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Lebanon's Security Dilemma: Navigating the Divide between UN Mandates and Conflicting National Approaches

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ABSTRACT

This article reflects on the challenges of United Nations (UN) state-building efforts in Lebanon, highlighting the disconnect between international security frameworks and Lebanon's geopolitical realities and security needs. The UN's approach, rooted in a state-centric model that prioritizes centralized authority and a monopoly on the use of force, struggles to address Lebanon's hybrid security governance, where groups like Hezbollah and the idea of resistance play a crucial role. By examining the implementation and follow-up process of the UN resolutions on Lebanon, particularly 1701 and 1559, this article seeks to reveal the material and ideational dilemmas between international and Lebanese approaches to state and security building. Using a qualitative methodology that combines critical discourse analysis, policy review, and interviews with Lebanese politicians, the study critiques the Western-centric paradigm of state-building, arguing that it overlooks local political realities and entrenched power dynamics. Instead, the article advocates for a more adaptive, context-driven approach that fosters national ownership of security reforms for long-term stability.

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KEYWORDS United Nations; security; state-building; critical theory; Lebanon

1. Introduction

The United Nations' (UN) approach to state-building has long been grounded in a normative framework shaped by liberal peacebuilding principles and Weberian conceptions of statehood. It presumes the desirability and feasibility of constructing strong, centralized institutions capable of exercising a monopoly over the legitimate use of force. Yet such assumptions have come under increasing scrutiny, particularly in contexts of contested sovereignty shaped by shifting geopolitical dynamics and recurring conflicts. Lebanon, with its pluralistic political fabric and hybrid security landscape, offers a compelling case through which to examine the disconnect

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between internationally driven state-building efforts and interwoven local and regional power dynamics.

This article reflects on the challenges of implementing UN Security Council (UNSC) resolutions in Lebanon, with particular attention to the country's evolving security architecture. Lebanon's experience raises important questions about the relevance of conventional state-building models in contexts where authority is not fully centralized and where local actors both shape and, at times, resist the terms of international engagement. By examining the interplay between international mandates and national political dynamics, the article highlights the structural and ideological mismatches that limit the effectiveness of UN-led peace and security efforts. It also contributes to broader debates on the need for more context-sensitive and flexible frameworks in international approaches to state-building.

Building on the emerging literature that critiques international state-building, this article adopts a primarily qualitative, case study-based methodology that combines critical discourse analysis, policy analysis, and semi-structured interviews. The research includes a close examination of UN documents and resolutions, complemented by interviews with Lebanese political figures from across the political spectrum. In this context, I conducted 12 interviews with deputies and political affiliates from the Progressive Socialist Party, Lebanese Forces, Amal Movement, Free Patriotic Movement, Kataeb Party, Hezbollah, and Future Movement, as well as an independent deputy and a senior representative from UNSCOL.¹ To ensure confidentiality, interviewees' names and identifying details have been withheld, although their roles and affiliations are retained for analytical relevance. This methodological approach integrates theoretical critique with empirical insights to evaluate the viability of the UN's approach in Lebanon and to propose alternative frameworks for more effective and locally grounded state-building.

This article begins by exploring the broader constraints of international security building, critiquing the state-centric model's limitations in conflict-affected states. It then turns to Lebanon's hybrid security structures, tracing their historical evolution and the role of non-state actors in shaping the country's security landscape. The discussion then focuses on key UN Security Council resolutions, particularly 1701 and 1559, assessing their impact on Lebanese sovereignty and the dilemmas they generate amid geopolitical tensions and competing local and international narratives. The final section analyses contrasting security perspectives among Lebanese political actors, with particular emphasis on Hezbollah's role and the challenges of achieving national ownership over security reforms.

¹Interviews were conducted in person by the author between May and July 2023. UNSCOL: The Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon.

At the time of writing, the implications of the evolving security dynamics since late 2024 – notably Israel’s war on Lebanon, its assassinations of senior Hezbollah commanders, including longtime Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah, its subsequent invasion of Lebanese territory, the fall of the Assad regime in neighbouring Syria, and Lebanon’s presidential election and government formation – are still taking shape. Despite the November 2024 ceasefire, Israel’s continued assaults on Lebanon, which have killed many civilians and violated UNSC Resolution 1701, have placed UN peacekeeping operations along the Blue Line in a difficult position. The long-term impact of these developments on Lebanon’s security governance is still unfolding. While these recent developments are important, this analysis focuses on the period preceding them and examines the underlying structural dynamics shaping Lebanon’s security landscape in relation to the implementation and limitations of UN mandates.

The article argues that the UN’s state-centric security and peacebuilding frameworks are fundamentally misaligned with Lebanon’s hybrid security and political structures, leading to implementation challenges, local resistance, and a lack of national ownership. The persistence of external interventions, regional geopolitical rivalries, and sectarian divisions prevents the full realization of UN resolutions, necessitating a more context-specific and flexible approach that integrates local political and security networks.

2. Constraints of International Security Building

The mainstream Western security approach, which is evident in the international peace and state-building practices, emphasizes a central security apparatus built under a sovereign state.² While this approach may seem logical for states with strong institutional establishments, it may fall short in conflict-ridden countries facing more complex security conditions.³ Countries lacking strong state mechanisms to monopolize all security and violence apparatus under its control tend to witness emergence of internal armed struggles that receive overt or covert support by other states. In conditions where multiple political and security networks are established, the internationally led peace initiatives face serious challenges as the proposed objectives fail to adequately address the complex needs and threats present. As such, the proposed solutions end up lacking local ownership and intention to be implemented.⁴

The critical approach to the Western understanding of security and sovereignty is not something new.⁵ UN Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali once

²Volker Boege et al., “Hybrid Political Orders, Not Fragile States”.

³Buzan, *People, States & Fear*, 34; Bilgin, “The ‘Western-Centrism’ of Security Studies”.

⁴Boege et al., “Hybrid Political Orders, Not Fragile States,” 19.

⁵Makinda, “Sovereignty and International Security”; Camilleri, and Falk. *The End of Sovereignty?*.

stated that the era of absolute and exclusive sovereignty had ended, advocating for a new balance between effective internal governance and global interdependence.⁶ Earlier international experiences in Bosnia, Rwanda, and Somalia have led to a rethinking of the concept of security,⁷ whether in non-military terms or beyond the state's instruments. Scholars argue that state sovereignty is relatively declining,⁸ given its inconsistent interpretation by entities like the UN Security Council.⁹

Despite such rethinking of the concept, the international approach to sovereign states and security has not significantly evolved beyond the principles of Weberian state-building, commonly practiced until the early post-Cold War years.¹⁰ The primary issue is the incompatibility of this ongoing international approach with the realities of most post-war settings. The components of state-building have often been modelled after nation-states established post-World War I, which were built around identities resonating with the majority of their populations. However, states that do not share similar conditions or historical paths are likely to find these earlier models irreconcilable.

The Western conception of a 'fragile' state exemplifies this issue, suggesting that such states are 'fragile' because they do not possess the same socio-political characteristics as those that were formed 'successfully' earlier. This concept often overlooks the unique characteristics, structures, and strengths of a country, focusing instead on the imposition of external state-building and development reforms. That is also why fragility is portrayed as a major challenge in security and foreign policy, where state-building is deemed a central task.¹¹ Given the limitations of uniform state and security approaches, there is a growing search for alternative explanations of statehood, emphasizing non-state-centric perspectives on governance, violence, and peacebuilding.¹² However, critical scholars' emerging focus on the hybridity of political orders is often viewed unfavourably in mainstream discourse and practice.¹³

Against the mainstream approach to security, critical studies have recently gained prominence in both theoretical and empirical research. In particular, post-colonial studies seek to better understand the contexts of the Middle East, the Arab world, and other regions by moving beyond the limitations of mainstream frameworks, especially the state-centric lens adopted by Western states, which positions the state as the primary referent object of

⁶UN Secretary-General, "An Agenda for Peace", para. 17.

⁷Makinda, "Sovereignty and International Security," 165.

⁸Leonard, "Seeking Sovereignty".

⁹Makinda "The United Nations and State Sovereignty".

¹⁰Chandler, "Peacebuilding and the Politics of Non-Linearity".

¹¹Boege et al., "Hybrid Political Orders, Not Fragile States," 13.

¹²Ibid., 14.

¹³Ibid., 19.

security. Drawing on Edward Said's critique of Western knowledge production about non-Western societies,¹⁴ such studies explore how international security discourses are shaped by powerful states and how they obscure alternative perspectives and realities. Considering the multiple dimensions of security, these studies ask: whose security are we actually talking about when we discuss security?¹⁵

Western security studies have often misrepresented the role of the Global South in security dynamics. In particular, the discourse on combating terrorism has framed the MENA region as a source of global threat and instability. American-led interventions, policies, and military actions have not only exacerbated insecurity for both states and societies but also shaped and dominated the broader security narrative.¹⁶ Against this background, critical studies saw threats and non-threats as a product of political acts, and thus contesting facts. With a goal of broadening the scope of security perspective emerged, power and hierarchy in the world needed to be unmasked.¹⁷

The scholarly works on the status of Arab state and society gained momentum following 2011 Arab uprisings. Responses to the dominant IR discourse on state and security have paved a way for new theory-building efforts. Accordingly, critical approaches to the study of security and global politics emerging from the Middle East and North Africa have gathered around the newly emerging Beirut School, to examine the processes that other fields have not adequately theorized.¹⁸ For instance, are mainstream traditional and critical approaches to security studies capable of comprehending and theorizing the issues in MENA? Or specifically related to this article's topic, do they have the tools to apprehend the threats, crises, and security issues of Lebanon?¹⁹ Regarding this, in his inquiry on security studies in MENA region, Samer Abboud emphasizes the importance of systemic and regional analysis in understanding how intra-regional factors and state relations produce its ways of security; together with constructivist approach that centralizes identity and ideational actors at the heart of the analysis. Accordingly, a central point in critical scholarship on security should be to critically approach the idea of a state as the referent object of security.²⁰

The mainstream approach to security, along with associated security assistance programmes, primarily aims to build and strengthen state institutions from the ground up. This often leads to the oversight of existing

¹⁴Said, *Orientalism*; Said, *Culture and Imperialism*.

¹⁵Abboud, "Whose Security?"

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 5–6.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁸Abboud et al., "Towards a Beirut School of Critical Security Studies"; Darwich et al., "International Relations and Regional (In)Security".

¹⁹Abboud, "Whose Security?"

²⁰*Ibid.*

political and security networks.²¹ The major flaw lies here, where external assistance attempts to establish a stable security structure, disregarding the presence of stronger, pre-existing networks. This approach also complicates the development of trust in state agencies. However, it's important not to undervalue the state security support provided to post-war countries, as it plays a key role in building a centralized state infrastructure. The critical issue is the exclusive focus on a state-centric structure to be built, neglecting established local networks. The failure of this approach was apparent in Afghanistan, where two decades of state-building efforts were unsuccessful against entrenched local structures. For this reason, it is recommended that international approaches should acknowledge and integrate local political and security networks for more effective outcomes.²²

While the state-centric security approach dominates externally driven state-building frameworks, practitioners often encounter hybrid structures on the ground, with approaches varying by case. In this respect, a paradigm shift away from liberal state-building has been conceptualized as 'post-interventionism.' This approach places a greater emphasis on human security and local agencies, acknowledging the earlier criticisms of liberal intervention framings.²³ While this paradigm shift may appear more as a change in discourse, contemporary cases of security assistance are increasingly analysed through new conceptual lenses. For instance, a study on Lebanon and Tunisia argues that a post-interventionist approach, centred on 'fluid' security governance, can contribute to the amplification of hybrid security elements on the ground, by enabling selected local actors to utilize donor priorities for certain sub-state interests.²⁴

Despite the standardized frameworks adopted by international organizations, it is important to recognize the nuances of the UN's approaches tailored to specific contexts. Dichotomies such as Western/non-Western, liberal/non-liberal, and Global North/Global South can lead to inaccurate or simplistic analyses that overlook the multifaceted nature of the situation. For instance, while documents of the UN agencies often use fixed language shaped by the power dynamics of Security Council mandates (or member states in general), the communication and mediation styles of UN agencies and senior officers on the ground may exhibit more flexibility and adaptability. Although this behaviour may not necessarily influence UN policymaking, such adaptability can facilitate better interactions with local actors.

Before examining the UN's approach to security and sovereignty in Lebanon, it is crucial to consider how political developments have shaped Lebanon's hybrid security landscape. The following section will explore

²¹Jackson and Bakrania, "Is the Future of SSR Non-Linear?"

²²Ibid.

²³Chandler, "Resilience and Human Security".

²⁴Hanau Santini and Tholens, "Security Assistance in a Post-Interventionist Era".

the developments correlated with the hybrid orders in Lebanon, which eventually characterize the Lebanese security sector as ‘domestically bifurcated and internationally subordinate.’²⁵ The article will then analyse how the UN approached the situation in Lebanon and the dilemmas this brought regarding national ownership.

3. Hybrid Structures of Lebanon

The Lebanese army and security agency had fallen apart during the Lebanese civil war (1975–1990), and Syria dominated the country with its forces until their withdrawal in 2005. Since then, Lebanese security institutions have excessively relied on external assistance and capacity-building support from donors. The outbreak of the Syrian civil war in 2011 further escalated Lebanon’s security challenges, prompting a shift in security assistance focus towards counterterrorism, border control, and migration management.²⁶ Reflecting the country’s sociopolitical fabric, the Lebanese security institutions are entwined in sectarian politics where leadership positions in the military and police are distributed across Lebanon’s diverse confessional spectrum.

Due to the structural limits and political transformations in Lebanon after 2005, military leadership’s capacity to acquire state monopoly on violence and become a powerful agent of national defence has not been possible. The main constraining factors in this regard, particularly until 2005, can be situated in the following contexts: the division of Lebanese society on sectarian and tribal basis, the influence of the Syrian Baath political culture on Lebanese politics, the threat posed by Israel to Lebanese security, and the foreign interventions in Lebanese politics arising from this situation.²⁷ After 2005, the emergence of the two major political blocs as March 14 and March 8 alliances led to entrenched political polarization in the country, where these two blocs witnessed varied support from different regional actors. This divergence has been a concrete reflection of the hybrid sovereignty and security components in the country.

A fundamental difference between the two blocs’ security approaches has been their views on state sovereignty and the role of non-state armed groups in Lebanon. Formed after the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri in 2005, the March 14 Alliance was composed of Sunni, Druze, and Christian parties who were against the dominance of Assad’s Syrian regime in Lebanon. Although the essence of the alliance changed throughout the years, the bloc has been known with their stance against the March 8

²⁵Kerr and Knudsen, *Lebanon*, 84.

²⁶Tholens, “Border Management in an Era of ‘Statebuilding Lite’”.

²⁷Kerr and Knudsen, *Lebanon*, 85.

Alliance who had a pro-Syrian position. While composed of parties with different political agendas, March 14 advocated for a state-centric security model that sought to integrate all military capabilities under the official Lebanese Armed Forces, aiming for a demilitarized political landscape free from foreign influence, particularly from Syria and Iran. It has been more aligned with Western interests and supportive of international efforts to address Lebanon's security situation. This coalition has advocated for the disarmament of Hezbollah and has sought to strengthen state institutions, including the Lebanese Armed Forces and Internal Security Forces, to exert control over the country's security apparatus. Their stance is also marked by a call for international involvement in Lebanon's security matters, as seen in their support for the Special Tribunal for Lebanon and the request for UN involvement in investigating the Beirut port blast.²⁸ The March 14 alliance was later replaced by the Lebanese opposition parties.

On the other hand, the March 8 Alliance has been known for its support of Assad's Syrian regime and has included the major Shiite parties, Hezbollah and the Amal Movement (*Harakat Amal*), along with the leading Christian party, Free Patriotic Movement (*Al-Tayyar al-Watani al-Hor*) led by Michel Aoun, who joined this alliance later by signing a memorandum of understanding with Hezbollah.²⁹ Among the driving forces of this alliance, Hezbollah has prioritized a resistance-centric security model that justifies the existence of armed groups as necessary for defending Lebanon against perceived external threats, especially from Israel. This perspective is rooted in a broader anti-Zionist and pro-resistance ideology that encompasses not only security policies but also political and social dimensions within Lebanon and the region.³⁰ As such, the March 8 alliance has opposed efforts to disarm Hezbollah, arguing that the group plays a legitimate role in defending Lebanon's sovereignty.

Here, it is also important to note that while Hezbollah was founded on an Islamic-Shiite ideological foundation in response to the 1982 Israeli invasion, the concept of resistance (*muqawama*) had already existed in Lebanon, primarily through leftist and secular groups for whom the Palestinian cause played a central role. In this sense, Hezbollah's narrative of resistance can be seen as a continuation of the struggle waged by various leftist, pro-

²⁸"انفجار بيروت: لماذا يطالب الحريري وجنبلاط بتحقيق دولي ويرفضه عون ونصر الله؟ [Beirut Explosion: Why Are Hariri and Jumblatt Calling for an International Investigation While Aoun and Nasrallah Reject It?], *BBC Arabic*, 7 Aug 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/arabic/interactivity-53694331>; "Parliamentary Blocs Demand Intl Probe into Beirut Blast," *Naharnet*, 13 Aug 2020, <https://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/274145>.

²⁹"Paper of Common Understanding Between Hezbollah and the Free Patriotic Movement," *tayyar.org*, 6 Feb 2006, https://static.tayyar.org/Content/uploads/PdfLibrary/150528041932259~fpm_hezbollah2.pdf.

³⁰"Khamenei.ir's interview with Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah," 1 October 2019, <https://english.khamenei.ir/news/7075/The-full-text-of-Khamenei-ir-s-interview-with-Sayyid-Hassan-Nasrallah>.

Palestinian, and secular organizations that opposed Israel during the 1960s and 1970s.³¹ As such, Hezbollah arguably incorporated leftist notions in its formation, reflected in its organizational structure, militant activities, and the objective of resistance.³²

The external affiliations of the March 14 and March 8 blocs have deepened Lebanon's divergent security perspectives. March 14's alignment with Western and Gulf Arab states contrasts with March 8's ties to Syria and Iran, placing Lebanon's internal security debate within a broader regional geopolitical context. This polarized political landscape, in which security policies are influenced by ideological and geopolitical loyalties, creates a stalemate that hinders effective governance and meaningful security reform. Given the significance of this issue, it is important to examine how Lebanese political groups and international actors respond to this impasse, a topic that will be explored further below.

A key priority for Western donors such as the US, France, and the UK, mirrored in UN policies, has been to counter the influence of Hezbollah. Backed by Iran, Hezbollah has been a dominant force in Lebanon, functioning both as an armed organization and a political party. Its substantial influence within state structures has led to collaboration with the Lebanese army on numerous occasions, thereby intensifying the country's hybrid security governance. Although many foreign and domestic actors view this cooperation as problematic, it has arguably been crucial in managing Lebanon's security affairs. However, due to Hezbollah's influence and its designation as a terrorist group by countries like the US and Saudi Arabia, these nations have announced plans to withdraw their military aid and security assistance.³³ This uncoordinated and non-normative approach to external security assistance is argued to be exacerbating sectarian tensions within Lebanon, as it prompts donor countries to favour relations with certain groups and clients, and vice versa, in order to preserve their influence.³⁴

Nevertheless, during times when the power balance among political groups in Lebanon was steadier, the state structure of Lebanon was viewed more positively. Pierre Gemayel, the founder of the right-wing Phalange Party, once described Lebanon's weak state structure by saying, 'Lebanon's strength lies in its weakness,' which eventually became a controversial motto. Despite its smaller and more fragile structure compared to the other Arab states established around it in the twentieth century, Lebanon's prominence with its different religious and sectarian identities, becoming a

³¹Saade, *Hizbullah and the Politics of Remembrance*.

³²Ibid., 88–104; AbuKhalil, "Ideology and Practice of Hizballah in Lebanon".

³³"Saudi Arabia halts \$3 billion package to Lebanese army," *Reuters*, 19 Feb 2016, <https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSKCN0VS1K7>; "White House Freezes Military Aid to Lebanon," *NY Times*, 1 Nov 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/01/world/middleeast/lebanon-military-aid.html>.

³⁴Santini and Tholens, "Security Assistance in a Post-Interventionist Era," 510.

regional hub for literary and cultural activities, and later evolving into a centre of attraction for banking and tourism activities, could have made such an assessment understandable. More importantly, Lebanon was able to find a balance within the power dynamics of its region without possessing a strong structure. It was able to distance itself, to some point, from the Arab-Israeli conflict, which posed the major security issue in the region. Thus, as Fawwaz Traboulsi puts it, Lebanon was seeking to free itself from the responsibility of belonging to a region dominated by the Arab-Israeli conflict.³⁵

However, this motto has been controversial as it implies the power of the cartels in Lebanon, which have grown by taking advantage of the weakness of the state. After all, the Lebanese civil war and subsequent Israeli occupations had already undermined the validity of this narrative. The magic that had made Lebanon historically a territory of 'refuge'³⁶ was now perhaps broken. The evolving conditions necessitated the long-term presence of the UN missions in the country. Modernization, which had brought various benefits to Lebanon's development in recent history, generated new and wider insecurities in Lebanon, particularly via the political order it bequeathed. The democratic procedures that once were established in Lebanon seem to have paralyzed the policy process.³⁷

The hybrid perspective on security, which has recently gained more importance in the peace studies literature,³⁸ transformed the view of 'Lebanon's strength lies in its weakness' and offered a different perspective on the notion of weak state. The evolving dynamics that developed in Lebanon after 2005 with the political division and the strengthening of Hezbollah as an armed actor, despite the different challenges it brings with it, have been revisited as a method of coping with the threats and insecurities evolving in and around Lebanon.

Waleed Hasbun argues that viewing Lebanon through the lens of a weak state overlooks the intricate security mechanism in Lebanon.³⁹ He contends that Lebanon was more effective in deterring internal and external security threats from ISIS and similar militant groups than the authoritarian states in the Arab region. He suggests that Lebanon, despite grappling with internal conflicts, possesses a relatively effective and resilient plural governance mechanism over security. In this respect, security politics in Lebanon finds its place among 'rival, contentious understandings of insecurity' that transcend the state-centred frameworks prevailing in IR studies.⁴⁰

³⁵Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon*, 175.

³⁶Salibi, *A House of Many Mansions*.

³⁷Hudson, "Democracy and Social Mobilization in Lebanese Politics".

³⁸Abrahamsen and Williams, "Security Privatization and Global Security Assemblages".

³⁹Hasbun, "Assembling Security in a 'Weak State'".

⁴⁰*Ibid.*

Viewing Lebanon as a weak state based on the classical understanding of state and security may not only be unhelpful for understanding the reality but also obstructive to peace, as such views shape international actions. To illuminate how the accepted binaries such as state/non-state, security/insecurity, domestic/foreign, and legitimate/illegitimate are blurred in Lebanon, particular events in recent Lebanese history have been examined.⁴¹

The opposition sit-in protests in 2006–2008 and the intrastate military clashes in May 2008 (known as the ‘May 7 events’), is an illustrative case reflecting the hybrid structures of Lebanon. The rivalry between the predominantly Sunni-led government (March 14 Alliance, then headed by Prime Minister Fouad Siniora) and the Shiite Hezbollah-led opposition (March 8 Alliance) resulted in an 18-month political crisis that ultimately led to armed confrontations. The immediate trigger for the May 7 events was a dispute over the government’s decision to dismantle Hezbollah’s private telecommunications network and to dismiss the security chief of Beirut international airport who was allegedly Hezbollah-affiliated. Hezbollah saw this decision as an attempt to undermine the resistance’s communication network, which they considered one of their most vital weapons against Israel.⁴² In response, Hezbollah militants seized large parts of west Beirut which was the stronghold of Sunnis and Future Movement (*Tayyar al-Mustaqbal*), the leading party of March 14 Alliance. The Lebanese army did not directly interfere to stop the clashes, which seemingly showed the ambiguous neutrality that the army followed on internal issues.⁴³

The controversial position of the army during this crisis illustrated how hybridity was reflected on this key state institution. With the Doha Agreement that was signed by the Lebanese political leaders to end the clashes and the preceding 18-month political crisis, the opposition (then including Hezbollah) gained the right to veto cabinet decisions by getting at least one third of the cabinet seats. The UN Security Council declared its strong support for the Doha Agreement by emphasizing the ways ‘to reinforce the authority of the state over all its territory, in such a way to guarantee the sovereignty and the safety of the state and the people of Lebanon.’⁴⁴ While it could be said that Hezbollah emerged from this process as a stronger actor, its image as a party of resistance against occupation was challenged, a pattern that would resurface later with its intervention in the Syrian war.

The role and agency of militias in Beirut were once dismissed in dominant Western discourses as ‘irresponsible elements driven by tribal instincts.’⁴⁵

⁴¹Fregonese, “Beyond the ‘Weak State’”.

⁴²“مؤتمر صحفي لسماعة السيد حسن نصر الله” 8-5-2008 [Press Conference by His Eminence Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, 8-5-2008], *Hezbollah Media Relations*, 8 May 2008, <https://mediarelations-lb.org/post.php?id=6424>.

⁴³Fregonese, “Beyond the ‘Weak State,’” 662.

⁴⁴UN doc., S/PRST/2008/17, 22 May 2008. <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/627307>.

⁴⁵Fregonese, “Beyond the ‘Weak State,’” 666.

While these discourses have evolved over time, they have largely remained state-centric. However, within critical discourse, the interconnections between state, non-state, and political violence in Lebanon have been interpreted through the concept of hybrid sovereignties. This analytical framework is considered a more productive way of understanding these interconnections, especially when taking into account the evolution of events in an urban environment like Beirut.⁴⁶

While the two main coalitions of post-2005 Lebanon experienced shifts and transformations in the following years and elections, another major turning point in the country's internal dynamics came with the public uprisings of October 2019 (*Thawra*). These uprisings, along with the subsequent economic collapse – further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the Beirut port explosion in 2020 – posed a significant challenge to Lebanon's political establishment. The protests, which represented a powerful reaction against the corrupt ruling elites and their oligarchic system, aimed to bring about a fundamental change in Lebanon's post-Taif political and economic order. They called for a just system that transcended sectarian and class divisions. Although their direct impact on the ruling establishment has been limited, the uprisings marked a crucial moment for civil society movements and the emergence of reformist political parties and independent deputies, some of whom won seats in the Lebanese parliament. These movements highlighted the potential for a new reform-oriented force within Lebanon, emerging within the context of the country's hybrid governance structures.

4. UNSC Resolutions Alongside Lebanese Geopolitics

Lebanon is considered an anomalous state because a significant portion of its politics occurs on the state's periphery.⁴⁷ The Israeli conflict, the Syrian civil war, Lebanon's sociopolitical structure of multiple identities, and the impact of regional actors on Lebanon, all indicate some of the reasons why Lebanon's security has been based on a complex balance of factors. On the other hand, the UN objectives regarding the Lebanese state have been more simplistic, reflecting traditional Weberian state elements, which could not be expectedly applied in all contexts. Aiming for a Lebanese nation-state that controls all security apparatuses under it, at least in the short to medium terms, would not address the security threats within and around Lebanon. That's why, beyond the UN resolutions that indicate the UN's main goals for Lebanon, a roadmap that can holistically address the Lebanese realities and concerns is essential, so that a possible reform process could proceed in line with the Lebanese decision-making parties.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 655–74.

⁴⁷Kerr and Knudsen, *Lebanon*, xvi.

The foundational elements of the United Nations' approach to security and sovereignty in Lebanon are encapsulated in UN Security Council resolutions, and most recently in Resolution 1701, which was adopted following the 2006 Israeli war in Lebanon. The objectives of the Resolutions 1701 (2006) and 1559 (2004), which also reference earlier related resolutions dating back to 1978, highlight standardized understanding of state and security structure. These resolutions emphasize 'the sole and exclusive authority of the Government of Lebanon throughout Lebanon' and reiterate principles of 'sovereignty, territorial integrity, and political independence of Lebanon.'⁴⁸ While Resolution 1559 calls for the disbanding and disarmament of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese 'militias' (a term used in 1559 but not in 1701), Resolution 1701 emphasizes that 'there will be no weapons without the consent of the Government of Lebanon'. However, Resolution 1701 also refers to provisions of earlier resolutions that 'require the disarmament of all armed groups in Lebanon'. The language used in the resolution paved way for different interpretations by the parties. Although loosely defined, it could be said that a central objective of the resolution has been to enforce Hezbollah to be disarmed. The resolution was criticized for failing to address the hybrid nature of Lebanese security governance, overlooking the geostrategic competition in the region.⁴⁹

After the 1989 Taif Agreement, all militias in Lebanon were disbanded, with the notable exception of Hezbollah, which positioned itself as a national resistance group. The Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 ended in May 2000, in line with Resolution 425 (1978), although some lands in the Shebaa farms area on the southern Lebanese border remained under Israeli occupation. Syrian intervention in Lebanon, which started during the Lebanese civil war, ended in April 2005 per Resolution 1559 (2004), following a chain of demonstrations known as the Cedar Revolution that broke out after the assassination of Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri.

Resolution 1701 underscores the extension of the Lebanese Government's authority over all Lebanese territory and calls for the disarmament of all armed groups in Lebanon, implying Hezbollah's militant presence, especially in southern Lebanon. Hezbollah justifies its armed status by citing the Israeli threat and the ongoing occupation of Lebanese territories. While all relevant parties have officially declared their commitment to Resolution 1701, its full implementation has not been possible, as the actors did not prioritize its immediate execution.

Following the 2006 Israeli war in Lebanon, UNSC Resolution 1701 significantly expanded the mandate of the United Nations Interim Force in

⁴⁸UNSC Resolution 1701 (2006), adopted on 11 Aug 2006, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/581053>; UNSC Resolution 1559 (2004) adopted on 2 Sept 2004, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/529421>.

⁴⁹Santini and Tholens, "Security Assistance in a Post-Interventionist Era," 504.

Lebanon (UNIFIL). The resolution increased UNIFIL's personnel size (from about 2,000 to up to 15,000) and broadened its tasks in safeguarding the Blue Line between Lebanon and Israel and monitoring the cessation of hostilities. The resolution also extended UNIFIL's assistance to humanitarian access, the safe return of displaced persons, and the reconstruction of affected areas. While the resolution with the UNIFIL deployment has largely helped the pacification of hostilities and prevented further conflict escalations between the Israeli and Lebanese sides, the lack of its full implementation put the situation at stake, particularly by exchange of threats and fires between Israel and Hezbollah.

Although all parties eventually declared their commitment to Resolution 1701, this did not necessarily mean that the resolution effectively addressed the intricate security landscape of Lebanon. In its recent modern history, Lebanon has witnessed several protracted wars that did not only include its own actors, but also interventions of others. Besides the clash of its multiple sectarian identities, Lebanon has attracted waves of Palestinians after Israel had occupied their lands and displaced them following the wars in 1948 and 1967. The settlement of Palestinians in Lebanon and the Palestine Liberation Organization's (PLO) expulsion from Jordan to Lebanon has brought along the Israeli invasions, which also prompted the prolonged Syrian military involvement in Lebanon. The Lebanese civil war which witnessed various escalations between 1975 and 1990, brought down the state security apparatus and scattered it among militias. Moreover, the involvement of the US in Lebanon to support Israeli security interests, such as backing Israel's objectives to eliminate PLO influence following its 1982 invasion, and later to contain Hezbollah, has been another external factor with a major impact on Lebanon. The instability that the sectionalization and external interventions have brought is an ongoing challenge that Lebanon has to deal with today.

Amid external and international pressures, Lebanon continues to contend with the ongoing threat from Israel and its repeated invasions, the influence of regional actors, the armed presence of Hezbollah, which operates outside the direct control of the Lebanese government, and Palestinian factions operating within refugee camps, among others. Given this complex security and political scene, the responsibilities imposed by the resolutions on Lebanon exceed the role of the Lebanese state and government alone. Therefore, a critical examination of the concerns surrounding Resolution 1701 is necessary to address the fundamental deadlock in the process.

5. Dilemmas of the UNSC Resolutions on Lebanon

UNSC resolutions on Lebanon have received various critical reflections from scholarly and political circles. Scholars have highlighted the contested

narratives portrayed by the resolution texts regarding Lebanon, while politicians have emphasized the resolutions' narrow structure, which does not provide a comprehensive view to address the root causes of the conflicts. Additionally, implementation reports of the resolutions have drawn reactions from the Lebanese government when they touched on Lebanese domestic affairs. The situation of Syrian refugees in Lebanon has been one such case, representing a contentious issue between Lebanese politicians and the relevant UN agencies.

One of the criticisms of Resolution 1701 is the dominant role played by the US in its development. In his critical analysis of the political and ideological underpinnings of the resolution, Karim Makdisi argues that the 'war on terror' discourse significantly influenced its framing and understanding.⁵⁰ This discourse, seemingly a global response to local power disputes in Lebanon, linked these local disputes to a global struggle for and against US domination in the region. Accordingly, Resolution 1701 contains two contradictory narratives: one portraying Lebanon as a weak state with Hezbollah as a threat, representing the battle for US domination; the other emphasizing Lebanon's sovereignty and criticizing international interference in its domestic affairs. Makdisi demonstrates that a critical discursive approach is essential for understanding how meaning is produced in UN resolutions and how these texts interconnect with broader societal and political discourses, power dynamics, and contested narratives. For example, in the initial narrative, the elimination of Hezbollah and the national resistance is viewed as both a material and an ideological objective necessary for maintaining Israeli dominance and US hegemony in the region, a perspective that is also reflected in the selective use of the term 'terrorism'.⁵¹ In contrast, the second narrative rejected post-Westphalian elements of Resolution 1559, such as international involvement in Lebanon's internal affairs, some of which were eliminated from the final text after negotiations.⁵²

It was clear that Resolution 1701 did not address the full picture of the conflict, but mainly functioned to pacify the violent attacks. Statements emphasizing the need for a holistic approach to security and peace, one that addresses the interconnected issues and conflicts in the Middle East, have come to the forefront. In the UNSC meeting on Resolution 1701, Qatari Foreign Minister Sheikh Al-Thani highlighted the resolution's lack of balance and its failure to consider the complex 'historical, social, and geopolitical factors' of the situation, noting that it ignored 'the interests, unity, stability, and territorial integrity of Lebanon'.⁵³ In the same meeting,

⁵⁰Makdisi, "Constructing Security Council Resolution 1701 for Lebanon in the Shadow of the 'War on Terror,'".

⁵¹*Ibid.*, 6.

⁵²*Ibid.*, 15.

⁵³UN doc., S/PV.5511, 11 Aug 2006, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/581051>, p. 8.

Russian Ambassador Vitaly Churkin pointed out the absence of a comprehensive settlement, which may lead to the continuation of similar incidents in the region. Echoing this sentiment, Greek Foreign Minister Dora Bakoyannis added that there would be no peace in the region unless the Palestinian issue is urgently addressed.⁵⁴ It could be argued that the narrow structure of the resolution aligns the UN mandate in Lebanon more with Western security interests than with a comprehensive peace strategy.⁵⁵

Similar debates in the UNSC arena took place in 2004 when the draft of Resolution 1559, submitted by the United States, France, the United Kingdom, and Germany, was to be adopted. The abstaining UNSC members then raised issues such as the resolution establishing no evidence of any urgent threat to peace. They argued that it intervened in Lebanese internal affairs and bilateral relations by going beyond the mandate and authority of the Security Council, thus constituting an 'unfortunate precedent'.⁵⁶ Additionally, they contended that the resolution addressed the wrong threat by focusing on the Syrian presence in Lebanon rather than the threat arising from the Israeli occupation in the region.⁵⁷ The discussions illustrate how Lebanon's sovereignty has been a subject for other states' interests, especially those of the US, through resolution drafts.

On the eve of the adoption of Resolution 1701, different concerns and reservations were expressed by the Lebanese authorities. Lebanese Foreign Minister Tarek Mitri underscored that a functioning political resolution must address the root causes of the conflict. These include the ongoing Israeli occupation of the Shebaa Farms, the perennial threats to Lebanese security, and Lebanon's struggle to fully reclaim its territorial sovereignty.⁵⁸ In its current form, the resolution seemed to be more focused on addressing Israeli security concerns rather than the security structure and needs of Lebanon. Therefore, Hezbollah leader Nasrallah has labelled Resolution 1701 as biased towards Israel.⁵⁹ The Lebanese government has reiterated its determination to end any breaches of its sovereignty by Israel, emphasizing 'the right of Lebanese citizens to resist the Israeli occupation, thwart its aggressions, and recover the occupied territories.'⁶⁰ Furthermore, Lebanese President Michel Aoun has stated that Hezbollah's weapons do not contradict the state's stance and that they serve as a complement to the Lebanese

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 14, 10.

⁵⁵Makdisi, "Constructing Security Council Resolution 1701 for Lebanon in the Shadow of the 'War on Terror,'" 13.

⁵⁶UN doc., S/PV.5028, 2 September 2004. <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/529306>.

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸UN doc., S/PV.5511, p. 10.

⁵⁹"Nasrallah Says Aoun Can't be 'Isolated or Defeated'," *Naharnet*, 14 Aug 2015, <https://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/187419>.

⁶⁰UN doc., S/2021/873, 14 October 2021, para. 5.

army. He asserted that until the army is strong enough to confront Israel, which continues to occupy Lebanese lands, Hezbollah's role remains crucial.⁶¹

While both Lebanese and Israeli authorities have seemingly advocated for respecting Resolution 1701 and viewed it as a guarantee of border security, they have each accused the other of violating its terms. According to UN reports, the primary violations of Resolution 1701 include breaches of the ceasefire (such as cross-border attacks, and the firing of rockets or artillery), territorial violations (including incursions into Lebanese territory by Israeli forces and airspace violations by drones or aircraft), violations of the arms embargo (specifically, the delivery of arms to Hezbollah), and actions against UNIFIL (which encompass restrictions on the movement of UNIFIL personnel and attacks against peacekeepers).⁶²

As the critical violations have primarily been committed by the Israeli side, this has contributed to reinforcing Hezbollah's narrative of security and the need for resistance. Following Israel's genocidal war on Gaza, Hezbollah's Secretary-General, Hassan Nasrallah, stated:

What happened in Gaza proved that the international system, international institutions, and the international community are not capable of protecting any people, and this is a lesson for us all. This experience says that if you are weak, the world will not recognize you, defend you, or mourn for you. What protects you is your strength, courage, fists, weapons, missiles, and presence on the ground. If you are strong, you will command the world's respect. If Gaza had fallen in the first days of the war, everything would have been over.⁶³

This discourse highlights the distrust towards existing international resolutions that dismiss alternative security paradigms advanced by resistance movements. A later statement by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu threatening Lebanon 'to face destruction and suffering like in Gaza' has reflected this perception of international failure.⁶⁴

By contrast, Israel has accused Lebanon of violating Resolution 1701, primarily due to the activities of Hezbollah in southern Lebanon. According to Resolution 1701, the area between the Blue Line and the Litani River should be free of all armed personnel, except for those of the Lebanese Armed Forces and UNIFIL. In its periodic reports, the UN Secretary-General has frequently highlighted militia activities that operate outside the control of the Lebanese Government, in violation of Resolutions 1559 and 1701. These reports

⁶¹"Wahhab Urges Bassil to Summon Kaag over 1701 Tweet," *Naharnet*, 13 Feb 2017, <https://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/225387>.

⁶²UN implementation reports of Resolution 1701 (2006).

⁶³"نصر الله في كلمته اليوم - أبرز المواقف التي أطلقها نصر الله في كلمته اليوم," *Al Joumhouria*, 3 Jan 2024, <https://www.aljoumhouria.com/ar/news/706808/التي-اطلقها-المواقف-أبرز-نصر-الله-في-كلمته-اليوم>.

⁶⁴"Israel's Netanyahu warns Lebanon could face destruction 'like Gaza'," *Al Jazeera*, 8 Oct 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/10/8/israels-netanyahu-warns-lebanon-could-face-destruction-like-gaza>.

identify Hezbollah as the most heavily armed militia in Lebanon and note the presence of other armed groups outside government control.⁶⁵ They describe Hezbollah's military capabilities as 'a matter of grave concern' and 'a divisive issue within Lebanese society,' pointing out that its activities undermine Lebanese security and stability. In line with these concerns, the reports urge the Lebanese state to 'achieve a monopoly over the possession of weapons and the use of force throughout its territory.'⁶⁶ Consequently, UN representatives have been emphasizing the importance of a well-resourced and strong Lebanese army, along with international support for Lebanese security institutions, as critical for the successful implementation of Resolution 1701.⁶⁷

On the other hand, major Israeli violations noted in the UN reports include the occupation of 'the northern part of the village of Ghajar and an adjacent area north of the Blue Line,' violations of Lebanese airspace by Israeli unmanned aerial vehicles and warplanes, and the striking of targets in Syria from Lebanese airspace. The reports also reference statements, such as those by the Permanent Representative of Iran, highlighting Israel's continuous occupation of territories in Palestine, parts of Syria, and Lebanon.⁶⁸ Addressing the scope and gravity of these violations, the Lebanese representative to the UN emphasized that the violations by the Lebanese side are incomparable to those of the Israeli side. He specifically referred to 'the annexation of Lebanese territory, Israeli military aircraft patrolling Lebanese airspace, and bombings in another state, Syria, from above Lebanon.'⁶⁹ He pointed out that these actions also pose a threat to the safety of Lebanese civil aviation.

Although primarily a resolution on the cessation of hostilities between Israel and Lebanon, Resolution 1701 largely addresses Lebanese affairs. Its directives for Israel mainly involve withdrawing from the Lebanese territories it occupies and avoiding violations of Lebanese territorial sovereignty. UNIFIL forces, tasked with monitoring the cessation of hostilities and coordinating humanitarian access for civilian populations, as well as assisting in the voluntary and safe return of displaced persons, operate exclusively within Lebanese territory, particularly in areas designated as the Blue Line. During a meeting with representatives of a municipality in southern Lebanon, concerns were raised about UNIFIL's perceived lack of impartiality, with residents expressing the belief that UNIFIL was biased in its monitoring of Israeli forces.⁷⁰ In essence, an unbalanced aspect of the resolution stems

⁶⁵UN doc., S/2021/873, 14 October 2021, para. 23.

⁶⁶UN doc., S/2021/873, 14 October 2021, para. 42-45. Usually mentioned under the sections "Disbanding and disarmament of Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias" and "Observations".

⁶⁷"Special Coordinator Wronecka Briefs Security Council on Resolution 1701," 21 Nov 2023, <https://unscol.unmissions.org/special-coordinator-wronecka-briefs-security-council-resolution-1701>.

⁶⁸UN doc., S/2021/296, 22 April 2021, para. 45.

⁶⁹UN doc., A/77/1004-S/2023/616, 22 August 2023; UN doc., S/2023/755, 12 October 2023, para. 28.

⁷⁰UN doc., S/2019/889, 18 November 2019, para. 11.

from the fact that the responsibilities it outlines are predominantly focused on actions within Lebanon, dealing largely with Lebanese domestic affairs.

Other critical UN resolutions concerning Lebanon include those mandated to investigate the assassination of Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, notably Resolution 1757 (2007), which authorized the formation of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon. This tribunal was the first international court with jurisdiction over acts of terrorism.⁷¹ Initially, the Lebanese government and the UN had signed an agreement to establish this tribunal. However, it encountered a political impasse in Lebanon and was not ratified by the Lebanese Parliament due to opposition from various political factions.⁷² To overcome this deadlock, the UN Security Council intervened by implementing the agreement through Resolution 1757. This approach was perceived as circumventing Lebanon's constitutional procedures, contributing to the perception that the Special Tribunal lacked adequate involvement and ownership by the Lebanese people and their judicial system.

Furthermore, the establishment of the tribunal was perceived as an infringement on Lebanon's sovereignty,⁷³ seen as 'a door through which Western powers could enter.'⁷⁴ The internationalization of the Hariri assassination investigation represented an unprecedented move in UN history.⁷⁵ The imposition of an international tribunal, allegedly mobilized by the US and France,⁷⁶ was viewed as undermining Lebanon's capability to manage its internal affairs. Consequently, this tribunal, along with many other UN Security Council resolutions concerning Lebanon, has arguably 'bureaucratized and internationalized Lebanon's domestic conflicts,' transforming them into matters of 'international arbitration, diplomacy, and decision-making.'⁷⁷

5.1. UN-Lebanon Tensions Over Syrian Refugee Policies

Another contentious issue between the UN and the Lebanese authorities has been the politics surrounding the repatriation of Syrian refugees. In the UN Secretary-General's reports related to Resolution 1701, this matter is discussed under the section 'Political and institutional stability.' In the reports for Resolution 1559, the issue is addressed under 'Extension of control of the Government of Lebanon over all Lebanese territory.' These reports have pointed out that 'deportations by Lebanese authorities of

⁷¹Tolbert, "Introduction: A Very Special Tribunal", 3.

⁷²UN doc., S/2007/281, 16 May 2007.

⁷³Mégret, "A Special Tribunal for Lebanon",

⁷⁴El-Masri, "The Hariri Tribunal".

⁷⁵Makdisi, "Constructing Security Council Resolution 1701 for Lebanon in the Shadow of the 'War on Terror,'" 10.

⁷⁶Ibid.

⁷⁷Kerr and Knudsen, *Lebanon*, 11.

Syrians who had entered or re-entered Lebanon irregularly after 24 April 2019 continued, often without the application of legal procedural safeguards.⁷⁸ Responding to these observations, Lebanese President Aoun criticized certain aspects of the reports regarding Syrian refugees. He argued that they failed to accurately represent the challenges Lebanon faces, highlighting the significant impact of hosting around 1.5 million displaced people.⁷⁹

In July 2022, Lebanon's caretaker Minister of the Displaced Issam Charafeddine announced the government's plan to repatriate 15,000 Syrian refugees each month.⁸⁰ Contrasting this, UN authorities, referencing the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) report,⁸¹ stated that conditions in Syria were not yet conducive to safe and sustainable return.⁸² UN Deputy Special Coordinator for Lebanon, Najat Rochdi, addressed the situation by highlighting 'the principle of non-refoulement under international law,' and the need to ensure 'the safe, voluntary, and dignified return of refugees.'⁸³ She urged Lebanese politicians to avoid inciting 'negative sentiments and hatred.'⁸⁴ In response, the Lebanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants contended that the UNHCR's failure to facilitate the safe return of displaced Syrians was a primary cause of the escalating problems and tensions within Lebanon.⁸⁵

In my interviews with Lebanese politicians, participants highlighted the significant burden of Syrian and Palestinian refugees on Lebanon's economy and infrastructure. They called for a more organized approach to managing refugees and criticized the international community for not addressing the issue adequately. The politicians expressed concerns about the socio-economic impact of refugees and emphasized the need for their return to their home countries, while advocating for a balanced and non-racist approach to the crisis. Another concern raised was that rising social tensions could lead to clashes between Lebanese and Syrian groups.⁸⁶

A Hezbollah affiliate claimed that the US and the West did not want the refugees to return to Syria to prevent Bashar al-Assad from retaining his power and legitimacy. He suggested that this issue was being kept as a

⁷⁸UN doc., S/2022/214, 11 March 2022, para. 61.

⁷⁹"Aoun vows timely polls, criticizes U.N. report on displaced Syrians," *Naharnet*, 30 March 2022, <https://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/288846>.

⁸⁰"Lebanon hopes to repatriate Syrian refugees within months," *Associated Press*, 6 July 2022, <https://apnews.com/article/middle-east-syria-lebanon-united-nations-b899025139e1210008bba194effa9557>.

⁸¹"Syria situation – Global Report 2022," <https://reporting.unhcr.org/syria-situation-global-report-2022>.

⁸²UN doc., S/2022/749, 11 October 2022, para. 33.

⁸³"UN Humanitarian Coordinator Says Protecting vulnerable Lebanese and Refugees alike is a Humanitarian Imperative," 22 Jul 2022, <https://unscol.unmissions.org/un-humanitarian-coordinator-says-protecting-vulnerable-lebanese-and-refugees-alike-humanitarian>.

⁸⁴*Ibid.*

⁸⁵"... طلبات مع طلبات ... وزارة الخارجية: عدم تجاوب مفوضية اللاجئين مع طلبات ... [Ministry of Foreign Affairs: The UNHCR's Lack of Response to Requests ...]," *National News Agency (Lebanon)*, 30 July 2022, <https://www.nna-leb.gov.lb/ar/c3dAb7c3b9/554791>.

⁸⁶Interviews conducted by the author, June-July 2023.

card to be used when needed. He criticized the UN's current refugee policy as unhelpful and against the will of the Lebanese majority, adding that the UN has not been transparent with the Lebanese government.⁸⁷

Some interviewees also criticized the Lebanese government's policy and attitude regarding refugees. A Kataeb Party affiliate claimed that the situation could be better managed if Lebanon controlled its borders by implementing a dissociation policy.⁸⁸ An independent deputy warned that the political elite choose refugees as scapegoats to blame for all the country's problems. The deputy highlighted that the Lebanese government did not maintain proper registry data of refugees, which poses a significant security risk.⁸⁹

The situation of Syrian refugees in Lebanon has often been highlighted in the UN Secretary-General's reports on Resolutions 1559 and 1701. In recent years, it has become a major source of tension between the UN and Lebanese authorities. This strain is further compounded by EU policies aimed at containing refugee movements, which effectively shift the burden of displacement onto host countries like Lebanon.⁹⁰ The repeated emphasis on this issue in UN reports illustrates how the follow-up process for these resolutions has extended beyond their original mandates. Rather than focusing solely on core objectives, the reports increasingly address Lebanese domestic security concerns, signalling a broader scope of UN engagement with the country.

The disturbances arising from international resolutions, especially when these resolutions are unbalanced among the actors and overlook certain contextual realities, would hinder the actors' desire to take ownership of their implementation. Thus, a critique of UN resolutions and supplementary documents is important to identify the elements that undermine the implementation of the UN's peace and state-building objectives from a national ownership perspective.

6. Comparing Security Views and Seeking Ownership

Domestically, tackling issues related to the UNSC resolutions and reaching a common understanding requires progress in resolving internal political problems. During my interviews with Lebanese politicians, internal political disputes were central to discussions on Lebanese security affairs. The cases of a presidential vacuum and lack of a functional government, resulting from political sectarianism, have led to a deadlock in implementing intended reforms and worsened the economic crisis that the country has been facing since 2019. The ongoing political crisis hinders the structural

⁸⁷Interview with a Hezbollah-affiliated researcher, conducted by author, Beirut, July 3, 2023.

⁸⁸Interview with a Kataeb deputy, conducted by author, Beirut, June 21, 2023.

⁸⁹Interview with an independent deputy, conducted by author, Beirut, July 10, 2023.

⁹⁰Fakhoury and Stel, "EU Engagement with Contested Refugee Returns in Lebanon".

reforms anticipated by the Taif Agreement, which are frequently referenced in UN reports. The priority becomes solving the political crisis and rehabilitating the economy, which is seen as a result of the strong clientelism that dominates the system, leading to a sort of vicious cycle.

The main themes highlighted during my interviews with political associates regarding Lebanon's security were the hegemonic division of the country between Iranian and Saudi/Western proxies, the Israeli threat and resistance, the situation of Hezbollah's weapons, and expectations surrounding UNSC Resolution 1701. Interview participants commonly underscored the impact of regional and international interference in Lebanese politics. Another critical point was the issue of refugees in Lebanon and the disputed views between the Lebanese and UN agencies, which was discussed above.

Affiliates from Hezbollah and Amal elaborated on Lebanese security and sovereignty, focusing on the concepts of 'threat' and 'enemy'. The Hezbollah affiliate identified three major threats: the Israeli threat, militant groups across Syria – a concern that has lessened with the mitigation of the Syrian war – and regional instability. While Hezbollah and Amal affiliates spoke about Hezbollah's resistance as a deterrence against 'the Israeli enemy,' a Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) affiliate added that the right of resistance is a sacred right for all Lebanese, which should not be confined to the people in the South or specific regions.⁹¹ By framing Israel as a significant threat to Lebanon's sovereignty and security and justifying the existence of resistance movements as a defence strategy, affiliates from Hezbollah, Amal, and FPM indicate a Lebanese issue that complicates the objectives of Resolution 1701.

The Amal affiliate defends Hezbollah's armament as necessary for balance against Israeli threats, citing the inadequacy of the Lebanese army. 'What others call illegal weapons, which is the weapon of resistance, is a legitimate weapon according to us, as the resistance defends a legitimate cause,' says the Amal affiliate interviewee, as long as the imbalance of power between the armies of the two states continues. 'The army and resistance movement create a balance of deterrence,' he states. Citing a recent incident, such as an Israeli bulldozer expelling a Lebanese farmer in Kafr Shuba, a village in southern Lebanon, the Amal affiliate claims that all circumstances on the ground confirm the impossibility of any talk about the disarmament of Hezbollah's weapons.⁹²

On the other hand, affiliates from the Lebanese Forces (LF) and Future Movement (FM) argued against the legitimacy of Hezbollah's arms, linking them to Iran's regional agenda rather than Lebanon's defence

⁹¹Interview with a Hezbollah-affiliated researcher, conducted by author, Beirut, July 3, 2023; Interview with an Amal politician, conducted by author, Beirut, June 16, 2023; Interview with a former FPM deputy, conducted by author, Beirut, June 19, 2023.

⁹²Interview with an Amal politician, conducted by author, Beirut, June 16, 2023.

needs. They highlighted that Hezbollah's military role has been a polarizing issue. They also criticized Hezbollah's dominance in Lebanon, arguing that it undermines the country's relations with Gulf countries, where many Lebanese live and from which significant financial resources used to come – resources that could greatly aid in the ongoing economic crisis. Nevertheless, affiliates from the LF, FM, and Progressive Socialist Party (PSP) advised against any forceful disarmament efforts, warning that such actions could lead to civil war.⁹³

In 2012, Lebanese President Michel Sleiman drafted a 'comprehensive National Defence Strategy' that outlined the main pillars regarding threats to Lebanon and strategies to counter these threats.⁹⁴ The paper was distributed to participants of the National Dialogue meetings. The three dangers identified in this document are the Israeli enemy, terrorism, and arms. The strategy also emphasized the implementation of Resolution 1701 and the priorities identified in the Strategic Review of UNIFIL, which include an 'increased UNIFIL involvement in capacity-building for the Lebanese Armed Forces'.⁹⁵ Furthermore, the strategy underscored the importance of finding a just and comprehensive solution to the Middle East problem based on the Arab Peace Initiative, which would protect Lebanon's interests.

According to Michel Sleiman's proposal, 'the resistance' could only act in case of occupation, and its arms would be at the disposal of the Lebanese Army, which would have the sole authority to use force. Under this plan, the arms of 'the resistance' would be used until the Lebanese Army 'is provided with the appropriate strength to undertake its missions'.⁹⁶ Therefore, Hezbollah would not hand its weapons to the Army, as the March 14 coalition has demanded, nor would there be cooperation between 'the resistance' and the Army, a defence strategy that Hezbollah has endorsed. Following the National Dialogue session, different party members reacted positively to this proposal as a starting point for discussion.⁹⁷ Although not ratified or implemented, this paper remains one of the latest efforts to agree on a common defence strategy to manage the duality caused by Hezbollah's arms. It is important to note that this proposal conflicts with the provisions of some earlier UN resolutions that stipulate 'the disarmament of all armed groups in Lebanon' and that 'there will be no weapons or authority in Lebanon other than that of the Lebanese State.'

Regarding the existence of 'the resistance' and its arms, three perspectives come to the fore. The first is the 'Western' perspective favoured by the US, also

⁹³Interviews conducted by the author, June–July 2023.

⁹⁴"Conception of the President of the Republic of Lebanon," September 20, 2012, "نصّ تصوّر رئيس الجمهورية," September 20, 2012.

⁹⁵Strategic Review of UNIFIL is drafted as a letter from the UN Secretary-General to the Security Council. The first Strategic Review: S/2012/151. Follow-up Strategic Review: S/2017/202.

⁹⁶"Conception of the President of the Republic of Lebanon,"

⁹⁷"Sleiman plan bridles Hezbollah arms," *The Daily Star*, 21 Sept 2012.

partly reflected in the UN resolutions, and supported by some Lebanese parties from the March 14 coalition. According to this view, Hezbollah and all other militias should be dissolved, and the Lebanese Army should have full control over the use of force throughout Lebanese territory. The second perspective is endorsed by Hezbollah and its supporting parties, such as the Amal Movement, which see 'resistance' as necessary to confront the 'Israeli enemy.' This view supports the existence of 'resistance' arms indefinitely, as a regional settlement to counter the Israeli threat does not seem imminent.

The third perspective, supported by the Lebanese status quo and some parties that do not take a hard stance, acknowledges the security gap that Hezbollah fills with its deterrence against the Israeli threat. In that sense, it can be regarded as part of a defence deterrence strategy needed until the Lebanese Army acquires balanced power with its opponents or a wider Arab-Israeli peace settlement is reached. This perspective, as reflected in Michel Sleiman's proposal, prioritizes exclusive state and military control over the use of any kind of arms in Lebanon, rather than Hezbollah's full disarmament. The power Hezbollah has attained in Lebanon has made it especially difficult for its opponents to force its disarmament, as any attempt to do so could trigger a larger internal conflict. Thus, a defence strategy where the Lebanese Army is the only authority to use force would require an agreement with Hezbollah.

Although parties declare their compliance with the implementation of Resolution 1701, the security situation and defence strategy in Lebanon prevent possible ownership of the resolution's objectives. As an Amal affiliate said in the interview, 'The international community knows that there is no possibility of implementing the resolutions until certain conditions are met, as is the case with the resolutions regarding occupied Palestine and the right of return of Palestinians, which Israel refuses to implement.'⁹⁸ What this article has discussed as a hybrid structure appears to be the case in Lebanon for the foreseeable future. Nevertheless, this structure does not conform to the international state-building perspective or the UN objectives. Building a strong state army with international support to confront regional threats is far from realistic, considering the escalating instability and conflicts in and around Lebanon.

Despite its challenges, Resolution 1701 has served as an important tool for maintaining border security between Lebanon and Israel and as a reference point for mitigating potential escalation of violence. However, its implementation requires ownership from both the Israeli and Lebanese governments. From the Lebanese perspective, as discussed in this article, such ownership does not exist because the objectives of the resolution do not address the security concerns in Lebanon, not only for parties aligned with Hezbollah but also for some of those in the opposition. The Israeli war and attacks on Lebanon particularly since late 2024 have underscored such concerns.

⁹⁸Interview with an Amal politician, conducted by author, Beirut, June 16, 2023.

Although the UN, through its coordination mission UNSCOL, emphasizes the fulfilment of the goals of 1701 in each meeting with Lebanese officials, the real barriers to its fulfilment seem to be ignored. The UN's mediation and facilitation approach relies on leaving any potential progress to time. Considering the caveats mentioned in this article, an applicable resolution and reform process would require a more comprehensive approach to the conflict so that it could be embraced by the governmental actors.

7. Conclusion

UN state-building efforts often fall short when they rely on fixed models that assume centralized authority can be quickly restored in fragmented political systems. In the Lebanese context, this approach has struggled to gain traction, as it overlooks the role of non-state actors, sectarian alignments, and the ways in which security is already managed through hybrid arrangements. The repeated emphasis on disarmament and monopoly over force, without accounting for shifting geopolitical dynamics and internal political divisions, has limited the relevance and effectiveness of these interventions. As the article has argued, standardized frameworks risk reinforcing local resistance when they fail to reflect the political realities on the ground.

As internal dynamics continue to evolve, the need for a more flexible and realistic approach becomes more pressing. Supporting sustainable security in Lebanon will depend less on enforcing ideal outcomes and more on facilitating political dialogue that reflects the country's actual balance of power. Rather than viewing hybrid security structures as obstacles, international actors might consider how they can serve as transitional mechanisms that require engagement. Ownership of any meaningful reform can only emerge when external agendas are balanced with local priorities.

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