim majority. Contrary to Lawson [1996: 91], Islamic ferment, far from being contained by the intervention, largely post-dates and was greatly accelerated by it. Finally, involvement of the Syrian army in Lebanon was a more direct conduit for infecting the regime with sectarian conflict than any 'demonstration effect' in Lebanon. All this was quite predictable and Asad must have realised it was intervention which most risked exacerbating sectarian cleavages in Syria, as indeed it did – but he put geopolitics first.

Lawson attributes the intervention to economic crisis, notably capital shortages, which fuelled contradictions in the regime's coalition and,

jeopardizing the incorporation of the bourgeoisie into it, threatened to turn the rich to the emerging Islamic opposition. Asad sought access to Lebanese economic assets to appease elements in his coalition and to stabilize conditions in which the Syrian private sector could continue to benefit from Lebanese financing and imports. All the evidence defies this account. In the early mid-1970s, the regime's cohesion and stability was at its height. Far from economic crisis fuelling conflict with the bourgeoisie, plentiful regime expenditures encouraged the private sector where investment was robust. There is no evidence economic issues were considered in Syrian decision-making, that the private sector had access to it, or that an economically autonomous regime was susceptible to private sector pressures. Nor is business likely to have seen the Lebanese crisis as a threat since it had alternative (expatriate, Gulf) sources of capital and imports (West European), and commodity smuggling through Lebanon was never jeopardized by the civil war; moreover, the Lebanese bourgeoisie was as much an economic competitor as a partner for Syrian business. Intervention, itself costly, could not have been perceived as an answer to economic problems: Syria could hardly expect to seize Lebanese economic institutions or harness its bourgeoisie through a limited military presence. Finally, rather than Asad's foreign policy decisions being driven by economic needs, he has consistently sacrificed economics to strategic goals, in Lebanon as elsewhere; thus, the intervention antagonised his Soviet patron and even when – in the eighties – the Syrian economy was actually in crisis, he continued policies in Lebanon which jeopardised aid from Saudi Arabia and the Arab Gulf states (drives against the PLO and Maronites) and then from Iran (conflict with Hizbollah).

Explaining Syrian Hegemony: Syria's Drive to Impose a Pax-Syriana in Lebanon

Once resistance from the Palestinian-Muslim camp was smashed, Asad set out to reconstruct a reformed, less sectarian Lebanese state under Syrian tutelage and bound to his diplomacy.

Secular Reform and Sectarian Resistance: The Failure of the first Pax-Syriana (1976–82)

The Maronite militants, however, now resisted Syrian penetration of their domains and reconstruction of the central government and set about forging a Christian canton in Mt. Lebanon and East Beirut. They also sought expulsion of the PLO from Lebanon as against Syria's desire for a controlled Palestinian presence in the south. When in 1977–78 the Maronites collaborated with Israel in carving out a southern enclave meant

to seal the border, Syria threw its support to Palestinian-Muslim forces resisting this project, but stood by when Israel's 1978 invasion consolidated this 'security zone'.[3] Syria's subsequent military drives to punish the Maronites pushed them back in central Lebanon, but, deterred by Israel, it could not bring them under control and only cemented their Israeli connection. Two Christian-dominated enclaves in the south and centre, overtly aligned with Israel, emerged, seen in Damascus as obstacles to the reconstruction of a united Lebanon and threats to Syrian security [Haddad 1982].

Israel, now under Begin, upgraded its alliance with the Maronites and began looking for a way to expel Syria from Lebanon. In 1981, a Maronite bid to extend their control into the Syrian-held Biqaa Valley, to cut Syrian access to Beirut, and to draw Israel deep into Lebanon almost succeeded [Schiff and Yaari, 1984: 31–8]. Syria pushed the Maronites back but the Israeli airforce intervened on their behalf. Syria moved anti-aircraft missiles into eastern Lebanon, Israel threatened to destroy them and the US intervened to restrain Israel and defuse the 'missile crisis'. But Israel as much as Syria had become the arbiter of Lebanon. Syria's attempt to balance between the rival communities had backfired and its actions – weakening its own allies, strengthening militant Maronites whose interests were incompatible with Syria's, then pushing the Maronites into the Israeli embrace – helped bring about what it most feared. A stalemate had resulted which Israel made the first bid to break.

The Decade of Chaos: From the Failure of Pax Israelia to the Failure of the Second Pax Syriana (1982–92)

Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon represented an attempt to achieve hegemony in Lebanon at Syria's expense. Israel, encouraged by growing Arab fragmentation and the neutralisation of its front with Egypt, aimed at smashing the PLO, expelling Syria from Lebanon, and demolishing resistance to Camp David. Although Syrian forces extracted a price from Israel and stubbornly refused, as Israel expected, to retreat from Lebanon, Israel inflicted large losses and pushed Syria from strategic sectors of Lebanese terrain, including the nerve centre, Beirut. Moreover, it expelled the PLO from Lebanon and in the wake of the war tried, with American assistance, to impose a Maronite client regime in Beirut and a virtual peace treaty on Israeli terms. The 1983 Lebanese–Israeli accord would have opened Lebanon to Israeli influence, military forces, and products, outlawed Arab forces on Lebanese soil, and, was aimed, Asad feared, at effacing its Arab character. Israeli withdrawal was made contingent on Syria's and the US and Israel believed a militarily weakened Syria had no choice but to accept withdrawal or face continued Israeli occupation of Lebanon. Yet,

Syria chose to defy the potentially overwhelming military power of the American-Israeli *combinazione* and in a short time brought about a remarkable turnabout in the balance of forces. Syria used growing Muslim resentment against Israeli and Maronite domination to mobilise and back Muslim militias, notably Shi'i and Druze forces, in a guerrilla war against the Israeli occupation. The militias also checked the Maronite Gemayel government's consolidation of power and the intervention of American guns and planes on its behalf could not deter them. Israel, wearied by the casualties and the dubious benefits of Lebanese occupation and aware of the risks of a renewed drive against a Syrian army much reinforced by Soviet arms and backing, chose to withdraw from Lebanon, although it maintained its 'South Lebanese Army' proxy in the southern 'security zone'. Asad rightly calculated that when Israel's own security was not at risk it would not pursue a war of attrition costing continual casualties. The bombing of US Marine positions and the downing of American bombers flying against Syrian forces demonstrated to the US the costs of involvement and brought about its withdrawal, too. The weakened Maronite government was forced to annul the accord with Israel. Thus, through a shrewd use of proxies, steadfastness under threat, and Soviet backing, Asad snatched victory from the jaws of defeat [Dawisha, 1984; Schiff and Yaari, 1984; Rabinovich, 1985, 1987; Petran, 1987: 295–348].

Asad turned his attention to the PLO even as he was confronting Israel and the US. Arafat resisted Syria's claim to control the 'Palestinian card' and refused to burn his bridges with Egypt, undermining Syria's drive to prevent the legitimation of Camp David. To Arafat, Syria claimed a protectorate over the PLO, but failed to defend it in southern Lebanon during the Israeli invasion. With Jordan, he began to explore the Reagan Plan, a warmed-over version of Camp David-style autonomy for the West Bank. Making no provision for the Golan Heights, it seemed to Damascus a second prong of the Israeli-American offensive developing against it in Lebanon in 1983. When rebellion broke out inside the PLO against Arafat's policy, Syria saw a golden opportunity to depose him and reshape a pro-Syrian PLO. Yet, this only pushed him into the arms of Syria's rivals: Arafat's subsequent visit to Cairo was a first step in breaking Egypt's Arab isolation after Camp David. The Syrian-sponsored Palestinian National Salvation Front, made up of various radical splinter groups, did not become a credible alternative to Arafat's PLO [Hinnebusch, 1986; Petran, 1987: 335–377].

The 1984 Israeli withdrawal and the decimation of Palestinian power seemed to again open the door to a *Pax Syriana* in Lebanon. However, reconstructing a stable pro-Syrian state in a centrifugal society took more than the partial retreat of Syria's main antagonist. Although the Maronites

were gravely weakened after 1983, Syria could find no leader able to deliver their co-operation. At the Lausanne conference in 1984, the Maronite *zu 'ama* rejected a modest redistribution of power to the Muslims, President Amin Gemayel similarly proved an unreliable partner, and when a Maronite militia leader, Elie Hubayka, accepted Syria's reform plan – the 'Tripartite Agreement' – the Maronite community revolted, preferring cantonization to equalisation and Syrian tutelage.

Syria's position was further complicated when its continuing conflict with the remnants of Arafat's PLO began to split the pro-Syrian Muslim camp and the radical Islamic Hizballah challenged Syria's preference for a secular Lebanon; the anti-Israeli coalition on which Syrian influence rested began falling apart. The failure of Syria's 1988 attempt to make the election of a new Maronite president conditional on Christian acceptance of its proposed reforms, left Lebanon divided between two rival governments. A sign of Syria's apparent declining influence was the 1989 attempt of the Maronite general, Michel Aoun, to challenge its very presence in Lebanon. Lebanon's growing fragmentation and armed mobilisation made it seemingly ungovernable and Israel prevented Syria from using its military power to impose a solution [Harris, 1985; Petran, 1987: 345–69].

Re-building Pax-Syriana: Harnessing the Shi'is, Neutralising the Maronites (1986–92)

Unable to bring its military power to bear, Syria sought to use patient political work to rebuild its power. This meant exploiting the rivalries of the various Lebanese factions while using the anarchy they created to make its peacekeeping indispensable and deter the involvement of rival external powers.

The starting point of Syrian strategy was to harness the Shi'ite community to its aims. Particularly with the decline of the secular nationalist-left and Sunni political movements, with whom Syrian relations had been strained since 1976, Damascus had increasing need for a reliable ally [Abu Khalil 1990: 5–6, 11; Deeb 1988]. The Shi'a, as their demographic plurality was politically organised, attained a power which made them an attractive substitute for other potential alliances. Many Shi'a, for their part, shared Syria's opposition to Maronite cantonization and long supported Syrian proposals for reconstruction which other Lebanese factions rejected (*The Middle East* [*ME*], June 1985, pp.21–4; *Middle East International* [*MEI*], 23 Jan. 1987, pp.5, 17; Norton 1984b; Norton 1987).

The moderate Shi'a movement, Amal, proved to be Syria's most consistently reliable surrogate. The Syrian–Amal alliance had roots going back to 1973 when Imam Musa Sadr helped defuse anti-Asad Islamist discontent in Syria by declaring Alawis to be Shi'a Muslims [Seale, 1988:

352]. Amal was the major Syrian surrogate in the battle against the pro-Israeli Gemayel government and the 1983 Israeli–Lebanese accord. Syria and Amal shared an interest in preventing a re-establishment of Arafat's PLO in southern Lebanon and since Israel would not permit Syrian forces to enter the south, Damascus relied on Amal to help control the area [Petran, 1987: 315; Norton, 1990: 125–6; Deeb, 1988: 686–7]. Amal needed a patron and arms supplier to play a credible role in Lebanese politics, which turned on the struggle for West Beirut against an emerging PLO–Sunni coalition; Syria was similarly opposed to a resurgence of Arafat's power and Amal became its main surrogate in the anti-PLO 'War of the Camps'. Amal failed but, eventually, an agreement ended the conflict satisfactorily for Syria: not Amal but pro-Syrian Palestinians were left in control of the Palestinian camps [Petran, 1987: 361–8]. Amal was for a period discredited for its role in the conflict, making it all the more dependent on Syria.

By the mid-1980s, the Shi'a had split between Amal and the pro-Iranian radical Islamic Hizballah. In the early 1980s, Hizballah rendered Syria immense services in the struggle against the Israeli occupation [Abu Khalil, 1990: 14]. But Syria believed Hizballah's Islamic vision incompatible with the pluralistic secular Lebanon it sought to reconstruct. Hizballah was fiercely independent of Damascus but, as it infiltrated the south, Syria needed control over it in order to calibrate the pressure of Shi'i resistance against Israel there [*MEI*, 20 Dec. 1995, pp.5–6; Norton, 1990: 132–3; Norton, 1988: 43–9].

Syria first clashed with militant Islam in Tripoli, where Shaikh Sha'ban's Sunni but Hizballah-aligned Islamist movement, *Tawhid*, was imposing an Islamist regime against the resistance of leftist and Alawi militias. Arafat's retreat to Tripoli from Syrian-backed Palestinian rebels brought on a Syrian siege of the city in 1984 (*MEI*, 21 March 1986, pp.6–7; *Christian Science Monitor*, 3 Oct. 1985; Wright, 1988: 59–61). Syria used its Tehran alliance to get Iranian intervention on behalf of a cease-fire in which Syria was allowed to deploy peacekeeping troops in Tripoli. This was a classic case of how Syria used divisions among Lebanese forces, and Iranian mediation, to extend its control in Lebanon [Norton, 1990: 118].

With the collapse of the 1986 Tripartite agreement, Syria began to pursue a similar incremental strategy in other parts of Lebanon, starting with Beirut. It first attempted to extend its power in Beirut through security agreements under which small numbers of elite Syrian troops would patrol the city with Lebanese army units and allies like Amal, the Syrian Social National Party (SSNP) and the Lebanese Ba'ath party (*MEI*, 27 June 1986). Syria was able to exploit the fear of the Sunnis, who lacked their own militia, of rule by the Shi'ites and Druze, to extract an invitation to return to the city. Then, in March 1987, Syria seized the opportunity of fighting, in

which Amal was badly pressed by a Druze–Communist–PLO coalition, to enter West Beirut in strength to establish order. It thereby displaced the PLO as the main protector of the Sunnis, partly reincorporating this community into its coalition (*ME*, Oct. 1986, pp.8–9; *Christian Science Monitor*, 10 July 1986; *MEI*, 11 July 1986; pp.5–6; 25 July 1986).

But this was only a first step in re-establishing its control in Beirut. The Hizballah-dominated southern suburbs remained as outside its sway as was Christian East Beirut. Moreover, in its March intervention in West Beirut, Syria had clashed with Hizballahis, killing 23 and inflaming the movement against it. Syria was deterred from a drive into the southern suburbs to discipline Hizballah by Iranian warnings this would jeopardise the Syrian-Iranian alliance (*MEI*, 6 March 1987). However, the June 1987 taking of Charles Glass as a hostage undermined the credibility of Syria's claim to be establishing security in Beirut; 7,500 Syrian troops encircled the southern suburbs and Syrian roadblocks confiscated Hizballah arms, inspected Iranian diplomatic cars, and tightened the flow of arms to the Revolutionary Guards in Bekaa; Syria was showing that Iran's proxies in Lebanon operated at its sufferance (*MEI*, June 1987, pp.4–5; *ME*, Sept. 1987, p.28). Then, after the kidnapping of the American Colonel Higgins in the south, Asad enlisted Amal to crack down on Hizballah, splitting the Shi'a community. Amal defeated Hizballah in south Lebanon but when it extended its drive into southern Beirut, Hizballah turned the tables, wiping it out there. This put Hizballah contiguous with Palestinian camps and Maronite East Beirut, posing the threat of a potential new anti-Syrian axis (*MEI*, 5 March 1988, pp.13–14; *MEI*, 14 May 1988, pp.3–4; *MEI*, 28 May 1988, pp.3–4). Syria now made the decision to cut Hizballah down to size. Iran's opposition was blunted by appeals of the Shi'a community, suffering from the Amal-Hizballah warfare, for Syria to stop the fighting. Once Syria showed it was determined to assume control of the southern suburbs, Iran and Hizballah accepted it in return for Syrian pledges not to favour Amal over Hizballah. In Iran, the death of Khomeini and purge of the Iranian radicals by Rafsanjani's moderates opened the door to increasing Iranian-Syrian co-operation in Lebanon and the two states sponsored the 1989 'Damascus Agreement' to end the conflict between Amal and Hizballah. Under it, Amal conceded Hizballah a presence in south Lebanon on condition it restrained its operations. Iran leaned on Hizballah to accept the deal in order to protect its Syrian alliance and Syria did not object to a controllable Hizballah presence in the south to play off against Amal and to use against Israel. Thus, the Iranian alliance allowed Syria to balance and mediate between the two wings of the Shi'a movement, which it had itself helped to divide, making both beholden to it. A side benefit was that Syria's better position in south Beirut to press for and take credit for US hostage

releases began a rapprochement with Washington. The US was brought to see Syria as indispensable to the pacification of Lebanon, distancing it (and Israel) from the Maronites, and setting the stage for American backing of the Taif agreement and Syria's central role in it.

Having brought the Shi'a and Sunni communities under its wing, Syria now had to cope with the Maronite General Aoun who, supported by Iraq, militarily challenged Syria's presence. His strategy was to upset the *status quo* and force external intervention to bring about Syria's withdrawal. However, Aoun's strategy backfired. It provided the occasion for Syria to enlist Iranian help in mobilising a remarkably broad nationalist-Islamic counter-coalition including Amal, Hizballah, the Druze, Palestinian radicals, Nasserites, Communists and even Shaikh Sha'ban's Tawhid. This coalition started the reversal of the seemingly inexorable tendency toward fragmentation among Lebanese political forces. This backing also proved useful to Syria in deterring hostile international intervention – for example, by France – and, in suggesting that Islamic radicalism was the alternative to Syrian pacification, arguably pushed Saudi Arabia and the US into backing a Taif settlement more acceptable to Syria than previous proposals [*MEI*, 21 July 1989, pp.3–4; *MEI*, 4 Aug. 1989, pp.3–4; *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts* [*SWB*] 28, 29 Aug. 1989; *MEI*, 22 Sept. 1989, pp.9–10; *MEI*, 6 Oct. 1989, pp.7–8; Marschall, 1992: 440].

With Taif and the beginning of the disarmament of the militias, Hizballah leaders realised they had to adapt to Syria's power and struck a working alliance with Damascus which would be remarkably enduring. Hizballah disarmed in Beirut while Syria agreed that it was illogical to insist on its disarmament in south Lebanon when the Israeli-backed 'South Lebanese Army' remained armed [*SWB*, 3 Oct. 1990; MEI, 5 Jan. 1990, pp.3–4; Nasrallah, 1990: 19]. In return for Syria's support for its role at the head of the Islamic resistance in the south, Hizballah would tailor its activities to serve Syrian strategy in the conflict with Israel. After the second Gulf war heightened American power in the area, Hizballah embraced the Syrian–Iranian axis as the only force in the region which enjoyed a degree of independence of American pressures (*SWB*, 29 April 1991]. Hizballah's growing stake in the Lebanese political system after it won several seats in parliament, started to attach it to the Syrian-backed *status quo*.

The last obstacle to a Pax-Syriana was Maronite resistance, but the Maronites, so long a sunken iceberg on which the Syrian ship had foundered, remarkably, self-destructed. The 1989 Taif accord was the first step in neutralising them. The Kata'ib, Lebanese Forces, the Maronite patriarch and most of the Maronite *zu'ama*, under American urging, and in the absence of a credible external patron, accepted Taif, while Aoun's

rejection of it ended up isolating him. The former provided Christian political legitimation for Taif and while they were later disenchanted with it, by then the train had passed them by and they had squandered much of their political capital in the Maronite community. Maronite militants were subsequently worn down by infighting between Aoun and the Lebanese Forces over leadership of the community. Then, Aoun's Iraqi support became a liability when Iraq invaded Kuwait. Syria, buffered from Israeli reaction by its membership in the anti-Iraq coalition, seized the opportunity for a successful military move against Aoun. Thereafter, the civil war was rapidly wound down and Syrian hegemony established (*Asharq al-Awsat* in *Middle East Mirror* [*MEM*] 21 Dec. 1993; *L'Orient-Le Jour* in *MEM*, 17 Jan. 1994, 21 Jan. 1994; *al-Hayat* in *MEM*, 18 Jan. 1994; *al-Safir* in *MEM*, 30 March 1994, p.18; *MEM*, 19 April, 1994, p.8].

How did Syria triumph in a Lebanon which for a long time appeared to be, in Dawisha's (1978–9) words, 'Asad's Vietnam'? First, Syria outlasted or neutralised its external rivals in Lebanon – Israel, the US, the PLO, Iraq – leaving it as the only major power and depriving its Lebanese opponents of external patrons. This was not achieved through military superiority but because its vital interests being more at stake than theirs, it was more prepared to stay the course. Syria's close ties with Lebanon allowed it to minimise its costs through the use of Lebanese surrogates and, gradually, to be accepted as Lebanon's least objectionable overlord while, by contrast, Israel's role, never accepted, proved much more costly. As the US came to see Syrian pacification as the best alternative to anarchy, radicalisation, or war it not only backed Taif, but also Syria's defeat of General Aoun and the 1992 Syrian–Lebanese treaty. As Salamé remarked, while several external powers have meddled in Lebanese politics, only Syria has exerted widespread and lasting influence [Salamé, 1988: 25].

Second, the Lebanese factions were all cut down to size, partly through their own infighting and the constant splintering which divided even sectarian communities (for example, Amal-Hizballah, Aoun vs Lebanese forces). Syria, operating as a cohesive force in this power vacuum, was able to play one force against another and make itself indispensable as a decisive source of support in these power struggles and the only stable source of protection from opponents.

Third, Syria harnessed the main rising force, the Shi'i, through common interests, intra-Shi'i divisions and the Iranian alliance, while it neutralised its main rival, the militant Maronites, by driving a wedge between them and their external patrons, thereby forcing half the Maronites to accept the Taif agreement and enabling Syria to defeat the other Aounist half, which rejected it.

Fourth, the major portion of the Lebanese elite were brought to accept

Taif because of the exhaustion of all parties, the discrediting of militia rule, the realisation that the alternative was endless civil war, and because it altered the *status quo* enough to appease the Muslims without unduly threatening the Christians. Acceptance of Syria's role as peace keeper was an integral part of the deal. Once Taif became a *fait accompli*, those who collaborated could expect influence and privilege while those who resisted faced marginalization [al-Khazan, 1994: 122–3].

Fifth, Syria's military defeat of Aoun, disarmament of the militias, especially the Maronite Lebanese Forces, and reconstruction of the Lebanese army, left Syria with a near monopoly of force. This allowed Damascus to oversee the reconstruction of the Lebanese political system more to its liking.

The Domestic Consequences of Syrian Intervention: The Shape of *Pax Syriana*

It was one thing to come out temporarily on top – as Syria had done in 1976 and again in 1984; it was quite another to build a new pro-Syrian order in Lebanon. Syria's immediate objective was to insulate the country from Israeli penetration by excluding the militant Maronites from sensitive positions. Its long-term goal was to contain the natural Lebanese resentment of its hegemony. But how could such a selectively exclusive order which gravely compromised Lebanese sovereignty be stabilised, much less legitimized? Syria's strategy was to accept the traditional pluralistic order and manipulate its built-in fragmentation, while breaking the link between the Maronite core and the central state pillars, thereby assuming the indispensable role of inter-sectarian arbiter. This strategy has achieved some remarkable successes, although their durability is problematic.

Governmental power is no longer concentrated in the Christian presidency, the potential pole for anti-Syrian forces, which can no longer dismiss the prime minister or parliament. Rather, it is divided between a Troika of the Presidency under Elias Hrawi, the Sunni Prime Minister, Rafiq al-Hariri and the Shi'a speaker of Parliament, Nabih Berri (*MEI* 2 May 97, p.12). Although the cabinet, headed by the prime minister, has displaced the presidency as the centre of initiative, this is a collegial body in which the president and speaker also have their allies. The overlapping of powers of the three offices creates a built-in rivalry which, in the absence of established mechanisms for resolving deadlocks, forces a resort to Syrian arbitration. Thus, for example, Hariri thrice resigned over Speaker Berri's obstruction of his projects in parliament or the cabinet, requiring Syrian mediation to break the stalemate. The result is that important Lebanese decisions are made in consultation with Syria – with Lebanon's rival leaders

frequently travelling to Damascus to get Syrian backing for their position.

Syria has close ties to all three of the major leaders who, although having local bases of their own, are to varying degrees, dependent on its support and thus have an interest in the continuance of Syrian influence. Hrawi, seen as Syria's man among the Christians, cannot fall back on wide support in his own community. Berri has long depended on Syria in fending off Hizballah's challenge to his representation of the Shi'a in government; thus, before the 1996 elections, in which Hizballah would get 80 per cent of the Shi'a vote, Syria pressured Hizballah into a joint list which favoured Amal (Usher, 1996; *MEI* 25 Oct. 1996, p.13).

Hariri is the strongest of the three leaders: he initiates, while they react and obstruct. Combining high office with prestige, financial clout, a long clientalist tail in parliament and elsewhere, and the confidence of the West and Saudi Arabia, Hariri is less Syria's man than the others; indeed, Syria twice vetoed his nomination as Prime Minister. However, he was a mover behind the Taif agreement, he alone seemed able to rescue the faltering economy which was inflaming unrest, and continued American and Saudi backing for Syria's Lebanon role may have been made contingent on his appointment [Najem, 1997: 35, 75–8]. In fact, his stature gives greater credibility to the new order and he developed a working relationship with Damascus. Syria retained the major role in security and foreign policy matters and the appointment of its clients to the appropriate cabinet positions, while Hariri received a free hand in economic matters and the right to fill economic portfolios with his clients (*ME*, Feb. 1997, p.7; March 1997, p.30; Salem, 1994: 58–9).

Perhaps equally important, the balance of power among the sectarian communities has shifted in Syria's favour as the power of the Maronites has declined. Their steady emigration from Lebanon shifted the demographic balance against them while Sunni–Gulf–Euro linked money, incarnated in Hariri, may be eclipsing their previous economic dominance. They are also badly fractured by infighting. The Maronite boycott of the 1992 elections, which they believed would be rigged without a Syrian troop withdrawal, only served to eclipse the anti-Syrian Maronite establishment and allowed the co-optation of Maronites willing to co-operate with Syria. Thus, Samir Ja'ja, head of the Lebanese Forces (LF) militia who was coopted into the first post-Taif government, but later resigned, was jailed for several civil war murders including the assassination of rival Maronite leaders; but Elie Hubayka, a former LF leader guilty of comparable civil war crimes, and the northern *za 'im* , Tony Frangieh, co-operated with Syria and are pillars of the new order (*ME*, July–Aug. 1997, p.9). Nor are the Christians a monolith: the Greek Orthodox community, partly incorporated in the pro-Syrian Syrian Social Nationalist Party, is much more friendly to Damascus than the

Maronites. The Armenian community allied with the pro-Syrian Murr camp in the 1996 elections [Harik, 1996: 20–23].

At the same time, the Muslims have a stake in the new order. Syria's Shi'a allies, are – by virtue of their demographic plurality, intense mobilisation and more equitable post-Taif share of power – a pillar of the system. Amal, always the strongest supporter of a pluralistic, undivided Lebanon incorporates the secular wing of the Shi'a middle class. Hizballah incorporates an aroused and radicalised lower strata and its role in parliamentary opposition strengthens the new Lebanese state while more securely rooting it in an Arab-Islamic milieu compatible with close Syrian ties. Despite Syrian actions to cut it down to size in the 1996 elections, because all other Lebanese forces fear it, Hizballah cannot do without Syrian patronage: Syria reputedly intervened to prevent the Lebanese government from closing the Hizballah TV station as part of its drive to exclude all but a limited number of friendly stations – just as it had earlier partially exempted Hizballah from disarmament [Usher 1996: 18–19]. As for the Sunnis, the new order, in empowering the prime minister, reversed the deterioration of their position in the civil war and gave them a greater access to government than their cohesion or numbers warranted.

Parliament and parliamentary elections remain a sufficiently authentic part of the political contest in Lebanon to have considerable legitimising power, but they are, even more so than before, instruments of selective inclusion and exclusion [Harik, 1996]. In 1992, the Maronite boycott, gerrymandering, and the little chance for campaigning, limited the election's legitimising function and turn out was very low (30.3 per cent). Yet Syria's ability to broker the formation of lists in a wide variety of electoral districts is indicative of its ability to bypass the Lebanese state and deal with elite clients at the grassroots. Moreover, the election incorporated into the political system the Islamist movements – both Sunni and Shi'a – that the civil war had thrown up.

The 1996 election was more successful in institutionalising the new order. Since decision-making is made in the full cabinet and relative power there mirrors, to a degree, that in parliament, elections were vigorously contested [Harik, 1996: 19]. Hariri, with money and Syrian support, emerged as the leader of the Sunni community (Issues, Dec. 1996). The Maronite boycott was less effective, turnout close to the Lebanese norm even in Christian districts and lists constructed from traditional patronage and cross-sectarian alliances succeeded in partially incorporating the Christian areas. Pro-Syrian government figures including Christians, such as the Interior Minister Michel Murr, were able to mobilise considerable voter support. Murr, a Greek Orthodox, used patronage, media access, and the support of the pro-Syrian Greek Orthodox-dominated SSNP in Matn [Harik, 1996: 18]. Thus, Syrian

hegemony is buttressed by a patronage network running from Damascus, through its clients in government and among the local notability, to the grass roots – and not just in the Muslim areas.

The new order has several major vulnerabilities. Although the Maronite opposition parties – the Kata'ib, National Liberals and National Bloc – have been enervated by the exile of their leaders, splits, emigration, and surveillance by the security forces, the regime's inability to incorporate them nevertheless indicates the fragility of its legitimation in the Christian heartland. Second, many of the top governing elites are perceived to be corrupt and some have very poor public reputations. Thirdly, economic reconstruction remains hostage to the precarious peace process. In good part because of continued conflict with Israel in the south, and, recently, the election of Netanyahu, the investor confidence needed to restore Lebanon's role as a Middle East economic hub is lacking. Fourth, in the absence of major private investment, reconstruction has depended on public debt and high debt translates into austerity policies and inflation for the poor, which, combined with corruption and the spoils of reconstruction for the rich, has led to growing class gaps. The labour confederation, one of the stronger forces in civil society, has channelled popular discontent and even brought down the pre-Hariri Omar Karami government, but the Hariri regime has since repressed the strikes and demonstrations it has tried to mount. The independent press has also been targeted by restrictions [Fattouh and Leenders, 1996: 18; *ME*, Feb. 1997; *ME*, March 1997, p.30].

If reliance on the tarnished governing coalition is an unreliable pillar of Syrian control, Syria has diversified its ties and, except for the hard-line Maronites, has links with much of the opposition as well. Its Hizballah ally has the greatest capacity to politically mobilise discontent but is channelling it through, not against, the new order; it deferred to Syria's veto of its 1996 election bid to build a cross-sectarian opposition including the left and, reputedly, Aounists (*Issues*, Dec.1996). The rest of the 'opposition' in the 1996 parliament, including notables such as Karami, Selim Hoss, Sulayman Franjieh, Hussein Husseini, and the Nasserist Najah Wakim – all enjoy ties to Syria. Syria's patronage of the moderate Islamist Ahbash movement allows it to check opposition from more radical Sunni Islamicists and the Beirut *zu'ama* (*ME*, Nov. 1994; *MEI*, 25 Oct. 1996, pp.13–14).

Finally, the other inherited pillar of the state, the Lebanese army, has been transformed from a Maronite domain to a more non-sectarian force responsive to the pro-Syrian government – although it is conceivable that it could yet remeerge as a champion of a non-sectarian Lebanese nationalism at odds with Syria. Syria's security and intelligence apparatus ultimately backed by the Syrian army is the silent power centre in the system. Its surveillance of militant Maronites curtailed their activities, at least until

recent attacks on Syrian workers which prompted a roundup among them [Harik, 1996: 12; *MEI*, 10 Jan. 1997, p.8]. But it has reputedly also arrested Palestinians and leftists with the participation of Lebanese security forces (*MEI*, 8 Nov.1996, p.13).

If Syria's intervention in Lebanon was driven primarily by strategic motives, it has since acquired other political-economic interests there. Some of the trans-state connections which Lawson imagined to have motivated the Syrian intervention, may, ironically, develop as its *consequence*. The Biqaa drug trade temporarily provided a certain alternative to oil-rent for servicing the Syrian regime's military constituency although this has diminished under American pressure [*National Review*, 15 Nov. 1993: 26; *Christian Science Monitor*, 8 Nov. 1995]. Syria hopes to harness Lebanese entrepreneurship to complement, rather than compete with, its own economic liberalisation. Vice President Khaddam has promoted 'a modest experiment in economic integration' between the Syrian and Lebanese private sectors as a way, he argued, of countering Israel's penetration of the Middle East as an agent of Western multinational corporations at the expense of Lebanon's historic economic role (*al-Hayat* in *Mid East Monitor*, 14 Jan. 1994). Hariri and Khaddam reputedly have business connections and this may be only the tip of the iceberg of transstate economic ties. Such ties will not be readily manipulated to the sole advantage of Syria: for example, the failure of Syria to liberalise its banks has reputedly forced Syrian business to revive its old reliance on Lebanese banks [Pölling, 1994: 22] while Khaddam is reputed to advocate Hariri's views in Damascus [Najem, 1997: 373]. Lebanon has, however, become an outlet for surplus Syrian labour which contributes $1 billion to the Syrian economy [Najem, 1997: 372]. The presence of up to one million Syrian workers plus the control indicated by Syria's apparent ability to call up 100,000 military reservists among them in a recent crisis with Israel, indicates the depth of Syrian demographic penetration of Lebanon, possibly at the expense of Lebanese labour. This trans-state economic interdependency may in time generate a more solid class underpinning – even a new Syro-Lebanese bourgeoisie – of ties initially constructed from above via strategic realpolitik.

The International Consequences of Syria in Lebanon: The South Lebanon Conflict and the Struggle for the Levant

South Lebanon has become the main arena for the Syro-Israeli struggle over the Middle East. Today, this is partly over the Golan Heights, since Syria has been able to link any settlement which may be reached on the two fronts, partly over Lebanon itself, since Israel's seeming success in

excluding Syria's influence from Jordan and Palestine makes the assertion of its sphere of influence in Lebanon all the more crucial in the struggle over the Levant.

The struggle began in the 1970s as the Lebanese central government lost control over the area, leaving a power vacuum. Israel insisted on 'red lines' beyond which Syria, after its 1976 intervention, could not pass in the south. This preserved a space where Palestinians could operate against Israel, spurring Israel's creation of the pro-Israeli SLA militia, its self-declared 'security zone', and, after its 1982 invasion completed the radicalisation of the Shi'ites, the rise of Hizballah [Rabinovich, 1991]. Since Israel's post-invasion withdrawal, Syria has used both Amal and Hizballah in a proxy war focused on the security zone. This was not inevitable. Amal initially sought to pacify the border in the hope Israel would fully withdraw from Lebanon but its refusal to do so fuelled the growth of Hizballah: if the Israelis had withdrawn, Amal leaders complained, 'we would not have radicals with closed minds' [Norton, 1984a; *MEI*, 7 March 1986, p.10; quote from *ME*, Aug. 1986, p.10].

For Israel, however, the zone was more than a security imperative: it also allowed Israel to keep a hand in Lebanese politics. Israel's presence was part of the power balance with Syria since it threatened Syria's Western flank through ready access to the Biqaa Valley and more generally facilitated Israeli efforts to frustrate a Pax Syriana in Lebanon [Harris and Jerome, 1990]. This was manifest in Israel's reaction to the 1991 Syrian-Lebanese treaty. The Syrian pacification of Lebanon and strengthening of the Lebanese government had created new possibilities for the stabilisation of the south; yet, the Israeli response was three days of massive air-raids that were taken as a signal to Syria that Israel would not be excluded as a player in Lebanon (*MEI*, 14 June 1991, pp.11–12).

But, in fact, Syria has turned the tables on Israel: its 'security zone' has become a Syrian asset, allowing Syria to use Hizballah to attack Israelis without the risk of using its own forces, and allowing it to heat up or cool down the region to suit its diplomatic strategy. Thus, according to Israeli General Mordachai Gur, over 80 attacks on the security zone and three abortive infiltrations into north Israel were recorded in the months after the September 1993 PLO–Israeli Oslo agreement, a sign, according to him, of Syria's displeasure at its exclusion from the peace process (*MEM*, 16 Nov. 1993). How did this turnabout happen?

As Hizballah's southern presence grew, the conflict over the security zone intensified and its effectiveness declined. Hizballah's highly motivated fighters conducted a mobile, effective guerrilla war while Israel was forced into a defensive strategy of fortifications, convoys, and air power [*MEI*, 6 Jan. 1995; Shahak, 1995]; the ratio of IDF to Hizballah casualties was an

unacceptable 1:2.7 despite Israel's great firepower and technological advantage and the IDF has lost 400 men since 1985. Israeli journalist Joel Marcus called it Israel's Vietnam (*ME*, April 1997, pp.12–13).

Israel's response was periodic sweeps and bombardments north of the zone to break up guerrilla concentrations and deter villagers from harbouring them; but Hizballah retaliated with rocket attacks on northern Israel. Unable to eliminate Hizballah, Israel aimed to establish 'rules of the game' under which it would refrain from attacking Israel itself and restrain attacks on the security zone [Shahak, 1992]. Frustrated in these aims, Israel took to launching massive incursions into south Lebanon, aimed at so raising the cost for Lebanon that it would have to curb Hizballah or demand Syria do so. Its 1993 'Operation Accountability', seven days of massive systematic bombing against the south, aimed to 'cause a mass flight of residents' and turn the Lebanese against Hizballah as Israel had done with the Palestinians in the 1970s; however, because Hizballah were local people and the movement provided relief and rebuilt destroyed houses, the operation only solidified Hizballah's role as defender of the southern population. In its 1996 'Grapes of Wrath' incursion, Israel's targeting of Lebanon's infrastructure and consequent dampening of investor confidence showed it could permanently set back Lebanon's reconstruction. Israel hoped to fan resentment of Syria as the obstacle to normalcy [Nasrallah, 1997]. But such tactics are not cost free for Israel: Hizballah fired 1,100 rockets into northern Israel in retaliation.

Moreover, Israel's policy invited international intervention which constrained Israel while advantaging Syria. Under the rules of the game which were negotiated, Hizballah only agreed to end attacks on northern Israel if Israel refrained from attacking Lebanese civilians, while Hizballah's right to make guerrilla attacks on the security zone was thus legitimized (*MEI*, 28 Aug. 1993, pp.4–5; *MEM*, 17 Nov. 1993; Jerusalem Post and Haaretz in *MEM*, 16 Nov. 1993, *MEM*, 26 Jan. 1994; *MEI*, 14 April 1995, p.7). The formation of the five nation cease-fire monitoring group after the 'Grapes of Wrath' incursion constrained Israel's freedom of unilateral retaliation (*MEI*, 24 Jan. 1997, p.12). Instead, it must now take complaints to a committee on which it sits with Syria, Lebanon, France, and the US: just the kind of international forum which, tending to neutralise Israel's power advantage, it has always eschewed. Finally, the need for US mediators to enlist Syria in delivering Hizballah cease-fires enabled Asad to depict Syria as a responsible power and the key to a solution. Syria also made the point that, as the Israeli newspaper *Davar* wrote, a south Lebanon settlement which necessitated Syria disciplining Hizballah, would require Syria deploy troops in the south; in return for pacifying the Lebanese border, Syria would demand recognition by Israel of its sphere of influence

in Lebanon. Indeed, the US and even Israel seemed more ready than heretofore to accept Lebanon as a Syrian satellite. Arguably, the security zone neither enhances Israel's security or gives it leverage over Syria but withdrawal would require dealing with Hizballah, thereby undermining Israel's strategy of demonizing Iran as the main threat to regional peace, while Syrian co-operation in a Lebanon settlement could not be obtained without withdrawal on the Golan Heights (Khairallah Khairallah, *al-Hayat*, *MEM*, 10 Jan. 1994, p.11; *MEM*, 9 Feb. 1994, p.4; *MEM*, 17 Jan. 1994; *MEI*, 21 Feb. 1997, p.9).

Lebanon's 'Second Republic' is, indeed, bound to Syria's strategy. Taif established Lebanon's identity as unequivocally Arab [Salem, 1994: 48]. The May 1991 Syro-Lebanese Treaty of Brotherhood, Co-operation and Co-ordination and a Supreme Lebanese-Syrian Council institutionalise Syrian control over Lebanese foreign and security policies. One indicator of Lebanon's loss of its foreign policy autonomy was Syria's quashing of Hariri's 1993 trial balloon for an settlement with Israel under UN 425 [Norton, 1997: 10]. This would have required a separate peace with Israel which Hariri could not deliver against the wishes of Syria and Hizballah. Syria encourages Hariri's rivals against him whenever he seems to seek support from Western powers over south Lebanon [Najem, 1997: 379]. Lebanon seems to have accepted, if unwillingly, that it must deal with Israel in concert with Syria and that a Lebanese settlement will have to be part of a package including a Syrian-Israeli one. In response to Netanyahu's 1997 'Lebanon First option', an attempt to split Lebanon and Syria, Asad responded: 'I say Lebanon *and* Syria first' [Usher, 1996]. If a peace settlement comes about, Syria's role and allies in Lebanon will remain crucial to containing Israeli penetration – whether through commercial relations or re-established Maronite alliance – in an on-going geopolitical contest over the Levant. .

Conclusions: Syrian Policy in Lebanon and State Formation in the Middle East

The Syrian-Lebanese relation is a microcosm of Middle East regional politics. Lebanon is the arena of the power struggle between Syria and Israel over control of the Levant and the Middle East. In this struggle, Syria's state consolidation allowed it to conduct itself as a rational actor in pursuit of geo-political goals. Defined by the wider Arab struggle with Israel and never wholly Syro-centric, yet not a revisionist attempt to overthrow international borders, Syrian policy aimed at making Lebanon a sphere of influence while partly preserving its pluralistic system.

Syria's cohesion amidst Lebanon's fragmentation allowed Damascus to

manipulate the kaleidoscope of Lebanese alliances and loyalties in constructing coalitions used in turn against each of its main rivals – radical Muslims, Israel, the PLO, Hizballah, and finally the Maronites. Its patient use of surrogates, 'divide and rule' tactics, and its indispensability to ending Lebanese anarchy set the stage for limited but decisive applications of military force when opportunities arose. Indicative of the unevenness of state consolidation in the Middle East, nearly stateless Lebanon was an arena thoroughly penetrated by conflicting trans-state forces. Each local faction, in its struggle with rivals, sought external patrons. Although the civil war had local causes, its implications for Lebanon's very political identity linked them to regional politics. The militant Maronite attempt to efface Lebanon's Arab character through alignment with Israel and the US failed while the mobilisation of the Shi'ites shifted the power balance in favour of Syria and established an Arab identity for Lebanon.

Lebanon's 'Second Republic' remains a traditional-modern hybrid which Syria has proved adept at manipulating. Syria has revitalised the *zu'ama*, incorporated the leaders of the dismantled militias into the traditional system, and used the built-in rivalries and patronage networks of this system to divide and rule. The modern forces – the reconstructed non-sectarian army , the resurgent Hariri-centred capitalist class, and Hizballah, the only modern political party, also have mutually beneficial relations with Syria. Finally, if the pre-civil war state was built around a Maronite core, for which secular institutions have yet to substitute, it may be that Syria has now taken on that role and is therefore indispensable to containing Lebanon's naturally centrifugal forces. However, the exclusion, rather than incorporation, of the most politicised Maronites is the main vulnerability of Pax Syriana in Lebanon.

NOTES

1. Mount Lebanon was administratively separated from Syria under the Ottomans, but it was under the French mandate that the boundaries of the modern Lebanese state were drawn, combining Sunni Muslim regions that has long been part of Syria with the Maronite heartland and thereby creating Lebanon's sectarian balance. The post-independence end to the Syrian-Lebanese customs union ruptured some but not all persisting economic interdependencies.
2. Militant Maronites, hereafter referred to simply as Maronites, are taken to include largely the Kata'ib, the Lebanese Forces militia and the National Liberal party of Chamoun. It must be kept in mind, however, that some Maronites have taken a more 'moderate' stance, such as ex-President Elias Sarkis, while others, notably the Frangieh clan, have collaborated with Syria.
3. This zone, emerging from Saad Haddad's efforts to build a Christian-Shi'a barrier to the PLO, was only consolidated after Israel's 1977 invasion, under whose tutelage Haddad's 'South Lebanese Army' took shape, a project which meshed with the strategies of the militant Maronite leadership in East Beirut.

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MEM: *Middle East Mirror*
ME: *The Middle East*
SWB: *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*

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