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MASTERS PROGRAM

Subject:  
The Impact of the Syrian Civil War on Lebanon

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April 2014
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Introduction

Lebanon and Syria have always had very strong interdependent ties during their short history since their simultaneous independences in the mid 40s. To some extend, the very existence of the “Greater Lebanon” made by France was contested by many since its creation. Since that the notion of a Nation-State cannot be applied on the socio-political structures of the Near East, the birth of Lebanon caused irremediably a dilemma about the legitimacy of its existence as a sovereign country with all that this can imply. For some, Lebanon was never considered more than a stolen region of Syria, a region that was institutionalized by the colonial powers following the First World War (Salibi, 1998, pp.25-28). For others, the Lebanese particularities were fair enough for the foundation of a separate State, based on historical, geographical and social data characterizing and differentiating this entity from its Syrian neighbor (Salibi, 1998, pp.25-28). An entire literature was developed for the process of early Lebanese State-building which laid on these specific data (Elías, 2013, pp.5-8). But these facts were soon attacked by various factions that had different thoughts or agendas on both an ideological and interest levels. The border line drawn by mandatory France could maybe not bring a decent answer or clarification to this dilemma, but still, today’s Lebanese people tend to recognize themselves relatively more as such, regardless on if this identity was genuinely an artificial creation or not. Nevertheless, the very close relationship between Lebanon and Syria on various levels -such as social, cultural, religious, economic and geographical levels- was soon translated in the mutual interaction and interdependency of these two States, not only on an official level, but also on domestic politics and security as we will see it later.

This particular interdependency marked the entire post-independence period and was a key factor for the understanding of the major turmoil phases that occurred at that time in both countries. Indeed, Beirut hosted some of the major conspiracies related to the various Syrian putsches that characterized this phase (Ferzli, 2014), and in return, Damascus’s global policies and various turmoil influenced Lebanese domestic politics and also happened to be somehow the trigger for bloody events such as the clashes of 1958 (Ferzli, 2014). After the stabilization of Syria around the one-party Baas system under Hafez Al-Assad, the Syrian influence in Lebanon gained strength and importance. This new reality came to its paroxysm with the military intervention of the Syrian Arab Army at the beginning of the Lebanese civil war. From this point, Syria became the major foreign power moderating arbitrating and influencing the Lebanese political and security scenery. This role was then in a sense institutionalized by the
Taef agreements that simultaneously brought an end to the hostilities in Lebanon and gave Syria the international support and legality for the tutorship task of the stabilization and reconstruction of the country. This phase ended in 2005 with the redeployment of Syrian forces from Lebanon, but the direct and indirect influence of Damascus, even if weakened and reconsidered, did not come to an end.

In another perspective, in early 2011, and in the wave of the uprisings that started to shake many Arab countries, violent unrests began in Syria opposing the regime to different opposition factions. Initially unarmed, many of these opposition groups switched gradually to an armed confrontation with this regime. Some of these groups were created from rebels who deserted the regular army, and civilians who joined the opposition, but then even from foreign Jihadi Islamist fighters. Many of these disparate armed groups were provided by logistic, financial and weaponry help from regional and international powers opposed to the Baas regime of Damascus. Syria was gradually but inevitably entering a long-lasting civil war, still ongoing at the time when this study is written.

Considered within the frame of the close and particular interrelationship mentioned earlier that characterizes the Lebanese-Syrian matrix, the Syrian conflict has an irrefutable impact on the Lebanese neighbor. The daily data coming from Lebanon are fair enough to underline this reality. One of its most visible aspects for instance is the continuous flood of refugees coming on a daily base since the beginning of the fights (Liban : Plus de 957.700 réfugiés syriens sont enregistrés auprès du HCR, 2014). But this is only one of the many other effects of this neighboring war. So the real pertinent question here has rather to be: what is the impact of the Syrian civil war on Lebanon? How are these effects related, and what are the consequences on the small Levantine republic and on its future? The answers for these issues are still blurred, fuzzy and hard to identify because of the complexity and the newness of the ongoing events. This study tries to deliver an overall view of the multiple effects of the Syrian civil war on Lebanon, with an analytical attempt of presenting a vision on the possible results and outcomes on the destiny of this country caused by these impacts.

The first step for a critical comprehension of the impact of the Syrian civil war on its Lebanese neighbor must be done by framing its diverse sides around these simple questions: Why is the Syrian conflict affecting Lebanon? How is it affecting it, where, when and what are the possible outcomes of these impacts? It is by answering to this specific list of easy questions that this study will be developed.
For the first question, the issue is focused on the essence or the origins of the problem. A first chapter presents a brief historical overview of the relations between Lebanon and Syria for the purpose of proving the intensity of the interactions between them and the strong correlation of the events occurring in both of them. This is done by showing that the two States have had a similar and related Geography and History. This resulted in the development of a similarity in the social composition of the two States. With the creation of these two States and their simultaneous independences, these similarities will be at the origin of political transnational ties that will influence the domestic politics in both countries. Then, the ties will be strengthened and develop also in parallel towards formal institutionalized relations due to the growing Syrian involvement in Lebanese political affairs and then by its direct military intervention after the beginning of the Lebanese civil war as a major moderator in the conflict. The chapter is then focusing on the relations since the post-Taef period until 2005, and since this date till nowadays. It will be done by stressing on the Historical, geographical and sociological factors that oriented these special relations.

Then, the second chapter sums up the different security, political, humanitarian and economic events that marked the Lebanese local scene since the start of Syria’s unrests in 2011. In a descriptive overview of the diverse bombings (Tripoli, Beirut’s Southern Suburbs, Hermel), the political assassinations (Wissam Al Hassan, Mohammed Shatah), the hostage cases (Lebanese Shiite pilgrims, Orthodox nuns of Maalula), Tripoli’s continuous unrests (between Jabal Mohsen and Bab El Tebbaneh), Al-Assir’s case, the growing number of Syrian refugees and many other topics, this part of the study attempts to enlighten through these symptoms the close cause to effect links that ties the two neighboring countries. This analysis tries to give a clear view of how this list of events is related to the ongoing war in Syria.

But the Syrian conflict has also affected the Lebanese scenery from another angle. Indeed, the impact did not only manifested passively by marking the internal Lebanese dynamics. It is going also all the way around with the active participation of some various formations, groups or individual nationals on both sides of the fights in Syria. The third chapter concentrates on this particular subject by showing the most relevant aspects of this involvement and the consequences of these diverse interventions, on Lebanon. A special study case focuses on Hezbollah’s role in Syria because on one hand this party is the most important involved formation in this category, and on another hand due to its strategic significance vis-à-vis the balance on the battlefield and the consequences of its participation on Lebanon.
Finally, the conclusive chapter dives deeper in the still unclear global consequences of the Syrian conflict on Lebanon by giving a speculation concerning the possible outcomes of the impact of this war, within the frame of a geopolitical and regional understanding. The question of the viability and survival of the Lebanese actual political system can merge here, as well as the future of the Syrian entity and the shapes to what it could be remodeled to later on. But again, because of the complexity and the freshness of this issue, this conclusion is only a prognostic modest added value to this study that reflects a personal vision of the possible outcomes of this war, first on Lebanon and then briefly on Syria.
Chapter I: Lebanon and Syria, the History of a close relationship

Any attempt of focusing on the mutual influences that rule the interrelations between Syria and Lebanon has to take into consideration the historical aspect of the ties that regulates these kinds of dynamisms. For this particular reason, this chapter presents the many aspects, throughout History, of the quasi-diluted destinies of both states, by starting first with the many similarities, then by mentioning the major critical turning points and eras that can be relevant for the comprehension of the causality of the actual Syrian civil war’s impact on the “Country of Cedars”.

A- Similarities on different levels

Lebanon and Syria, framed under the modern concept of the state, are relatively new entities. But even under their current forms, the geographical proximities are more than obvious. For a better illustration of this reality, we just have to mention the coastal continuity between Beirut, Tripoli and the Syrian Lattakia; or the same continuity between Northern Bekaa and the Syria Homs district; or simply the distance of only 100Km that separates Beirut from Damascus.

Before 1920, both were parts of the Ottoman Empire, and the actual borders between them were meaningless. They were parts of the so-called greater historical Syria province, and divided into administrative governorates, or “Wilayets” (Salibi, 1998). Without considering the particularity of Mount Lebanon –which will be explained later- the ethnic, religious and cultural composition of the inhabitants was almost the same. The urban centers were composed of Levantine Arabs, Sunnis in majority, and Melkites-Greek Orthodox and Catholics- in minority. Other ethnical groups, mainly the Armenians, were also living there. The rural areas were also subjects to the same division, but with a major difference for some specific geographically isolated regions, inhabited by other minorities who sought refuge there. It is the case of the Nusayris or Alaouites in northern Syria’s mountains, the Druzes in the Southern highlands of Syria and Mount Lebanon, and of course the Maronite Christians in Mount Lebanon (Salibi, 1998). The separation within such communities that came with the drawing of the current borders did not affect their social ties: for instance, Druzes from Lebanon are still getting married to Druzes from Syria, whereas Melkites families from Aleppo have relatives in Zahleh, while Sunni families in Beirut are affiliated to Damascene parents. These facts explain better the very close cause to effect ties that links Lebanese to
Syrians from a social angle. This is a clear preliminary clarification of how events in one of these two countries can affect the other one.

The particularity of Mount Lebanon rose by the Maronite community led to the establishment there in the 19th century of an autonomous Sandjak: the Mutasarrifiyya. This was helped by an international guarantee, enhanced by the rivalry of French and British powers in their quests of dismantling the dying Ottoman Empire (Salibi, 1998). As said by the Lebanese scholar and former minister Georges Corm, it is the time when modernity and colonialism introduced the sectarianism to the region, known until then to its relative coexistence (Corm, 2003, pp.30-32). But nevertheless, the creation of this entity—which came after the bloody events of the civil sectarian unrests in Mount Lebanon, mainly between Druzes and Maronites—resulted in a spillover in Damascus. Indeed, the Muslim inhabitants of Damascus perpetrated a massacre against their Christian fellow brothers during July 1860 (Salibi, 1988, pp.197-202). This event is the first main modern proof of the political and security interaction of the two states—which were parts of a same Empire at that time—that emanates from the social, historical, and religious similarities.

All of these presented similarities were translated politically in the later periods. The following paragraphs summarize them concisely.

B- The French Mandate Period (1920-1943)

The current shapes of Lebanon and Syria’s borders are the direct result of both the Sykes-Picot agreements—that put Syria and Lebanon under French rule— and the French Mandate. The first happened to delimit the eastern and northern borders of Syria and the southern borders of both Syria and Lebanon; while the second determined the limits between them. The first is a result of the colonialism, while the second is the fruits of the Maronite lobbying for the enthronization of their particularity (Salibi, 1998). While the Maronites (and broadly the rest of the Christians) knew what they wanted—concretely independence within the limits of a modern theorized Lebanon—the Muslims leaned towards Pan-Arabism and unity with Syria as seen by their Syrian fellow brothers as well (Salibi, 1998, p. 26-28). The French added to Mount Lebanon former parts of the greater Syria—which are at least culturally, geographically and socially as related to Syria that to Lebanon—and formed the Greater Lebanon, three times larger than historical Mount Lebanon. Although based on a historical
Libanist argumentative (Ferzli, 2014), this initiative tells a lot about the still very much diluted situation at the common borders, with no concrete ethnical, cultural or even religious clear limits there; and on an official level, without any serious topographic work of clear delimitation. The reactionary attitude of a large part of the Lebanese society towards their newly created Lebanese identity is very relevant considering the current conscious implication of some of them in the neighboring conflict. The French ultimately instituted Republics in both countries, but maintained during its presence, an economic, customs and monetary union between them (Corm, 2003, p.87). Subsequently and briefly, the French mandate recognized and instituted the Lebanese particularity by constituting it in an independent state, but recognized also somehow the close and diverse relationship between Lebanon and Syria, according to the previously listed affinities and ties that unite them.

There is still a last episode that occurred during the period of the early French presence, which can be relevant to mention here, as a historical resemblance and redundancy with events linked to the current situation that will be the subject of analysis later on in this study. When the French based in Beirut, decided to invade Syria in 1920 to dislodge there the young Arab kingdom, they had to fight against the Arab rebel forces. The battle happened in Maysalun in July 1920, where French General Gouraud crashed the insurgents. The interesting fact is the participation on the French side, of Maronite volunteer fighters from Lebanon; Maronites who then openly celebrated the French victory (Salibi, 1998, p.33). This story constitutes a great example of historical parallelism when it comes to the actual military involvement of various Lebanese groups in the ongoing Syrian conflict.

C- The post-independence Period (1943-1976)

With the independence of Lebanon and Syria, many thought that the reunion will be inevitable. It was underestimating the strong and definitive will of the Maronites for independence vis-à-vis Syria, which managed to rally to its cause a part of the Sunni elite. This led to the National Pact of 1943 which instituted the sectarian repartition of the state’s key positions, guaranteeing by that the presidential seat to the Maronite Christians (Corm, 2003): an exception in the Arab-Islamic world. The period following the independence can be characterized by three major realities. The first one is geopolitical; the second is doctrinal, while the third is economic.
Concerning the first one, the creation of an alien Zionist entity at the Southern doors of the two countries changed drastically the geopolitical situation of the region. The massive flux of Palestinian refugees after 1948 constituted a common long lasting problem in the internal stability of both countries (Ferzli, 2014).

The second one is still related to the doctrinal confrontation at that time that opposed Pan-Arabism and Pan-Syrian transnational unionist movements, against the Libanism of the Maronite Lebanese ruling elite (Salibi, 1988). Also during these years, Beirut became the regional media platform and political tribune of the Arab world, because of the liberal atmosphere that pampered all the dissidents and opponents of the Arab regimes of the region (Ferzli, 2014; Salibi, 1988, p.337). Many of the consecutive putsches that shook Syria during this period were prepared in Beirut. So it became clear for Syria that the securing of a favorable general climate in Lebanon was a must for the sake of its own stability. Also in the opposite direction, events in Syria affected once again Lebanon and dragged the small country in its first modern civil clashes. This happened in 1958 after the union of Syria and Egypt in the Arab Union Republic under Nasser (Salibi, 1988, pp.338-341). The pan-Arab and Nasserist movements in Lebanon, encouraged and helped by Nasser, started to put pressure on the Lebanese state to enter this union. This genuinely political struggle degenerated into a mini civil war, causing the death of around 500 citizens (Corm, 2003, p.105). Of course, the parenthesis of these clashes are framed in the vicissitudes of the cold war, and are more related to the maintaining of Lebanon in the western liberal bloc, but even, taking the situation towards a violent tendency was directly caused by the developments in Syria.

The third one concerns the economy. The flourishing of the Lebanese economy which characterizes this period put the country in a status of a regional financial and commercial platform. The goods that transited through the port of Beirut had ultimately to pass through Syria’s territory, the only possible corridor pass towards the Arab interior hinterland (Ferzli, 2014). The Syrians were aware of that, and used from time to time the card of blackmailing to reach their political ends.
D- The Lebanese civil war, the Syrian interference and the Post-Taef period

The gradual stabilization of Syria reached after the arrival of the Baas party under Hafez Al-Assad’s rule strengthened the influence of this country on the internal Lebanese scenery. The apotheosis of this interference was concretized with the beginning of the Lebanese civil war, and ultimately, with the military intervention and invasion of the Syrian army in 1976. Starting from that time, Syria became the major referee and regulator in the war. It also armed some groups as proxy against others, like the Amal party of Berri (Thual, 2002). The Taef agreements, which ended the war, institutionalized and sacred the Syrian presence and tutorship over the country, that longed until 2005. Syria was given the role of stabilizing Lebanon, and helping the country in its reconstruction. This was possible through a Saudi-Syrian entente, the famous S-S, which parachuted Rafic Hariri as a Prime minister, who was the man of Saudi Arabia (Corm, 2003). The political field was completely controlled by the occupying forces; the civil liberties were restrained, and no politician could rise without the consent of Syria. The dissident leaders opposed to Syria’s rule were killed, exiled, or imprisoned. The demilitarization of the militias according to the Taef exempted the Hezbollah. The reason was that the party was considered as a resistance against Israel. The alliance between the Iranian financed Party and Syria is explained by the regional Iranian-Syrian alliance.

E- From the assassination of Rafic Hariri until the stating of the Syrian conflict

The changes in the regional status-quo launched by the US invasion of Iraq gradually tended to worsen the Saudi-Syrian relationship. This led to the transfer of Hariri into the growing opposition camp, which started since 2000 in demanding the Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon. The assassination of the former prime minister that occurred on the 14th of February 2005 was the long-waited catalysis of the launching of a national sovereign movement against Syria’s presence. The biggest protest for this cause was held a month later on the 14th of March 2005. This date gave the name to the heterogeneous political anti-Syrian regime coalition that continued the mobilization until the Syrian troops’ departure from the country in April of the same year. Meanwhile, on the 8th of March, a rival and equally numerous protest was held by the pro-Syrian political formations to thank the Syrian regime. Led by the Hezbollah, the mentioned date became the name of the pro-Syrian regime coalition. The vertical ditch of the political local field was born. It happened around the position of each group vis-à-vis the Syrian regime. This tells again a lot about the big
influence of Syria on its tiny neighbor. After the short parenthesis of the Israeli war on Lebanon of July and August 2006, the political ditch was amplified and entered a new phase. The specter of the contagion of the regional Sunni-Shiite conflict became more and more concrete, since the two major components of the rival coalitions, namely the Future movement and the Hezbollah, are respectively Sunni and Shiite. The political struggle degenerated dangerously into spontaneous civil clashes during May 2008. It ended with the compromise made under Qatari supervision in Doha, were the two coalitions agreed on the election of a centrist president of the Republic, to end the institutional vacuum at this post. It is in this context, strongly influenced and affected by Syria’s regime, that the unrests in the neighboring country will start in March 2011.

A last point to be remembered here during this period is nonetheless the establishment for the first time since their creation, of formal diplomatic relations between the two states. Indeed, Syria refused in the past to open an embassy in Beirut for nationalist irredentist considerations.
Chapter II: The Direct Symptoms of the impact of the Syrian crisis on Lebanon

Since the very beginning of its modern history, Lebanon’s internal scenery was not able to be isolated from its regional and international context. But even when this context tended to be more or less stabilized, the internal structure of the country did not constitute a solid base for the concretization and the strengthening process of a sustainable stability. This is partly due to the lacks in its political system and of course to the tacit will of maintaining the communitarian status quo by its political and religious elite (Corm, 2003). Due to this fact, the local situation as we saw it earlier was always more or less tormented. But since the beginning of the unrests in the neighboring Syria, the domestic events and data are more directly influenced and related to this ongoing conflict. We can even define this as a contagion. This is due to the importance of the interdependence between the two countries as presented in the first chapter. So after showing earlier why this war does have an impact on Lebanon, the question is where and when does this impact appear and manifest obviously. The following part presents the data and developments of the Lebanese scene since the start of the troubles in Syria in 2011, and shows its direct relation with the Syrian situation.

So what is the situation in Lebanon since March 2011? In a brief summary, since the very beginning of the unrests in Syria Lebanon hosted a continuous and massive exodus of Syrian refugees with all the consequences of this fact. In parallel, the inner security and stability of the country has visibly deteriorated with political assassinations, decreasing control of the State at some bordering regions with Syria were diverse forms of smuggling and traffic flourished, constant renewal of armed fighting rounds in Tripoli, growing Sunni radicalism, and finally rockets and blasts in different regions with -for the first time in Lebanon- the use of suicide bombers. All of this diverse events accompanied by a political and institutional blockade concretized by the postponement of the legislative elections and the inability to form a new government for 11 months after the resignation of Prime Minister Najib Mikati…

These facts are the direct impact of the Syrian civil war on Lebanon. But as we could see it above, they are various and they cover different levels. For this particular reason, the following analysis is framed under four main approaches: a humanitarian, a security, a political and an economic one. First of all the humanitarian issue linked to the massive flow of Syrian refugees is the most direct and visible impact on Lebanon. This topic will be developed in a primary point.
Then, the security situation of the country, in all its different forms, which has continuously deteriorated since 2011, is highly related to the Syrian events. This is why a second part will be dedicated to its thematic description. But the neighboring war has also an effect on the political level with a recurrent paralysis of the state’s institutions and will need some explanations under this chapter. And finally, the economic consequences of this war can compromise the stability of the country. A small paragraph will be devoted to enlighten them.

A- The flood of Syrian refugees, not only a humanitarian problem

The huge number of Syrian refugees in Lebanon is definitely the most visible and primary repercussion that had to face the country since the start of the troubles in Syria. The country is not carrying this burden alone since all the neighbors of Syria are witnessing the same phenomenon. The difference is that compared to its size and population says the HCR, “Lebanon is already the country that in modern History, has the most important number of refugees per head of inhabitant” (Réfugiés syriens : une catastrophe humanitaire "inacceptable", 2014). Almost one million has already been registered on the UN list of refugees in Lebanon in 2014 (Liban : Plus de 957.700 réfugiés syriens sont enregistrés auprès du HCR, 2014). But this number does not take into consideration the many other persons who have not been registered until now. The fact is that more refugees are still passing the border to Lebanon on a daily basis, and others are still waiting to be registered. Some other refugees are even unwilling to get registered by fear from their regime in Syria or simply because they have to go to the offices to execute this formality. Finally, a lot of wealthy Syrians passed to Lebanon were they bought or have rented apartments and so are not listed as refugees. For these reasons, the estimations about the Syrian presence in Lebanon are much higher and are around 1.5 Million, according to most of Lebanese officials (“Al bank al douali: ihtiwa’ makhater al nouzouh”, 2013). This massive presence is very heavy for Lebanon in all fields. If we consider that the Lebanese population is estimated at around 4 million citizens (La Réalité Démographique Libanaise, 2013), it means that Syrians constitutes now at least 25% to 30% of the total residents on Lebanese soil (Bulletin trimestriel d'information economique de la region MENA, 2014; Slavin, 2013). But the real problem is not linked to their number. In fact, Syrians are now everywhere, we can realize the magnitude of this phenomenon by having a walk in different localities of the country. In some villages, the local Lebanese population is
outnumbered by them \cite{lp.gov.lb, 2013}. They are scattered on all the Lebanese territory, renting, squatting or regrouped in around 450 randomly established camps \cite{Rizk, 2013}. Every day, around 3000 more are being registered according to Dana Sleiman, UNHCR’s spokeswoman \cite{Nharkom Said, 2014}. It is the total inaction and passivity of the Lebanese state which, unlike the other states concerned by this flood in the region (Jordan or Turkey for instance), has not been able to organize their arrival around a structured official plan with the establishment of organized refugee camps. For cause, the fear from the repetition of the Palestinian experience: their population is around half a million and they are more or less unanimously considered as an existential threat for the future of the Lebanese entity and there is still no concrete solution for their fate \cite{lp.gov.lb, 2013; Slavin, 2013}. Their presence constituted also one of the key factors in the initiation of the Lebanese civil war in the mid 70s \cite{Knudsen, 2007}. As a consequence, Lebanese narrative in its majority (official, journalistic or scholar) tends to not define them as “refugees”, but as “migrants". This is because Lebanon did not signed the 1951 UN Refugees Convention \cite{Sikimic, 2011} by fear from any unlikely solution for the Palestinian refugees issue as said by Rabih Al-Haber, president of Statistics Lebanon \cite{Nharkom Said, 2014}.

The threats that are an outcome of the flood of these refugees are not only connected to their number and to the state’s inertia vis-à-vis of their regulation. Actually, the dimensions of this problem were emphasized by these two mentioned facts, and as a result, its consequences are spreading out towards many fields: they are mainly sanitary, economic, social and related to security.

Concerning the health issue, we have to emphasize that the majority of the refugees are women and children \cite{Les enfants, victimes du conflit qui s'éternise en Syrie, 2014}. Around 70\% of the Syrian refugees’ families are “without a dad” \cite{Nharkom Said, 2014}, or without a patriarchal active men providing revenue to the family members. They usually live in disastrous hygienic conditions such as unorganized camps or unfinished abandoned buildings which are devoid of any canalization system and sanitary equipment \cite{Rizk, 2013}. The risks of infections and decease transmissions are high, and have been concretized with the rise of some epidemics that were previously eradicated from the country such as Tuberculosis or

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\footnote{In Arabic a “refugee” is “laaji’” and a migrant is “naazih”, but of course if the adoption of the second terminology is maybe sometimes made by default and can be due to its redundancy in mainstream discourses and media (on purpose or by misunderstanding), it was initially adopted because of the fact that Lebanon has not signed most of the UN refugee’s treaties and protocols by fear from any responsibility towards the Palestinian refugees and avoid their naturalization.}
Polio according to the June 2013 declaration of the Lebanese parliamentary health commission (lp.gov.lb, 2013). The Lebanese health system is not able to cover all their need, and NGO’s activities are far to be enough. According to Dr. Walid Ammar, Director General of the Ministry of Public Health of Lebanon, the health sector needs more than 400 million of USD per year to cover the sanitary costs of Syrian refugees; this money, around 400USD per refugee, is the cost of several medications and vaccinations, and the service cost that the Lebanese state will have to pay to the private hospitals (Nharkom Said, 2014). If foreign aid would not come, the Lebanese public deficit growth will be strongly affected. According to latest World Bank report, the cost of Syrian crisis for Lebanon will reach 7.5 billion of USD by the end of 2014 (bb.undp.org, 2014). These numbers leads us definitely to analyze the economic impact of the flood of Syrian refugees to Lebanon.

The primary effect of the important presence of Syrian refugees is the huge stress on the already weak Lebanese infrastructures, essentially electricity, water, canalization system, environment, but also roads (with thousands of Syrian cars moved to Lebanon with the refugees according to Statistics Lebanon (Nharkom Said, 2014)). Another very important point is that the Lebanese bread is state-subsidized, but the refugees are consuming this bread. That means that more than 5.4 million bread units are partly financed by the state on a daily basis says Rabih Al-Haber (Nharkom Said, 2014). It is a crucial and very urgent problem that the Lebanese state would not be able to manage on a long run. On another hand, the Syrian refugees will have to recur towards the Lebanese labor market for their living. And this would not only affect the cheap labor market of unqualified jobs where Syrian workers were since decades the major offer-seekers. Al- Haber expects unemployment going to be around 20% due to cheap work concurrence offered by the refugees, even in the more specialized jobs. Lebanese unemployment will double, adding more to the list of 170 000 Lebanese already pushed into poverty according to UNHCR High Commissioner Antonio Gutерres who said that “there is now not a single village or town in Lebanon that has not been affected by the presence of refugees from Syria” (Richard, 2013).

All these facts, in addition to again the unorganized and random repartition of the refugees on all the Lebanese territory leads unquestionably to dangerous social tensions based on economic but also on sectarian and communitarian basis. Providing Syrian women with free medical service at birth giving, while a Lebanese woman has to pay for it, or, as presented by Dana Sleiman, the 90 000 Syrian children that are attending classes at Lebanese
public schools – an almost equal number to the Lebanese students’ number- are the perfect illustrations of this dangerous reality (Nharkom Said, 2014). Some of these tensions have already manifested in diverse forms on the ground. As an obvious example, we can mention the falsification of Syrian identity cards by some rural peripheral Lebanese poor citizens for the goal of getting aids food rations and coupons as are their Syrian displaced neighbors (LBC Prime Time News, 2013). This is a clear mark of the social tensions that starts to affect the Lebanese-Syrian Refugee relationship. This happened to be in regions where sectarian identities of both national groups are the same, what if they would be different. The competition on the labor market will also obviously lead to a confrontation between Syrian and Lebanese since there is no place for everyone says the president of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Zahleh, especially that the pressure on employers is very high since it is very tempting for them to use a cheaper labor force with no obligations of providing them with social security in particular in a slow economic growth general ambiance (Â Zahlé, un malaise bien plus social qu’économique, 2014). This was said without considering those Syrians who may be tempted to open small businesses and concurrence by that, local Lebanese small entrepreneurs. But the tensions can be also due to cultural or socio-economic milieus’ differences as a result of the savage and unorganized repartition of the refugees on the country’s territory. The cases of the presence of traditional rural Muslim Syrian refugees in middle or high class Lebanese Christian suburbs, or simply Sunni refugees in Shiite Lebanese agglomerations are good examples as dangerous mixture situations. This reality can lead to an identity change of some regions, especially if the unrests in Syria are long lasting, and knowing that Syrians do not need resident permits of any type to live and work in Lebanon. We do not have to forget also that around 80 to 100 000 of the refugees are Palestinian refugees from Syria who came to pump up the effectives of this population with all the dangers that can emanate from this fact (Nharkom Said, 2014). We are witnessing a kind of a massive movement of population phenomenon that can generate with time several geopolitical issues and change the country’s identity, such those that happened in Post-WWII Europe for instance. The more the war in Syria is lasting, the more critical the problem will be for Lebanon and its existence as such.

This is how economic and health issues lead us to the dangerous security questions of the refugees’ presence in Lebanon. Beside all the social tensions that can develop later into security problems, there are all the other data that are equally relevant and have to be
mentioned here. The most simplistic question that can emerge here is that this huge number of people, coming from poverty mostly, to a more critical and vacillating situation, will lead or not to increasing criminality and violence (Aalmi, 2013). The question is if the Lebanese Interior Security Forces, which effectives are already insufficient, are capable of taking in charge this flood or not. But reversibly, because of the weakness of the refugees, violence and racism can emanate from the Lebanese towards them, based on diverse motives mentioned earlier in the text. The typical case as an example here is the mass punishment inflicted by the population of Qssarnaba in the Bekaa to the refugees living nearby the town by burning their informal camp because some of the refugees there were suspected of raping one of the village’s resident (Lebanese burn down Syrian refugee camp, 2013). Finally, there is a more strategic problem related to this security theme: a large number of the refugees are anti-regime dissidents, and so they could hide or dilute within their effectives a number of fighters or militiamen from different factions of the opposition including the radical Islamists and the Al-Qaida affiliated groups. This has an undisputable repercussion on Lebanon’s stability and security, especially with the sectarian tensions due to Hezbollah’s intervention in Syria’s conflict (Fleyhane, 2014). But this particular subject will be discussed in another chapter.

So far, the reactions to the refugees’ issues can be measured on three different levels: a local, a national and an international level. For the first one, some of the municipalities had taken measures since the very beginning of the arrivals of Syrians. In that frame, there is a very controversial measure established by some municipal authorities in diverse regions which is the curfew imposed on Syrian Refugees who are forbidden of “wandering” on the streets after a certain hour like in Aley for instance (Fleming-Farrell, 2013) where some exactions against those who did not conform were registered. For the second which is the national level, as we said it earlier, the state is impotent: beside the coordination with NGO’s and the health service offered by the Ministry of Public Health, there is a total paralysis because of the political divisions in the country. Political factions tend to use the situation for their own popularity by trying to find solutions at least in their regions (Sehnaoui s’inquiète de la présence croissante de réfugiés syriens à Achrafieh, 2014). The official discourse of the state-representatives appears only when it comes to the international level, at conferences such as the March 5, 2014 reunion of the International Support Group for Lebanon in Paris (Le Groupe de soutien au Liban assure Sleiman de la solidarité international, 2014) where the stress is on the urgent need to help Lebanon because without it the risks of a spillover of the conflict
is growing daily. But definitely, something has to be done to avoid an ultimate catastrophe on all stages. Official voices such as PM Najib Mikati are already demanding the installation of a safe zone within Syria where refugee camps can be settled (Mikati, 2014), a pertinent idea which still needs a maturation time. As the president Sleiman said it, the Syrian refugees are an existential threat to the Lebanese nation and its future (Les réfugiés syriens sont un « danger existentiel » pour le Liban selon son président, 2014). The international community has definitely lacked until now in its obligations of helping Lebanon which became the country with the highest rate of refugees on its territory in modern History.

But the problems related to this flood of refugees is only one of the many aspects of the impact, the next part analyses the course of the many security events related to the Syrian war in a rapid overview.

B- The internal security situation

The local security situation of Lebanon has evidently drastically deteriorated since the commencement of Syria’s unrests, threatening by that the inner stability of the country which was already fragile and volatile. This section shows the progress of this deterioration from the window of its relation with the ongoing Syrian conflict. For this purpose, the presentation of the relevant information is subdivided into thematically organized frameworks of analysis without taking into consideration the chronological flow of the different mentioned events. But for a better understanding, this overview is summarized here.

As developed previously, the very first symptom of the impact of the Syrian crisis on Lebanon was the flood of the refugees fleeing the repression and then the hostilities. This was facilitated by the very porous and permeable border line between the two countries, which enhanced- added to the support of a common societal background and the absence of the Lebanese state in these areas- several exchange dynamics from the two directions such as arms and munitions smuggling but also the transit of Lebanese and foreigner fighters. This represents a key factor of inner domestic security destabilization. Then, the constant inaction of official Lebanon led some of the Lebanese factions to a sentiment of existential fear that was translated consequently into unilateral actions and movements that were seen by these
groups as a step for their self-defense, or the defense of their “brothers” in Syria, especially after that acts of retaliation were taken by the Syrian regime concretized by the bombardment of bordering Lebanese villages suspected of helping and hiding opposition members. It is the case of the growing Islamist Takfiri and Jihadi movements mainly in the North and in Sidon (with Sheikh Al-Assir), but also later in 2013 from the other side, the involvement of the Hezbollah in the fighting in Syria. These facts, added to some other small security events deepened the already significant Lebanese political and sectarian division expressed at some point by the continuous renewal of violent civil clashes in Tripoli -which were previous to the Syrian conflict by the way- but also by sporadic attacks against the state’ institutions represented by the Lebanese army. In parallel, social and sectarian tensions flowed out to the streets with the kidnapping of Lebanese in Syria on a sectarian basis. Ultimately, the drastic deterioration of the situation was fueled by terrorist attacks on one hand against state officials, and on another hand against civilian targets in various regions and again with a sectarian connotation and from both sides. The following analysis tries to briefly sum up every aspect of this situation by grouping them according to their nature.

1- The Lebanese-Syrian borders, more than a buffering zone

The border line between Lebanon and Syria was never clearly delimited by a lucid bilateral topographic work. The project of its execution was intentionally abandoned on several times because of the strategic benefits made by the maintenance of this blurry situation for Syria primarily with the unclear status of the Shebaa farms, that is used by Damascus and its Lebanese allies to keep the pressure on Israel and maintaining the motives of the armed resistance from Southern Lebanon. In this perspective, the porosity and permeability of the Syrian-Lebanese border line is an obvious fact. Traffics and smugglings of all kind prospered and flourished along this border before the unrests in Syria (Al-Ali, 2014). This happened under a tacit acceptance of the officials in the two countries. The goods concerned by this activity were diverse, including livestock and diesel as an example (irconsult.org, 2014). But since 2011, even the minimal control over the borders was lost. This was partly due to the instauration of chaos in Syria which led to the significant decrease of state presence and regulation from the Syrian side. This

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2 The Shebaa farm is a region under Israeli occupation. Israel says that it belongs to Syria and its occupation is framed within the presence of Tsahal in the Golan, while Lebanon claims the territory as belonging to South Lebanon.
3 Some of our private and business connections in Majdel Anjar use to deal with this traffic on a large scale; I was the witness of these activities on several times during the 2000s.
loosening encouraged the proliferation of this smuggling and its diversification towards other sectors such as weapon trafficking and foreign fighters passing to the Syrian combat zones. There are a lot of factors that are propitious for the booming of such activities.

The most important one is the adoption of the Sunni Lebanese bordering inhabitants, mainly in Akkar but also in Ersal in the Bekaa, of the Syrian opposition causes based on the common cultural, social and religious backgrounds as seen in the first chapter. But also, the economic benefits of such activities are a valid explanation especially when regarding the poverty of these state-abandoned rural peripheral areas. Furthermore, because of these permeable borders based on this vague chaotic uncontrolled situation, the armed Syrian opposition tried to transform the northern Lebanese region and Ersal into a rear base for its operations. These circumstances were at the source of many destabilizing events. From another perspective, the bordering regions with Shiite and Christian majority citizens are the scenery for other activities and flows.

First, for a better analysis, a separation should be made between the developments in Akkar, and those of Ersal.

Akkar is an agricultural- and relatively fertile- area of Northern Lebanon composed of plains and low hills. Its population is Sunni in majority and it is the country’s most underdeveloped and poor region (Regional Development Programme In Akkar-Phase II, n.d.). As many peripheral districts of Lebanon, the state is almost absent there. Because of this low development, in addition to the social and religious interpenetration and interaction with Syria, with for instance 7000 Akkari villagers residing in Syria (Regional Development Programme In Akkar-Phase II, n.d.), the cooperation with the Syrian rebels seems logical. Since the beginning of the militarization of the Syrian conflict, Akkar region has been suspected of being transformed to a rotating plate in the importation of weapons for the rebels of various groups in Syria. The accusations were made by Syrian government officials and their Lebanese political allies on many occasions, such as by Al-Jaafari- The spokesman of Syria at the UN- who described one of the smuggling operations in 2012 which happened via the sea, and passed to Syria through Wadi Khaled in Akkar (Al-Jaafari: Lubnan yusaddir al ‘irhab ‘ila Suriyya, n.d.). But since then, even the opposition and some interviewed anonymous smugglers confirmed the reality of the activity of weapon flow towards Syria via Akkar for the various factions
of the rebellion (Al-Ali, 2014). In addition to this, some reports have attested the presence of Takfiri and Jihadi Islamist organizations affiliated to Al-Qaeda operating from this region towards Syria, enrolling Lebanese but also foreigners from diverse nationalities and using some villages there as their rear-bases for their eventual or actual operations against the neighboring Syrian regime’s outposts (Chararah, 2013). A stronger evidence of the importance of these weapons smuggling activities from Northern Lebanon and the transformation of this region to a major illicit transit route towards Syria is the interception by Lebanese authorities during spring 2012 of the Lutfallah II cargo ship which was transporting arms and munitions intended to be transferred to Syria through Tripoli (Lebanon holds ship ‘carrying weapons for Syria rebels, 2012). This development shows that the smuggling is not only an individual traditional arms trafficking of an excess of stocks by particulars for personal protection, but seems more to be a structured and internationally covered activity towards different organized groups in Syria (Noureddine, 2013). Moreover, Hezbollah’s officials consider it as a well elaborated conspiracy involving some of the Lebanese state’s security institutions, namely “fere’ el maalumat” the Interior Security Forces’ intelligence department (Al Mussawi, 2014). But with the establishment of other supply routes throughout other countries, and also with the strengthening of the Syrian army’s control on the borders with Akkar since mid-2013, the smuggling tends to be reduced. More than that, the tendencies are reversed with the importation to Lebanon of some explosives to the Takfiris, but also weapons from the Syrian government to their allies in Tripoli’s clashes between Jabal Mohsen and Bab Al Tebbaneh (Al-Ali, 2014). The other fact that highly concerns this region is the exportation of Lebanese and foreign fighters from there to Syria. Ghassan Rifi (As-Safir newspaper) says that Lebanese fighters concerned by this border passing are Islamist devoted youngsters from Tripoli and North Lebanon’s middle and lower class members usually working, but doing this for religious jihadi motives (Rifi, 2012). The subject of this question showed up after the Tal Kalakh ambush at the Lebanese-Syrian borders in November 2012, when a few dozens of Lebanese Jihadi fighters tried to pass to Syria to combat there but where killed or caught by Syrian armed forces (20 Lebanese killed in Syria ambush, 2012). They are usually indoctrinated by local Salafist Sheikhs such as Dai Al-Islam Al-Shahhal. The dead bodies (Almanar.com.lb, 2012) and some of the prisoners were given back to their families in Lebanon after bilateral negotiations due to the
pressure of the Sunni street on the Lebanese government (*Syria returns Islamist Detained in Tal Kalakh ambush, 2013*).

All this reality led consequently to the retaliation at several times of the Syrian armed forces, violating in the meantime the Lebanese sovereignty. This happened by bombarding Lebanese villages in Akkar suspected of hiding rebels, but also by shooting on Lebanese and Syrian people standing on the Lebanese side (*Naharnet, 2012*). At some point, Lebanese citizens from those villages were forced to migrate from there and seek refuge elsewhere in the country (*Naharnet, 2012*). Also, the coverage by the media of those exactions caused the death of a Lebanese cameraman from Al-Jadeed television. Ali Chaabane and his crew, who were filming and reporting at the border line with Syria while standing on Lebanese soil, died after three hours of gun shooting on them by a Syrian border patrol unit (*Naharnet, 2012*). All of this is done with the almost complete inaction of the Lebanese paralyzed state which is limited to the condemnation and disapproval speeches of the President Sleiman and other politicians, and to the claims of accusations presented to the Security Council against Syria (*Securitycouncilreport.org*, 2014).

Finally, the reoccupation of the Krak Des Chevaliers by the Syrian Army during March 2014- a medieval Castle built by the Crusaders and situated a few kilometers from the border with Lebanon- which was a rebels stronghold, pushed the majority of the Lebanese, Syrian and other Islamist fighters present there to escape to Akkar; and this subject was showed openly on mainstream media (*LBC Prime Time News, 2014*).

So what are the consequences of the enumerated facts that are shaking Akkar since the beginning of the Syrian unrests? The data presented above tend to underline that at some points, the will was to transform this region into a buffer zone for the establishment of a free rear base for the rebels, with a decreased central control of the Lebanese state and army. This last point can be proved by the campaign of distrust of the Sunni street against the Lebanese army, undertaken by Sunni Islamist leaders in the North, and partly enforced by the inaction of the institution against the Syrian Army’s violations. Only a major provocation was still missing for the establishment of this buffer zone. It happened with the mysterious assassination of a Sunni cleric at one of the Lebanese army’s checkpoints in Akkar. In May 2012, Sheikh Ahmed Abdel Wahed and his companion were shot at a military road checkpoint in Kuwaikhat. Diverse versions of
this event spread out in the mainstream news: some (like Akkar’s Islamist MP of the Future bloc Khaled El Daher who openly distrusted the Army (MTV Prime Time News, 2012)) said that it was a plot and prepared assassination, some others said that it was an action of self-defense for the army because the Sheikh and his companions were armed; army which opened an official investigation (Lebarmy.gov.lb, 2012). Right after, protests and road blockings were initiated by angry members of the Sunni community in the whole country (Naharnet, 2012). It resulted also in some deadly armed clashes in Beirut’s Sunni inhabited districts which show the tensions’ intensity (ar.Shafaqna.com, 2012). The army was constrained to suspend its checkpoints and patrols in Akkar to avoid any confrontation. This clearly resulted in an increased incapacity for the Lebanese Army of installing its full control: all of the presented data confirms the theory of the buffer zone project for Akkar. But this plan is no more in actuality since the reinforcement of the Syrian governmental forces on the Syrian side of the border. Another consequence is definitely the dilution of the international borders between the two countries because of the common security issues, the massive flood of refugees to Akkar, the missing state representation, and the common values and political and tribal ideals on both sides in this region.

On the Eastern border line with Syria, Lebanon has to face the very delicate question related to Ersal, a Sunni town in the arid Anti-Lebanon mountain chain, in the Northern part of the Bekaa valley. This region is a Shiite-majority district, with some Christian villages as well. Ersal is the only Sunni big town in this district with a population of around 40 000 citizens. The Syrian refugees there are outnumbering the indigenous inhabitants with more than 100 000 people (Al-Monitor, 2014). The situation in the town is quite similar to what was said about Akkar, with the difference that the smuggling there is relying another part of Syria: the Qalamoun (Nassief, 2014). Due to the difficulty of the town’s access and the quasi-absence of the Lebanese state, the rebels had the opportunity of using it as a rear base for their operations against the regime. When the first voices started to rise up denouncing the Al-Qaida presence in Lebanon, Ersal was the locality accused primarily of being the refuge for members of the organization (Al-Samra, 2012). The question related to Ersal is not only a security problem. The actual security developments linked to Ersal’s situation lead to two major observations: the
targeting of the Lebanese army to keep the activities there uncontrolled, and the risk of shaking the fragile Sunni-Shiite coexistence in the Bekaa region.

To sum up the situation of Ersal, we have to start by mentioning all of its various aspects. Beside the important number of refugees living there in piteous conditions without any infrastructure, the town is accused to hide within the effectives of these fleeing civilians, a considerable number of rebel fighters crossing borders through the Jurd\(^4\) area in both countries’ direction, having a rest or rearming themselves in Lebanon and smugglings goods, men and weapons towards the combat zones in Syria. As we said it earlier, this is possible in this particular region not only because of the geography, but also because of the socio-religious common affinities between these groups and Ersal’s inhabitants, and the lack of the Lebanese Army’s control. Knowing that these rebels are in majority affiliated to radical Islamist and Jihadi groups, the outcome of this situation had very negative and dangerous impacts on the area but also on Lebanon (Nassief, 2014).

This outcome manifested on three different levels: the targeting of the Lebanese army in Ersal but also in the Bekaa, the establishment of a car bombs and suicide-bombers’ importation path from the Qalamoun region towards the Bekaa and Beirut, and finally the use of Ersal’s Jurd as a rocket launching base against Shiite neighboring villages (Annahar, 2014). For the first one, we have to point out two significant cases which illustrate the best the dangerous targeting of the Lebanese armed forces. One of the dangerous events happened in February 2013, when an army’s patrol -which was pursuing some suspects in Ersal’s locality- was the subject of an ambush which led to the martyrdom of Captain Pierre Machaalani and another officer called Ibrahim Zahraman as well as some other soldiers (Assafir, 2013). The worst is that videos were posted about people gathered around their mutilated bodies in Ersal’s Centrum (“aljaych lan yaqfil malaff ‘Ersal”, 2013; youtube, 2013). The other significant event happened on the 29th of March 2014 when a suicide-bomber exploded his car at a military checkpoint in Wadi-Aata, in Ersal’s Jurd, which led to the death of three soldiers (Lebanonfiles.com, 2014).

For the second one, it is important to bear in mind that since the implication of the Shiite Hezbollah in the Syrian conflict besides the Baas regime, Jihadi groups have promised on several times to pursue for acts of revenge against the bastions of the party within

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\(^4\) A Jurd in Lebanese dialect is the no man’s Highland area of a specific region or town characterized by its aridity, difficulty of access, mountainous geography, emptiness and the quasi non-presence of human settlements there except some nomad shepherds.
Lebanon \cite{Nassief2014}. But the concretization of such acts will be discussed later in the study. In the frame of these acts, Ersal and its Jurd constituted the main passageway for the cars and suicide-bombers used against the bombings of Beirut’s Southern Suburbs that hit this region starting from summer 2013 \cite{ElnashraNews2014}. This happened sometimes with the tacit collaboration of local Lebanese \cite{LBCPrimeTimeNews2014}, like with the arrest of some Lebanese women from Ersal suspected of being working as intermediaries by delivering the car-bombs to the suiciders \cite{Aljazeerea.net2014}. The terrorist suicide bombing against the Shiite village of Nabi-Osmane directly near Ersal pushed the citizens of the village to block the road with Ersal, cutting by that the only connection of the Sunni town with the rest of Lebanon \cite{Aljazeerea.net2014}. Right after, Sunni youngsters in Tripoli, Beirut, Sidon and the Bekaa blocked main roads and avenues as an act of solidarity with the Sunni citizens of Ersal under siege \cite{LBCPrimeTimeNews2014}. This act, which was lately resolved, proves the sensitivity of the issue and its role in augmenting the fissure between the Sunni and the Shiites in Lebanon, threatening by that the coexistence in the Bekaa and causing a spillover of the sectarian aspect of the Syrian conflict. As another proof for the endangered coexistence, Shiite villagers menaced of taking the initiative for self-defense acts if the state does not bring a solution for the bombings and the rocket launchings \cite{Aljazeerea.net2014}.

On another hand, the uncontrolled border’s situation in this region provoked here also the interference of the Syrian loyalist army which violated Lebanese soil and air by infiltrating, bombing and conducting several helicopter and war plane airstrikes against the Jurd of Ersal, causing the death of civilians and embarrassing a little bit more the Lebanese army invited to retaliated against such violations \cite{K.F.2014}.

With the clear aim of the Syrian Regime of regaining control on all its border line with Lebanon to cut off the support from its Lebanese basis, Ersal seems to attract the major focuses because it is now maybe the last significant rear post of the rebels \cite{Jalkh2014}. And with the recent achievements of Assad’s army in the Qalamoun area with the takeover of Yabroud and the confinement of the rebels in the bordering town of Flita, which was also taken back recently by the army \cite{Nassief2014}, the main question resides in the destiny of the combatants and the Jihadi factions who could only escape towards the Jurd of Ersal, establishing by that a more complicated security issue that will
probably have to face Lebanon in the near future (Jalkh, 2014). We can imagine the consequences on Lebanon of the infiltration of 1000 or more Jihadi fighters (Jalkh, 2014).

The final topic of relevance in this part is the subject of the other bordering regions of the Bekaa valley with Syria, which are mainly Shiite and Christian localities. As mentioned before, these regions are the continuous targets of vindictive revenging blasts and rockets claimed to be elaborated or launched by the Syrian rebels on what they consider as Hezbollah’s strongholds. In addition to Baalbek, the list of the targeted towns are Hermel, Al-Chawaghir, Al-Qasr, Al-Qaa, Jdeidet El-Fekha, Nabi-Chit, Nabi-Osmane, Sar’een, Ras Baalbeck, Laboue, Younine, Al-Ayn and Brital. These bombardments caused several death and injured casualties among the locals (Darwish and Rida, 2014). But the fact of being in majority Shiite inhabited regions means that the Hezbollah is present there and controls the border line there with Syria. It is actually from these regions that the Party of God transfers its men and military arsenal to take part in the ongoing fights in Syria in which it is deeply involved. The Jurd of these bordering towns are also the traditional emplacement of the training camps of the party since the mid-80s, and furthermore homes the passageway of weapons coming from Iran and Syria to its arsenal. This last point explains the Israeli airstrike against this Jurd on the 25th of February 2014 (LBC Prime Time News, 2014). This information underlines the strategic importance of these bordering regions and its securitization by the Hezbollah and the Syrian army.

As a general conclusion for the borders’ issues, we have to emphasize that the peripheral regions concerned are very diverse when it comes to its respective geographic and socio-religious aspects, by having on one side Sunni areas were the aim is to help the rebel armed groups by smuggling and sheltering with its consequences of retaliation from the Syrian regime; and on another side mainly Shiite areas were the aim is covering the Hezbollah’s activities for the Syrian regime’s victory with its consequences of vengeance acts from the rebels. But beside this diversity, a common observation can be made for all the bordering regions confounded. This observation rises on two stages. One of them is the visible drastic deterioration of the stability and the security paired with the diminished trust of the local population in the state’s central institutions such as the Lebanese army. The other one is definitely the melting or the disappearance of the concept of national borders replaced by a reality of tribal buffering zone deeply implicated in the turmoil of
the Syrian armed conflict. The case of Ersal and Laboue’s relationship is very illustrative in this matter: two neighboring villages with mutual interests and a cooperative past in all sectors, are now subjects to deep tensions due to their opposed affinities in the Syrian conflict. These tensions can erupt very easily into civil clashes between them (Aljazeera.net, 2014). Also the fact that some of the explosions and rocket launchings against Shiite villages were claimed by the “Ahrar Ahl Al Sunna Fi Baalbek” group (literally “The Free Sunni people of Baalbek”) tells a lot about these circumstances. But on another hand, even in such situations, local dignitaries always try to keep a dialogue and organize reconciliation for peaceful coexistence (LBC Prime Time News, 2014). This is how the war in Syria is impacting these regions.

But the security situation linked to the Syrian conflict is also affecting Lebanon deep inside its heartland, in particular the stability in Tripoli, the country’s second largest city. The next section will turn to its closer examination.

2- The deadly rounds of clash between Jabal Mohsen and Bab El Tebbaneh

Beside the border line with Syria, the most sadly notorious and relevant zone when considering the constant and important violent situation, is definitely the question of the cycles of clashes between Tripoli’s neighboring districts of Bab El Tebbaneh and Jabal Mohsen. Tripoli is the second largest city after Beirut. It is located on the northern coastal line and is relatively close to the Syrian border (around 30km). With a majority of Sunnis, the agglomeration is also the place of residence for a notable number of Alaouites but also several and diverse Christian communities. In addition, the city is surrounded by Palestinian refugee camps since 1948; and is witnessing since 2011 an important flood of Syrian refugees. Poverty is omnipresent, especially in the populous crowded suburbs of the city. The half of the country’s Alaouite effectives are living in Tripoli’s suburbs (around 40 to 60 000) mainly in the Jabal Mohsen neighborhood surrounded by Sunni inhabited poor districts of which the closest and most significant is Bab El Tebbaneh- where more than 75% live under the poverty line- (Lupo, 2014). These two neighborhoods are separated by the Street of Syria. During the Lebanese civil war, the area witnessed already several confrontations between the two communities. It was put in the frame of the Syrian regime’s occupation malignancies in North Lebanon. It is starting from May 2008, in the wave of the events of May 7th -which led to the armed confrontation in Beirut and its suburbs between the pro-governmental militias (mainly the Future
movement of Hariri) and the opposition forces led by Hezbollah’s allies- that the lights focused again on these two neighborhoods. Indeed, during those events, bloody clashes between armed men from the two sectors liberated the old fears and animosities. The main involved actors are from Jabal Mohsen the Alawite militia of the Arab Democratic Party (ADP) of Ali Eid and his son Rifaat, and from Bab El Tebbaneh different Islamist local armed groups. After the stabilization of Lebanon with the Doha agreements, the tensions kept in inflaming from time to time the front between these two districts, constantly renewed by the confrontation of interests of diverse local or national political actors who used both sides as proxy letterboxes for their respective struggles. Since the beginning of the neighboring unrests in Syria, rounds of violence gained in intensity because of the deep alignment of both sides on one or on the other actor of the Syrian conflict. So as a result, from May 2008 until March 2014 we can count 20 rounds of combats between the two neighborhoods, causing an approximate death toll of more than 200 persons including civilians, militiamen and armed forces members, in addition to hundreds of wounded (estimated number of 1500) and thousands of refugees (Almanar.com.lb, 2014).

In the late 80s, during the civil war, the Syrian occupying forces used the militia of the ADP to repress Lebanese and Palestinian resistance located in Tripoli and especially in Bab El Tebbaneh. Some massacres were perpetrated against civilians there (Crisisgroup.org, 2010). Because of the general amnesty given by the Taef agreements, the responsible were never judged. The tensions kept burning under the ashes, until the general inflammation of 2008 which also reached these areas. But even after the Doha agreements that followed, which pacified the rest of the country, the two neighborhoods continued to have renewed rounds of violence from time to time. Beside the historical factor mentioned above, there was a political will- mainly among Tripoli’s leaders- to keep this armed status quo for the sake of affirming their local strength on the field, and by that to achieve various political bargaining. The poverty helped in realizing this situation, because fighting within a group or militia provided instant revenues for dozens of jobless and hopeless youngsters and men. The tragicomedy and the absurdity of this reality can be underlined by the costs of one night of fighting which questions the origins and the sources of who finances and arm these groups. If we multiply the approximate
number of bullet shot during one night by the cost of a single bullet, added to the rockets and the grenades used, we got a number in tens of thousands of USD…

In addition to these mentioned historical, sectarian, social, local, political and economic predispositions, the starting of the civil war in Syria had the ultimate effect of oil on fire. The radicalization of the rebel groups in Syria had also an impact on the Lebanese Sunni street where the sectarian Takfiri discourses and slogans were readapted to Tripoli’s case. This led to the manifestation of a new kind of and very dangerous series of events such as the sporadic attacks and shootings against citizens whose only guilt was to be Alaouites. During the last months of 2013, many Alaouite workers or employees were attacked by undefined radical Sunni groups who lynched them or shot them in their legs just because of their sect, before posting in some cases videos about their acts on youtube (Kostrz, 2013). This remembers us the darkest part of the Lebanese civil war, but also shows us the sectarian turning point that are taking the events in the capital of the North.

So who are the fighters of both sides? What are they motives? And who is financing them concretely?

For Jabal Mohsen’s ADP party, it is easier to find answers to such kind of questions. Even an obvious first approach leads us to determine logically that the Syrian regime- backed by its local allies such Hezbollah- is definitely behind the arming and financing of this Alaouite party (Hodeib, 2012). And for the rest, it is even simpler: poor jobless man or former militiamen who have fears from their isolated minority situation and led by their Asabiyya⁵ are easy to be convinced in joining such armed groups.

For Bab El Tebbaneh, the reality is a little bit more complicated. There is wide range of small local armed groups fighting and “protecting” the neighborhood. Some of them are Islamists, more or less radical, others are not. They are financed by local politicians or Islamist or Salafist organizations (Naharnet, 2013).

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⁵ Asabiyya is a term that became famous after the work of Ibn Khaldun. It was used in the pre-Islamic tribal and clanic structure and meant the strong attachment to the identity of a group without considering the location or time. It is referred to as the main element of social cohesion and can lead to national state building in modern terms. But in Lebanon, scholars used it to define the strong feeling of belonging to a certain religious minority, and the solidarity that emanates from this between their members.
How these clashes usually start? It depends, sometimes out of nowhere, but in other times because of another security event that happens in another part of Lebanon, or simply after a dispute between two families. The fights happen mostly during the night with rockets missiles and grenades, but also with sniper activity. Lebanese army’s checkpoints are also targets to attack.

The reaction to these renewal of violent rounds of clashes are usually the mutual accusations between the rival political elites, reunions between notables and MP’s of Tripoli, and the vain deployment of the Lebanese army which is completely paralyzed by the lack of political decision-taking for stopping the fights.

But finally, after the 20th round of March 2014, the situation seems to be changing. Indeed, unanimous political decision on a national level has been taken to put a definitive end for the violence between the two neighborhoods. Right after, the Lebanese army backed by the police forces, has put a security plan of dismantling all the strongholds and positions of the militias from both sides, and pacifying the city one and for all (Amrieh, 2014). Also, a large campaign of disarming the armed groups was undertaken, with the arresting of its convicted members. This pushed also Eid to flee to the US (Amrieh, 2014). The next days, civilians from the two neighborhoods presented spontaneous spectacles of street reconciliations and celebrations (LBC Prime Time News, 2014). But what is the reason of the timing of this united decision? The answer can be found in many local developments: first, the formation of a government in which most factions of the political scene are represented explains the general atmosphere of détente in the country or in the region (Kleib, 2014). Also, maybe the accession to the government of Ashraf Rifi, former chief-commander of Lebanon’s Internal Security Forces suspected of backing some of the Sunni fighting groups in Tripoli constitutes a major reason for this. But the event is too fresh to be analyzed in the context of this study. The next few months will enlighten us more about this subject. It seems judicious to conclude this part of the chapter by quoting the Druze leader of the Socialist Progressive Party Walid Jumblatt who mocked the security plan that waited 20 bloody rounds of fights to end up magically after the agreement of security and political figures (Amrieh, 2014).

It is obvious through the chronology of events that has shaken Tripoli’s scene since 2008, that the essence of the problems of Lebanon and Syria are very similar. The developments in the city since 2011 show the danger of the neighboring war and the
imminent risk of the spillover of the conflict to Lebanon. But the late compromises and pacification on the Front of Tripoli proves that avoiding Lebanon from the impact of this war is still possible to some extends.

3- The Hostage cases

In parallel with the ongoing developments at the borders with Syria and in the city of Tripoli, the Syrian conflict’s impact on Lebanon has manifested in another facet also. Since 2011, a list of kidnappings and counter kidnappings shook the Lebanese daily actualities, involving a little bit more the society in the neighboring unrests, and threatening by that the country’s stability and the strength of its formal institutions. The issue of the kidnappings can be divided in three different folders: the Shiite Lebanese pilgrims, Hassan Al-Mokdad, and the nuns of Maalula. All three cases show the deep social interrelations between the populations of both countries, and its repercussion on the official state’s level.

Starting from May 2012, the escalation of tensions along the Syrian-Lebanese border line resulted in the kidnapping of three Lebanese pro-Syrian regime citizens on May the 12th in the Syrian town of Zeita, which is mostly inhabited by Lebanese. Right after, fellow members of the kidnapped persons’ families managed to catch several dozens of Syrian workers and refugees in Lebanon as a counter act for the aim of exchanging them with their relatives (Al-Fakih, 2012). The exchange fortunately happened 4 days later on May 16th 2012. Of course this incident was to be preliminary to other more important and complicated events (Lebanese, Syrian hostages released in swap, 2012).

Less than a week after the mentioned actions, exactly on May 22nd 2012, a bus transporting Shiite Lebanese citizens coming back from their pilgrimage in Iran was intercepted near Aleppo, and eleven men were abducted while the women were set free. Right after, Lebanese from the majority Shiite Beirut southern suburbs went down to the streets, protesting, blocking roads and menacing of escalation (Aljazeera.com, 2012). The family members of the hostages joined their forces and created a committee established in the offices of the two travel agencies which organized the pilgrimage to Iran. After a series of warning, the families started escalation in a peaceful and non-violent way (Un an
après L’enlèvement des pelerins Chiites, une enieme promesse modere la reaction des proches, 2013). They considered since the beginning Turkey responsible of this kidnapping, or at least passive concerning its involvement in the finding of a solution. Why? Because the Kidnapers were first members of a Jihadist armed group opposing the Syrian regime and supported by the Turkish authorities, and second, because the place of the hostages’ detention was near Azaz -Aleppo Governorate in Northern Syria- a few Kilometers away from the Turkish border (Wehbe, 2013). Consequently, the Committee focused on targeting the Turkish interests in Lebanon. They held repeated demonstrations in front of the Turkish Embassy in Beirut, the Turkish armed force division’s general quarter member of the UNIFIL in Southern Lebanon, as well as in front of the Turkish Airlines offices. They successfully campaigned for the boycotting of all Turkish products sold in the majority Shiite inhabited regions of the country. They organized sit-ins, signed petitions, and even asked for the breaking of diplomatic relations with Turkey (Noujeim, 2013). One of the committee’s members, Hayat Awali -wife of one of the hostages- became famous for her tweets, declarations, TV interviews and speeches that kept the affair under the media’s spotlights on a daily basis. Finally, the escalation reached a peak when on the 9th of August 2013, two Turkish pilots were kidnapped on the Beirut International Airport road, and part of the Shiite inhabited Suburbs (Les deux pilotes turcs enleves a Beyrouth apparaissent dans une video, 2013). The families denied any link to this kidnapping which responsibility was claimed by an unknown group. Their movement led nevertheless to the implementation of the General Secretary of the Lebanese General Security Abbas Ibrahim by the Lebanese diplomacy, who played a major mediation role between Doha, Damascus and Ankara, for the finalization of the deal which ended with the simultaneous liberation of the pilgrims, the pilots and some female Syrian anti-regime prisoners in Syria on the 19th of October 2013 (Après 514 jours de captivité, les pèlerins chiites enfin de retour au Liban, 2013).

In parallel with the early developments of the pilgrims’ case, a young Shiite Lebanese citizen was kidnapped in Syria. But the man, Hassan, is a member of the Al-Mokdad family (Mortada, 2012). This family’s structure has to be understood as a clan, constituted of a few thousands who are still related by tribal and Asabiyya links. As a reaction to this abduction, and because of the passivity of the Lebanese state’s organs, the first time heard about family’s “armed wing” declared in mid August 2012 the launching of a counter-kidnapping campaign as a revenge. Armed and hooded members of the
family appeared on TV announcing the abduction of dozens of Syrian men supposed to be close or members of the Free Syrian Army but residing in Lebanon as refugees or workers (Mortada, 2012). They even managed to catch a Turkish citizen (Mortada, 2012). These acts raised for a few weeks a phenomenon of a diminished state’s control on the country in a sort of anarchy. The case was later on closed by the arrest of the implicated members of these groups by the army, and the mutual liberation of hostages.

The final aspect of this subject is definitely the kidnapping of the Christian Orthodox nuns from a convent in the old city of Maalula in Syria after its invasion by the rebel groups. In early December 2013, thirteen nuns and three of their auxiliaries were retained in their convent of Saint-Tekla by combatants from the Al-Nosra group. They showed up later in a video on Al-Jazeera without wearing their traditional crosses around their necks, saying that they were “hosts” and “well treated” (Fin du suspense, 2014). The involvement of Lebanon, with here again the major role of Abbas Ibrahim, is very interesting. Despite the fact that some of these nuns are Lebanese, the implication of Lebanon on an official and diplomatic levels tells a lot about the deep correlation between the country’s situation and the ongoing events in Syria. The other interesting information is definitely the major role held by the Qatari mediation which tries more and more to regain this status in regional diplomacy since the accession of prince Tamim there as a ruler (Fin du suspense, 2014). To resume the case of this particular kidnapping, we have to say that although they were in majority Syrian citizens, captured in Syria by a more or less Syrian faction, and kept on Syrian soil in a conflict opposing this faction to the Syrian regime, and finally exchanged to Syrian female prisoners detained in the regime’s jails, the major negotiation tasks were led by a Lebanese security official. This event is also a great proof of the important inter-reactions and the deep ties that links the two neighboring countries. The nuns were liberated on the 9th of March 2014 (Fin du suspense, 2014). They were kept in Yabroud but liberated through the Jurd of Ersal were they were delivered to a convoy of the Lebanese General Security. The convoy took them through Lebanon’s territory to the official border passage of Al-Masnaa, where they were handed over to Syrian authorities in a very well media-covered ceremony. During their period of detention, Lebanese politicians- especially the Christians- used this file in a game of bids and counter bids in their demagogue speeches of the protection of Christian minorities’ rights in the Levant (Seoud, 2014).
This kidnapping trend that flooded out to Lebanon via the Syrian conflict shows well the deep impact of this neighboring war on various aspects of the country’s internal situation. Nevertheless, the enumerated events lead to three major conclusions: the regression of the State building process with the semi-anarchy that ruled especially with the pilgrims and Al-Mokdad issues; but in counterpart, the great role given to a Lebanese security institution (General Security) and of its head (Abbas Ibrahim) in negotiation and mediation; and finally, the observation of a small fragmentation in the Shiite bloc. This last point is very relevant since the Hezbollah could not manage the primary overflow of the Shiite reactions on the street concerning the pilgrims and the Al-Mokdad cases as it did usually.

4- The Al-Assir phenomenon

One of the most notable facts that can be strongly associated with the ongoing war in Syria and its spillover on the Lebanese local scene, is surely the fragmentation accompanied by a radicalization of the Sunni community of the country (Mazis and Sarlis, 2012, p.85). Anger and frustration had risen in this community since 2005. Some analysts used the harsh term of emasculation to define their feelings (Hamoui, 2012). In the shadow of the failure of the Future movement of Hariri (Rifi, 2013) in being a major containment of what is seen by this community as a Shiite takeover of the state’s power (by Hezbollah), Lebanese Sunnis turned progressively to alternative rising forces (Majidyar, 2014). These different forces are scattered in all the country’s Sunni strongholds and are characterized by they radical or religious nature. The most prominent figure of this tendency is Sheikh Ahmad Al-Assir. His story since 2012 is the best illustration of this dangerous trend.

In opposition to notorious radical clerics of Tripoli such as Dai Al-Islam Al-Shahhal or Omar Bakri Fustok, Al-Assir’s raising as a public figure on Lebanese mainstream daily political scene was as brief as his dropping.

The summary of his story is the following. As a preacher and host at the Bilal Ben Rabbah mosque of Abra -in the Eastern suburbs of Sidon city- Sheikh Ahmad Al-Assir gained gradually in celebrity due to his vehement speeches against the marginalization and usurpation of the Sunni community by the Hezbollah’s rule on the country done by
the “hegemony of arms”, and the “injustices in Syria” committed by the regime (Rifi, 2013). The sheikh progressively increased the level of his actions by organizing protests against Hezbollah in Sidon and Beirut, but also by having solidarity sit-ins with the oppressed revolution of his brothers in Syria. He attracted also the media lights on him by going on a polemical trip with his family and companions to the ski slopes of Faraya, showing by that his peaceful intentions by playing in the snow (Chararah, 2013). Although the preliminary affirmations of the sheikh on several occasions were stated as using the nonviolent militant methods, his movement started to take slowly a more radical penchant of arming his followers and calling for assuming self-defense as well as inciting and encouraging the travel to Syria for helping the rebels in their struggle for the regime’s downfall (Haddad, 2013). However, the greatest absurdity was the dealing of official Lebanon with this phenomenon. Instead of taking drastic measures when the tone of the movement’s declarations and actions escalated, the state, after a period of ignoring on purpose the sheikh, tried to accommodate to it. The best example for this is the cycle negotiations initiated by the minister of interior affairs Marwan Charbel who even visited Al-Assir in his sit-in in Sidon (LBC Prime Time News, 2013). Al-Assir threatened then of overtaking by the arms of some of the apartments in Abra’s neighborhood that he qualified as being occupied by combatants from the Hezbollah (L’armée libanaise prend le contrôle du QG de Assir à Saïda, 2013). But before executing that, some of his men attacked an army unit deployed nearby on the 23rd of June 2013 killing at least three soldiers (L’armée libanaise prend le contrôle du QG de Assir à Saïda, 2013). The Lebanese state finally intervened by sending the troops to neutralize the general quarter of the sheikh. After three days of bloody clashes in which more than 20 soldiers lost their lives in addition to dozens of Al-Assir’s men, calm and stability were restored in Sidon. Al-Assir, wanted by the authorities for the crime of perpetrating murders against the army, vanished (L’armée libanaise prend le contrôle du QG de Assir à Saïda, 2013). This attack against the sheikh pushed a lot of Sunni radical angry citizens into the streets to protest in his favor. But the situation managed to be rapidly contained (L’armée libanaise prend le contrôle du QG de Assir à Saïda, 2013).

Of course, the big question resides around the sources of the financing of the sheikh’s movement, and the goals that the donators wanted to reach by his actions. The
5- The comeback of political assassinations

Lebanon has a long history of political assassinations linked to different stages of its modern history. This form of elimination was used on several times before, during and after the civil war. These assassinations usually come by waves. When there is relative regional and local stability they disappear for a while. In time of regional struggle of influences and/or local instability they reappear suddenly. A lot of charismatic and important political figures ended up their lives in that way. We can mention some of them just as an illustration: Riad El-Solh who was the first prime minister of independent Lebanon and was shot by Pan-Syrian Nationalists who wanted to incorporate Lebanon in a greater Syria; Kamal Jumblatt, Bachir Gemayel, Rachid Karamé, René Moawwad, Sayyed Abbas Al-Mussawi, Rafic Hariri, Samir Kassir Gebran Tueni, and the list is very long... The destabilizing atmosphere grazed by the Syrian conflict let to the prediction of the renewal of such a wave of eliminations. Their happening confirms a little bit more the contagion of Lebanon by this war on its doorsteps.

These thoughts were unfortunately concretized with the assassination of General Chief Brigadier Wissam El-Hassan on 19th of October 2012 in a car bomb attack in Ashrafieh Beirut. El-Hassan was very close to former assassinated prime minister Rafic Hariri. After his death in 2005 and the partial accession to power of the 14th of March anti-Syrian regime coalition led by the Future movement, El-Hassan was appointed to organize and create the very controversial “Fere’ el maalumat” or the Maalumat agency: an intelligence agency within the ISF (Internal Security Forces) or the Lebanese police (Hourani, 2013, pp.39-55). In a country were the state building process is not complete yet, every institution tends to be affiliated or dragged to a particular political faction, especially when the political division is at its paroxysm (Hourani, 2013, pp.39-55). Except
the Lebanese Army, all the institutions are involved in the regional and local game of influences which make them more or less hybrids. In face of the pro-Syrian regime Hezbollah’s power in and in parallel of the state’s institutions, the future movement tried to counter balance this hegemony by strengthening the Maalumat agency (Hourani, 2013, pp.39-55). Wissam El-Hassan managed since then to build it up as a solid apparatus within the State but serving locally the interests of the 14th of March, regionally Saudi Arabia, and internationally the US which had a very close relationship with El-Hassan (Hourani, 2013, pp.39-55). In the struggle of influence that came to Lebanon since 2005 between on one hand the Syrian regime and its local allies for keeping the country in the sphere of the Syrian-Iranian axis, and on another hand the West and Saudi Arabia through the 14th of March coalition, the role of the Maalumat was crucial. This organism was severely criticized by the 8th of March coalition when it comes to its integrity and partiality. Since the beginning of the unrests in Syria, the agency was accused of helping the Syrian rebellion by facilitating the arms smuggling to Syria: as we saw it with Hezbollah’s direct accusations delivered by the head of the party’s international relations’ department Sayyed Ammar Al Mussawi -in an interview with him in February 2014- in the involvement of the Maalumat in the Lutfallah II weapons shipment to Syria through Lebanon (Al Mussawi, 2014). Consequently, the 14th of March accused politically the Syrian regime as being responsible of his assassination (Khashan, 2013). But El-Hassan during his mandate could also successfully breech the Israeli intelligence presence in Lebanon by braking the cover of an important network of infiltrators and spies. This led Ashraf Rifi, the former head of the ISF and member of the 14th of March camp, to not underestimate the possible responsibility of the Jewish State in the elimination of the chief brigadier (Hourani, 2013, pp.39-55).

By going beyond the elucidation of the responsibility of the assassination -which reminds usually unclear in Lebanon-, the elimination of such a spymaster considered as a natural interlocutor of the US and a key member of Hariri’s network is definitely a great loss for this camp in the strings-pulling game for influence (Hourani, 2013, pp.39-55). The other consequence of this murder is the effect on -as we have seen it earlier- the radicalization and fragmentation of an already feeling vulnerable and weakened Sunni community (Andrew, 2013). Such acts’ repercussion is like putting oil on fire on the sectarian Sunni-Shiite already enhanced tensions. Indeed, the weakening of Hariri’s led
Future movement by the mistrust of his failing policy incites the Sunni masses to search alternative counterbalancing political formations which are the Salafist and radical movements that fill-in the vacuum created by the mentioned phenomenon (Andrew, 2013). But nevertheless, the international reactions to this assassination seemed to be going more towards the reiteration of preserving Lebanon’s stability and immunity from the spillover of the Syrian civil war (Khashan, 2013).

The second political assassination came more then a year later on December 27th 2013 in a car bomb that killed former minister Mohammed Chatah in downtown Beirut but also several civilians among who a teenager (Khatib, 2013). Chatah was also a part of the Future party of Hariri. But he was considered as representing the moderate and liberal wing or tendency within this formation, but also as a Sunni, part of the 14th of March coalition. The identity of the perpetrators of this murder can only be presumed. Professor Sami Nader in his direct reaction to the blast underlined the similarity in the methods of the operation with the previous assassinations back to Hariri in 2005, which has to be understood as a signature (Nader, 2014). Indeed, all political assassinations had targeted only one faction: the 14th of March. This can be interpreted in two ways: one explanation says that the Syrian regime and its allies are behind all of these political crimes in the frame of the regional struggle for influence on Lebanon’s faith or alignment; and another that simply wants to make this first hypothesis seem true. The second presumption is definitely more a conspiracy, but History showed us that nothing is to be neglected by analysis. The only thing that is sure, is that by hitting the moderate, liberal and democratic wing of the alliance, the clear message is that until now there is no place in this flaming Middle East for a third path between on one side the secular authoritarianism, and on another, the Islamist extremism (Nader, 2014). Both sides of course framed in the regional global sectarian Sunni-Shiite conflict (Khatib, 2013). For that particular reason, this kind of act cannot be seen as a simple impact of the war in Syria, but has rather to be inscribed in the wider Saudi Arabian-Iranian rivalry and its effect on both Syria, and so on Lebanon as well.

These violent assassinations were not the only bombings that occurred in Lebanon since the beginning of the Syrian crisis. The next part will present the rest of them.
6- The bloody blasts

We have seen through this chapter a list of relevant events, when it comes to the dangerous aspects of the impact of the Syrian civil war on the neighboring Lebanon. But most of the earlier mentioned cases tend to show a repercussion of this impact on a middle or long run. Even if the diverse bombings and blasts that shook Lebanon since summer 2013 can affect the nation’s stability by digging more deeply the coexistence – especially when it comes to the Shiite-Sunni relationship –, this phenomenon gains its relevance more as a matter of actuality. We can say in this regard that these acts are the most brutal, bloody and dangerous direct impact of the Syrian war on the country. This statement is true for two main reasons: first, it targets without any selection (beside the sectarian one which is not always as accurate as thought) the harmless civilians without any option of escape; and second because it installs a general atmosphere of fear in the entire country because it causes instantly a high number of casualties which makes it the real face of terrorism.

This subject can yet be divided into two segments: the explosions in the Shiite majority regions and the double explosion of Tripoli. Although that the blasts of Tripoli and the first two blasts of Dahieh –the Southern Suburbs of Beirut- came almost simultaneously and so gave them a connotation of attack, retaliation and counter retaliation, they cannot be directly connected in this way. Between July 2013 and February 2014, we can count seven explosions that hit the Southern Suburbs of Beirut, four others the Bekaa valley in Hermel and Nabi Osmane, and the double blast of Tripoli.

The first episode of this series of blasts took place in Beirut’s southern suburbs on July 9th 2013. As we have seen it, these suburbs are mainly inhabited by citizens belonging to the Shiite confession. It is also considered as the major general quarter of the Hezbollah. And since the party of God is deeply involved in the Syrian war as we will see it later, this explosion was considered as an act of vengeance elaborated by the radical Takfiri wing of the Syrian rebellion and its outsourced network in Lebanon. Even if this first blast happened only to cause some injuries, it opened a new chapter in the security situation of Lebanon since the beginning of the unrests nearby (Un groupuscule syrien peu connu revendique l’attentat de Bir El Abed a Beyrouth, 2013).
But this explosion in Bir El Abed –Beirut’s Southern Suburbs- was then followed after a month by another one. On August the 15th 2013, another bombing hit the neighborhood of Roueiss, very close to Bir El Abed, killing this time at least 27 civilians, and injuring hundreds. This attack’s responsibility was also claimed by another radical Jihadi group that was unknown until that day (Aljazeera.com, 2013).

Only a few days later, on the 23rd of August, a double car-bomb attack hit the Takwa and Salam Sunni mosques in Tripoli, causing the death of at least 47 persons and injuring 500 others. No credible responsibility was claimed, but some members of the ADP party of Jabal Mohsen’s Alauite minority were incriminated by the investigations led by the already controversial Maalumat section.

These first series of violence raised very high for a while the Sunni-Shiite mutual friction and tension. A former Lebanese security official hinted in an interview that this was in a process of a plot for the Iraqization of the Lebanese scene (Aziz, 2013). All the methods and sources tend to show that the aim of this series of acts were done for this particular reason, with the mutual accusations of formations from both sides for the responsibility in such acts (Aziz, 2013). Nevertheless, all major political formations from both sides denounced the fact that these events were done for the aim of sparking a sectarian Sunni-Shiite war in Lebanon (Mouzahem, 2013).

After a short break of three months, terror came to hit once more the Southern Suburbs, this time by targeting the Iranian Embassy in Beirut, on the 19th of November. The relevance of this attack came with it nature, and marked again a third level in the rising intensity of violence hitting the country due to an undeniable spillover and outflow of the Syria war. Indeed, it was for the first time in Lebanon, done by a double suicide-bombing. Suicide attacks may have been used during the civil war in Lebanon, but usually against foreign troops: namely the US troops or the Israeli invading forces in the 80s (Aziz, 2013). But since then it never came up again, and definitely not against civilians. Also, the two suicide-bombers were Lebanese, which shows the dangerous turning point that is taking the events’ flow (Aziz, 2013). The perpetrators wanted to access the main inner courtyard of the embassy by exploding themselves consecutively: the first one would have been facilitating the access of the second one. But the established initial plan did not worked out. The blasts killed at least 23 persons, among them the Iranian cultural attaché. Maybe this particular bombing gain in specialness as it
can be put in a wider global regional and international struggle between mainly Saudi Arabia and Iran, especially since the rapprochement started between Rouhani and the US administration. Some other sources underlined that revenge is applied by great powers’ intelligence agencies even after many years, so the role of even the US in such an act can be reconsidered if it is framed within the events of the US embassy of Tehran in the late 70s and the attacks against the US marines in Beirut in 1982<sup>6</sup>... But without considering this secret aspect that may has be hidden under this attack, the claim of responsibility was declared by the Jihadi Al-Qaeda linked group of Abdullah Azzam Brigades, more precisely its Lebanese wing.

But quickly, the previous trend of blasts against defenseless civilian neighborhoods renewed and doubled in intensity. Starting from January, with the amplification of the battles in the Qalamoun region of Syria, where the regime and Hezbollah are fighting against various rebel groups supplied by the route of Ersal in Lebanon as we saw it earlier, suicide-bombings hit twice the same area of Haret Hreik in the Southern Suburbs. The first one on January the 2<sup>nd</sup> killed four people –I was personally only one Kilometer away from the scene when it happened-, and the second on January the 21<sup>st</sup> that also killed four citizens among which a teenage girl. Finally on February the 19<sup>th</sup>, again a double suicide-bombing attack targeted unsuccessfully the Iranian cultural center in the suburbs killing at least seven civilians. This double blast injured a lot of Sunni orphan children present in a nearby located Sunni religious charity organization (Hashem, 2014). In the meantime, the city of Hermel in Northeast Lebanon was the subject of three consecutive blasts: one on the 16<sup>th</sup> of January killed five people after that the suicide-bomber blow himself before reaching his target since some citizens suspected him; another on the 1<sup>st</sup> of February killing four, and then on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of February on a military checkpoint at the entrance of the city near the Assi river killing two soldiers and one civilian (LBC Prime Time News, 2014). Finally, on the 16<sup>th</sup> of March, a suicide-bomber exploded himself in the mainly Shiite inhabited town of Nabi Osmane, causing the death of three persons (LBC Prime Time News, 2014). All these bloody events also let to hundreds of wounded, but also traumas, and national psychosis and fear. Here again, the responsibility was claimed sometimes by Abdullah Azzam’s Brigade,

<sup>6</sup>A very influent source that demanded to remain anonymous said to me that usually these acts come in concert with a cooperation of many allied intelligence agencies. And since the revenge, even after decades, is not only admitted but also taught in military academies, the mentioned possibility gains in relevance.
sometimes by Al-Nusra front in Lebanon, or other minor Jihadi Takfiri radical Islamist formations. Most of the perpetrators were Lebanese Sunni citizens, or Palestinian refugees from Lebanon, fact that shows the local dimension of this dangerous problem.

These kinds of savage explosions lead to two major consequences revealed through this part: one is the strive danger between the Lebanese Sunni and Shiite sects, if not directly as like in a Syrian war scenario at least in an Iraqi form; and another is the climate of instability and insecurity enveloping the country’s population.

7- Other relevant Security issues and events

Since not all the events and issues related to the topic of security can be categorized in the previously developed parts of this sub-chapter, this title regroups those which could not fit somewhere else. Most of these events are relatively minor, compared to those developed earlier, but since this study aimed to present all the aspects and symptoms of the impact of the Syrian civil war on Lebanon, they cannot be ignored. First, in the context of the explosions that hit the Southern Shiite Suburbs of Beirut, we have to add that before them, two rockets were launched against this neighborhood on May the 27\textsuperscript{th} 2013 causing some material losses and light injuries (Rizk, 2013). Rockets were also launched by the same methods toward the Christian region of Kesrwan, here also without any casualties, but also from South Lebanon against Israel. The last point can be interesting from the particular angle of the interests that some may have in dragging Israel again in an open war against the Hezbollah, deeply involved in Syria. There is also the attack against Hezbollah’s convoy heading to Syria in the Bekaa made by an explosion, which is deeply linked to the intervention of the Party in the ongoing Syrian conflict. In addition but in another perspective, the assassination of Hassan El-Lakkis, a major Hezbollah commander, by shooting him while getting home in early December 2013, is an incident to be mentioned here even though the Hezbollah openly accused Israel (BBC News, 2013). Also the arrest and conviction of former pro-Syrian regime minister Michel Samaha in 2012 after that a quantity of explosives were found in his possession while coming back from Syria by car, attests again the deep impact of this war on the security of Lebanon, caused by the very close trans-border personal relations
uniting the two countries (Hourani, 2013). This incident can also be linked to the intelligence file of El-Hassan’s assassination. In addition to this, the attack in June 2013 of pro-Hezbollah Shiite people against anti-Hezbollah Shiite Lebanese citizens demonstrating peacefully in front of the Iranian embassy tells a lot about the verticality of the sectarian division in the country- where there is no place to alternative voice outside the major monolithic bloc inside each one of the big sects- enhanced and pumped by the Syrian war. Then, the constant renewal of political assassinations and minor clashes within the self-governed Palestinian refugee camps of Ain El Helwe or Burj El Barajneh is explained by the contagion of the multiple Palestinian factions by the turmoil of this conflict and here also by the regression of Lebanese state control already weak regarding these mentioned camps (Chararah, 2013). The list of physical liquidation and counter vindictive liquidation attests that the Cedars’ Country is still far away from resolving all its issues to enroot sustainable stability and modern state building. Finally the climbing recurrence and the growth of the criminality on a daily basis shows here also this difficulty of maintaining a state-imposed stability which has lost its validity when its paralysis is compared to the efficiency of personal and private initiatives in all the security related issues as well.

But the direct impact of this neighboring Syrian civil war is not only resumed in its humanitarian and security. This conflict affected also the already weak and inefficient political system of the country. The next paragraph approaches the sensible question of the Lebanese political situation.

C- The political situation, a blockade

The political situation in Lebanon has been very affected by the neighboring Syrian conflict. Although previously not at its best -especially since the rupture with stability that came as a result of the regional turmoil enhanced starting from 2003 with the US invasion of Iraq, and the breaking of the status-quo that came after- this war at the doors of the small Levantine state deepened the vertical scission of the political elite that born after the events of 2005.
When the unrests began in Syria, a Lebanese government of more or less national unity, leaded by PM Najib Mikati, was ruling the country, despite the fact that the parliamentary elections of 2009 were won by the 14\textsuperscript{th} of March coalition. The composition of the government is explained by the special natural of the Lebanese political system, in which the opposition found the way to enter it with a significant numbers of ministry portfolios. But even though, the growing tensions did not spare the political field.

For that reason, and for a better comprehension, the situation in that field can be categorized under four major subjects: the Baabda declaration or the presidential initiative to neutralize the country from this conflict, the self parliamentary prolongation or the freezing out of the democracy, the political impasse of forming a new government and the fail of the “Self-distancing” policy, and the presidential elections issue.

1- The Baabda declaration

The vertical division of the Lebanese political formations between pro and anti-Assad Syrian regime –as it is divided- is older to the present Syrian conflict and goes back to the presence of the Syrian troops in Lebanon. This tendency has only gained in importance since 2005 with the birth of the two antagonistic coalitions of 8\textsuperscript{th} of March and of 14\textsuperscript{th} of March. Indeed, during the Syrian presence in Lebanon since Taef, many Lebanese politicians and political formations cooperated and made compromises with the regime of Damascus. It was the case of Rafic Hariri as well who was representing the so-called S-S entente in Arabic: the Saudi-Syrian agreement on Lebanon (Corm, 2003). Others such as the Hezbollah and Amal, became the very strong allies of Syria in Lebanon. For Hezbollah, it was due to the Syrian-Iranian alliance (Thual, 2002). Others were also dissidents and exiled such as Michel Aoun. Since the withdrawal of the Syrian troops from Lebanon as a consequence of the assassination of Hariri in 2005, Syria kept and remodeled its alliances with the political factions of the country. Those who claimed their friendship with Damascus formed the heteroclite coalition of 8\textsuperscript{th} of March, and those who were standing against are since that time known as the 14\textsuperscript{th} of March coalition. So when the unrests started in Syria, the trench between the two vertical transcendent coalitions became deeper and gained in intensity and animosity with on one side the 8\textsuperscript{th} of March openly supporting the regime, and on the other the 14\textsuperscript{th} of March openly supporting the rebellion. Because this support was genuinely based on strong political polarization, the blockade and political paralysis of the state’s institutions were inevitable in a country
built around a consensual democratic system. Soon, the specter of the Syrian contagion was felt by some. Among them was the president of the Republic, who played since his consensual election after the Doha agreements of 2008 the role of the nation’s moderator and referee that he institutionalized around the table of national dialogue –between all the political parties and personalities-. In the frame of this logic, he launched, through this national dialogue, a battle for the obtainment of a unanimous commitment of all the country’s factions united around this table, for the distancing, non-intervention and neutrality of all vis-à-vis the Syrian conflict. His success concretized in the so-called Baabda declaration of 11th of June 2012 (securitycouncilreport.org, 2012) in which, under the supervision of the president, all the political formations agreed to keep Lebanon out of this neighboring turmoil. For Professor Sami Nader, this declaration is a key step towards achieving the very old initiative of Lebanon’s official neutrality (Nader, 2013). It can be put as a continuation of the 1943 National Pact, the Taef agreements, and the Doha agreements (Nader, 2013). That means that for the first time, there was an official consciousness of avoiding any harm for the country by taking sides in a neighboring highly affecting and dangerous conflict, knowing that every Lebanese political formation is taking a side either with one or another faction implicated in the Syrian war. In the tragic degradation of the security situation that came with this conflict, the Lebanese political elite managed under local presidential initiative and patronage –in opposition to Taef and Doha done under international supervision- to commit in sparing Lebanon from chaos and spillover, as well as reiterating the common national values guaranteed by the state’s institutions, especially the Lebanese army (securitycouncilreport.org, 2012). The declaration referred clearly also to the interdiction of letting the establishment of a buffer zone in the bordering regions of the country (securitycouncilreport.org, 2012). With that, we can say that the Lebanese political elite, even if very divided to a level that could have been escalating towards clashes, showed a high level of maturity, at least in the texts. Of course the role of the international community cannot be denied here also, as it is the case every time when it comes to crucial decision-making in Lebanon, especially that hints were given about the insisting will of this community in the preservation of the stability7 –unlike in Syria-.

7 In the interviews made with Ammar Al Mussawi and Elie Ferzli, in addition to private talks that I had with Former Minister and MP Elie Skaff and Maronite Patriarch Bechara El-Rai, they unanimously underlined the insistence of the international community on keeping Lebanon’s stability and civil peace, despite of the war in Syria.
But of course this declaration was already transgressed at the time of its publication with the already mentioned earlier persisting rounds of clashes in Tripoli, the situation in Akkar, and as we will see it later, the gradual involvement of various Lebanese actors in the Syrian war.

2- The parliamentary Self-prolongation

The other important aspect of the impact of the Syrian civil war on Lebanese domestic politics is undoubtedly the self-prolongation of the members of the parliament’s mandates for one year and the half, which came after their incapacity of, on one hand agreeing on a consensual new legislative law, and on another, with their justification that the security situation is tense and inappropriate for its organization. Here also, it is not entirely the fault of the Syrian conflict. Beside the security impact argument, the Syrian conflict has had another relevant effect on the legislatives. For the first time since decades, the weakened Syrian regime, distracted internally by its own war, lost a little bit from its paramount influence on the Lebanese political internal struggles. That means that if it would be held, the breach in the status-quo would have been able to let the access easier to anti-Syrian regime formations, or third voices that are not aligned according to this vertical division between the 14th and the 8th of March coalitions. But this could only happen with the elaboration of a new electoral law. And here is the greatest problem. The Lebanese system is a sectarian consensual democracy based on the proportional representation of all the country’s religious communities. The francophone scholars call it a “consociational” or “consociative” democracy. The readjustments made by the Taef diminished the Christian role in the country that was prevalent earlier with the so-called political Maronitism; it instituted the political Sunnism (Corm, 2003). But the equilibrium is still not reached with the accusations of the Christians of an institutional marginalization due to these reforms –which diminished the power of the Maronite President of the Republic-, and the struggle for a better Shiite representation –which is the institutional form of a wider Sunni-Shiite struggle in the region-. The status-quo that ruled during the stable 90s under the Syrian patronage was not suitable for this change.
But now, with the turmoil in the entire region, many voices elevated for the concretization of such demands. The taboo subject of the need for a great institutional and constitutional reform was first broken by Michel Aoun. The need for it is now a fact. Why? It is because there is a duality in the whole system which is only deepening the sectarian differences and divisions. For the legislative issue, on one side the previous laws granted the quotas to the sects according to their sizes in each circumscription, by distributing the seats proportionally. On the other side, the entire electorate of the circumscription voted for a candidate for every available seat. That means that in a circumscription were for example only 10% of the voters are Maronites and the rest are Shiites, and are granted by one parliamentary seat next to 4 other seats for Shiite candidates, the Maronite candidate who wins is definitely the one that had the majority of the Shiite voters. So the representation is just by form, and biased. In addition to this fact, the elections are still held on a majority basis and not a proportional one. The possibility of reform enhanced by the turmoil in Syria launched a list of initiatives for the establishment of a new electoral law. The most polemical one was the project presented by former MP and vice-president of the parliament Elie Ferzli in the so-called “Orthodox Law” which is based on giving each sect the exclusive right to vote for its MPs. In a logical thinking, it is a very equitable solution for the right and equal representation of each community. Albeit, this project institutionalizes the sectarian division of the political system, which is in contradiction with the Taef agreements, that stipulates the progressive secularization of the system.

Nevertheless, some of the Christian political formations adopted this project and declared to legislate it as the next electoral law. However, for the first time since the end of the Lebanese civil war, the elections were postponed in June 2013, without adopting a new law (Parliament extends term by 17 months, 2013). This step shows the gravity of the current situation. And for avoiding constitutional emptiness, the quorum agreed on prolonging their parliamentary mandates for one year and the half. Maybe the situation would have partly impeached the electoral process, and avoided the country from direct street confrontations of the masses, but the motives were not enough convincing for this postponement.

The result of this self-prolongation is measurable on two levels. First, this step has definitely frozen the democratic mechanisms of the state, and added another layer to the
institutional emptiness and vacuum already started with the inaptitude of forming a new government, nominating new high functionaries at key state’s organs, and agreeing on the army’s role in stopping definitely clashes in Tripoli, and deploying in the bordering regions in an efficient way. Second, this measure has shown that the country’s political stability is still very much linked to the regional general atmosphere in general, and to the fate of Syria particularly. The vertical political division is so much related to Syria that the turmoil in it affected directly the most primary level of the political field in Lebanon which is the parliament, and could manage by that to block the entire political system. But this observation is not simply concerning the legislative power: the executive power passed also by one of its greatest crisis in the modern history of Lebanon. The next part enlightens this issue.

3- The government, between self-distancing, resignation and national unity

The logic of neutralizing Lebanon officially from the Syrian conflict was not only done throughout the presidential initiative of the Baabda declaration. It was also stated by the other executive organ of the state, namely the government of Najib Mikati who extolled himself the concept of “Self-Distancing” policy towards Syria’s unrests. This policy, biased, as we will see later on by the involvement of some Lebanese actors in the neighboring conflict, appears to be more like an ostrich policy of putting the head in the sand. For former parliament’s vice-president Elie Ferzli, interviewed for this study in February 2014, the policy of self-distancing seems to be impossible. In fact, this policy requires an abstracted Lebanese mind which is impossible when it comes to the very close political, social, economic, historical and sectarian ties that link the two countries (Ferzli, 2014). This policy shows more the incapacity of the executive of conciliating between the various political tendencies of the country, especially those represented in its government, while Mikati tried to present himself as a moderated middle man. This situation led to a complete paralysis of the political decision-making processes, blocked by the growing will of the 14th of March coalition to take back the integrality of the ownership of the government. Indeed, the weakening of the Syrian regime caused by the war there, limited its influence on Lebanese internal politics. That means that the political strength of it Lebanese allies – mainly the Hezbollah- were deeply affected. So the

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8 The integral exclusive interview’s translation in English can be found at the end of this study, under the annexes title.
reaction of the 14th of March seemed logical. In opposition, the attachment of the Hezbollah in favor of maintaining, at any costs, of the Mikati government seemed logical too. The resignation of such a government would have mean that the party, deprived of the Syrian support, would loose its presence in the state’s key institutions. But the resignation of Mikati came on the 22nd of March 2013 (Haddad, 2013). The justification of this step is dual. On one hand, the cause was the growing pressure on the back of Mikati due to his lost of popularity on the Sunni street – to which community he belongs- because of his positions that are seen as helping the Hezbollah. On another hand, the second reason was that he was not able to conciliate anymore between the will of, on one side the international community which wanted the parliamentary elections to be done on time – even if that would happen under the previous electoral law-, and on another side, the Hezbollah and its Christian allies that put the condition of the elaboration of a new and equitable electoral law as more urgent that having it on time (Haddad, 2013). Scarlett Haddad, top editorialist in L’Orient-Le Jour, stated that all of the actors were satisfied by this resignation: the Hezbollah avoided the elections that would have been held on the bases of the previous electoral law, the 14th of March succeeded in having its main claim which was this resignation, Mikati shown up as a hero in his community, and even Aoun avoided the mistrust in his proclaimed reforms, that failed to be done in a government that blocked all the initiatives of his ministers (Haddad, 2013). The steps that followed the resignation can be divided into three main phases: first, the designation of a new prime minister; second, the formation of a new government; third, the agreement on the ministerial declaration and program. The main issue that rose up was nevertheless the entente on the formation of a new government.

The task was given to Tammam Salam, a member of the parliament, and also part of the 14th of March coalition. Yet, because of the political impasse, he was unable to form his government for 11 months. Despite the impact of the general regional and international atmosphere on the inability of forming this government, the internal Lebanese political rivalries tell a lot about this prolonged failure. Here again, the main explanation is the vehemence of the vertical deep division between the two opposed political camps. The context given by the Syrian conflict happened to put each camp in an outcomes’ waiting position. If none of them would make compromises, the government could not be formed; especially that the Future movement has declared its
unwillingness of cooperation with the Hezbollah, putting its withdrawal from the Syrian battlefield as a precondition to any possible entente. Another argument that has been mentioned mainly by Hezbollah’s protagonists during these 11 months is that the party has a real interest in the vacuum created by the non-formation of the government, since it permits it to operate freely in its Syria (Abou Zeid, 2014). This was also aggravated by the international and regional geopolitical context which tended towards confrontation – during fall 2013, the US were envisaging a military intervention in Syria-. The détente that followed – with maybe the US-Iranian first steps in direction of a possible rapprochement - was a factor in favor of the possibility of the government formation. In addition, the repositioning of the Saudi foreign policy by listing the Al Nusra Front and ISIS on its terror list gives a hint in that matter (Haddad, 2014). This was translated internally by the acceptance of Saad Hariri in entering a government besides the Hezbollah (Haddad, 2014), and the initiation of meetings and talks with the Free Patriotic Movement of Michel Aoun, the greatest Christian ally of the Shiite party.

When the international, regional and domestic situations were finally favorable for such a compromise on the formation of the Lebanese government, Salam succeeded in the creation of his cabinet. This task was finally done on the 15th of February 2014 (La composition du gouvernement Salam, 2014). The news of this birth surprised many Lebanese, because the general atmosphere was still very blurred. The compromise comported on the nomination of 8 ministers from each one of the two rival blocks, and 8 more for the centrist formations. With these 24 ministers, all parties were equally satisfied, and no one could be in measure of blocking the work of the government. The formation was called a government of “national interests” (Abou Zeid, 2014).

However, a final very delicate issue still had to be solved. This question was the content of the ministry declaration. Its crucial importance resides in the fact that the Hezbollah, ever since the Syrian withdrawal of 2005, succeeded in imposing within the various following declarations, the presence of the so-called trilogy of the Army-People-Resistance, which guarantees a legal, institutional and official right for the justification of keeping the party’s weapons arsenal. The significance of this point is measurable on the domestic legal scenery, but also, on the international jurisdiction’s level. Without any doubt, the recognition of the role of the party in its armed resistance functions, on an official governmental level, immunes its action legally. And the international aspect of
this point was yet not be mentioned anywhere so far in the studies about the party. How is this ministerial declaration affecting the international legality of the resistance’s activity? In a very simple way: the right for a combatant in international law, for participating directly in hostilities (Vark, 2005), and its recognition by the jurisdiction of the Geneva protocol and the third Geneva convention, of his immunity (Vark, 2005). This immunity provides him the right to legally kill as a resistant, crime for what he would be accountable for during normal peaceful times (Vark, 2005). But the recognition of this status of resistant needs a formal acknowledgment at least from the state that this militiaman is defending. This is provided in Lebanon through the ministerial declaration. The conflict around the inscription of this legal protection of the Hezbollah’s activities within the text of the declaration seemed to be irresolvable, especially that the initial position of the rival camp –particularly the Future movement- tended to go even beyond the simple rejection of it, by pressing to inscribe the spirit of the Baabda Declaration in the text. That would have been simply meant that the Hezbollah would have been legally forced to withdraw from the Syrian conflict, besides his incapability to operate freely in the South against Israel.

But as usually in Lebanon, a compromise was settled a few weeks after the formation of the new government, on the 14th of March 2014, and a ministerial declaration was elaborated according to the sensibility of all the represented parties (Le gouvernement Salam adopte sa déclaration ministérielle, 2014). The adopted version was “the right of Lebanon and the Lebanese citizens to resist against the Israeli occupation” (MTV Prime Time News, 2014). This means that the status-quo was maintained: on one hand, the Hezbollah succeeded in keeping an official justification for its weapons, and on the other, the Future movement and its allies could save their credibility in front of their supporters (Haddad, 2014), because the priority for them, was to save this government in which they are well represented, of a potential failure and resignation. The governmental success came in concert with the compromise on the drastic long term security solution of Tripoli clashes developed earlier in this text, and the deployment of the army in the Bekaa valley in a major security plan. These facts confirm that on an external level, the climate enhanced this general compromise for the stability of Lebanon, and that on an internal level the clashes of Tripoli were only a bloody manipulate mailbox. But the governmental compromise can also have meanings for a longer term: the presidential election, which is
scheduled for May 2014, if not held in time, due to both local and international disagreement on the candidate, will definitely cause constitutional vacuum at the head post of the state. In that case, the government of Salam will be perfect for filling the gap of the interim period of a possible presidential vacancy (Haddad, 2014).

4- Towards the presidential election⁹

The last relevant issue concerning the Lebanese domestic situation and its affectation by the Syrian conflict is certainly the question of the upcoming presidential election. This subject comes of course in chronological and thematic continuality with the precedent analyzed points. Through the short history of modern Lebanon, the presidential elections could never been really neutralized vis-à-vis the regional and international context, in particular when it comes to the Syrian influence on it during its military presence in the country. Despite this influence, it seems notable to underline the importance of the presidential seat when it comes to the sectarian repartition of the key positions in the state’s institutions. The national pact of 1943, reaffirmed by the Taef agreements, guarantees this seat to the Maronite Christian community, the most numerous Christian sect, and thus, is seen as a symbolic assurance and highlight of the role of this community in the Lebanese decision making. But the post-Taef period, marked by the Syrian occupation’s dominance of the political life, tended to marginalize this role. The partial contagion of Lebanon by the Sunni-Shiite conflict enhanced since 2003 in the region aggravated this marginalization. In this logic, the accession of a strong Maronite man to the post of President of the Republic is considered by all the Christian political formations as a must and a priority. But here also, the Syrian conflict came to undermine this Christian will for renewed emancipation. The actual blockade and paralysis presented in the previous paragraphs are inevitably affecting the process of the elections that are constitutionally scheduled to be held in May 2014. The compromise made for the government’s formation is more difficult to realize at the presidential level since many other data are added in the conditionality of its success. First of all, the Christian parties from both sides are determined to bring to the presidential seat a strong figure that has a minimum of popular basis. The cause of this decision is residing in their wish of

⁹ Due to the very actuality of this subject, this part will only present a brief description about the issue, with a personal analysis of the possible outcomes.
abolishing the concept of a president-referee, as it is the case with President Michel Sleiman, while the two other first rank positions are filled by persons representing the majority trends of their respective communities. The second difficulty resides in the fact that a compromise if made, should be made on one person, and not on a collegial group such as the government. And since one person is indivisible, and cannot have different opinions about a same subject, the choice goes for a middle man, which will contradict the first point presented. The third issue is of course the constantly changing international balances of power. The given regional and international circumstances which facilitated the formation of the government could easily chance until the presidential elections.

Nevertheless, the recent efforts initiated by the Maronite Patriarch Bechara El-Rai (Kalam Ennas, 2014) for the launching of a global national campaign to the “Lebanization” of this election show a sort of a third way in the direction of sparing the presidential institution from the negative externalities of the neighboring conflict. But the actual scenery let more to predict a short term vacuum at the post of the head of the republic. This explains maybe more the surprising compromise over a strong, viable and sustainable national unity government; because in case of the fail of filling the presidential seat, the government will take in hands the reins of the state, as stipulated by the constitution.

As a conclusion, the general apprehension of the political situation in the country since the starting of the Syrian unrests is the following: on one hand, there is a strong dynamism towards sparing Lebanon from the turbulences of the neighboring war through the initiatives of the Baabda declaration and the Self-Distancing policy, but on another hand, most of the parties, especially those deeply involved in this war, are tending to practice a dual policy in which they accept in theory these initiatives, but tend for ignoring them on the ground. Subsequently, the observation that can be made is that the official Lebanon is showing neutrality towards the neighboring events, albeit paralyzed by the vertical political divisions of the two major camps, deepened by the bloody events that are shaking Syria. As a result, all the formations are united in a sort of a tacit agreement of preserving the minimal stability of the country until the clarification of the end of the Syrian conflict. All of this is done by sacrificing the democracy’s mechanisms and continuity.
D- The economic impact of the Syrian conflict

It seems clear after reading the previous paragraphs that Lebanon is contaminated on all the fronts by the Syrian ongoing conflict. The economy is not making an exception to this general trend. Of course, not all the problems in this field are blamable to this neighboring war. The Lebanese economy’s situation was not at its best before. With a very elevated public debt –one of the highest in the world compared to the number of its population- and a high poverty range, the country was already in a struggle for its subsistence soil (Bulletin trimestriel d'information economique de la region MENA, 2014). The Syrian crisis aggravated this problem. A big part of it is imputable to the massive flood of Syrian refugees. As presented earlier in the text, their presence affects the economy on two separated levels. First, they represent an additional cost on the Lebanese state which provides to them partial healthcare in addition to different services as well as the question of the subsidy on bread. Second, they change the balance of the domestic labor market both on a short term for unqualified jobs, but also on long term when the middle and upper class of the refugees will have to enter the market to assure their subsistence (Nharkom Said, 2013). Hundreds of thousands of Lebanese have already lost their jobs because of this phenomenon, and many others are in a risk to shift down towards poverty (Bulletin trimestriel d'information economique de la region MENA, 2014). Another impact is the inflation, and the increase of real estate prices. This is due to the growth of the demand in all the sectors. The tourism sector is also affected because of the general climate of instability and insecurity ruling above the country (Bulletin trimestriel d'information economique de la region MENA, 2014). Considering that Lebanon is traditionally a prized destination for Arab tourists from the Gulf that constituted their greater part, the political and security events pushed the GCC states to discourage official its citizens of travelling there (Gavin, 2012). All of this without mentioning the regression of the goods’ transit path that use to go from Lebanon towards the Arab interior through the Syrian roads.
After this concise presentation of the direct effects of the Syrian conflict on its Lebanese neighbor, done by presenting its humanitarian, social, security, political and economic aspect, it seems clear that the contagion is inevitable. There is a real difficulty in managing the situation but thus, the country of the Cedars is showing a great survival will of struggling for the maintenance of a minimal stability within its borders. Although, the reality on the ground seems to be dual, with data confirming an imminent and inevitable spillover, while other facts and developments tend to procure a minimal immunity against this neighboring contagious storm. Yet, the impact of this Syrian conflict has a very significant and equally dangerous indirect list of impacts on the small Levantine country. It pushed some of the Lebanese actors to interact and intervene directly, military in this war. The next chapter tries to present and analyze their dynamisms.
Chapter III: The Lebanese actors involvement in the Syrian civil war

As we saw it until now in this analysis, the impact of the Syrian war on Lebanon is a direct and inescapable result of the inter-relational and close ties that link the two countries. But this impact is quite more or less dual, as it is not only hitting Lebanon passively. Indeed, the impact of this conflict is not only affecting Lebanon in a one way flow coming from Syria. Instead, Lebanese elements are also participating and getting involved in it. This phenomenon is explained by the complexity of these close ties that push different actors from both sides to ignore the boundaries of the two states and so to interact. In the light of these facts, the most important Lebanese actor that is intervening in this neighboring conflict is definitely the Hezbollah. The first section of this chapter tries to study the case of its actions in Syria with all its aspects, implications, and effects on Lebanon. The other sections will mention broadly the remaining actors going from Lebanon to take part in this bloody neighboring war.

A- Hezbollah’s intervention in Syria and its impact on Lebanon, a case study

One of the most problematic questions concerning the impact of the Syrian civil war on Lebanon is definitely the active and deep military involvement of Hezbollah in it beside the regime of Bashar Al Assad. But to really understand the implications of this involvement we must put it in its local context. Indeed, at the beginning of the conflict in Syria, the different Lebanese political factions and parties agreed officially on their non interference and have chosen to apply the so called “policy of self-distancing” with its neighbor. The unanimous agreement on a neutral passive attitude vis-à-vis the ongoing conflict in Syria was sacred under the supervision of the president of the Republic Michel Sleiman in the so-called Baabda Declaration (securitycouncilreport.org, 2012) which took place at the end of the reunion of the Lebanese national dialogue table in the presidential palace of Baabda on June 11th 2012. But yet, despite this declaration, many political, social and religious factions or groups have since then violated the very essence of this agreement and are taking actively part in this neighboring conflict in a way or another, on a side or another. One of them is the Hezbollah, which is getting more and more militarily involved in the fights supporting openly the regime of Damacus, as recognized by its leader Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah who notified and explained the reasons of this implication in his speech of 30th of April 2013 (youtube, 2013). This involvement in the Syrian civil war raised a lot of critiques and reprobation on a local and an international political level, both from
the detractors but also some of the allies of the Party of God. But the party came out quickly with a counter argumentative discourse that he pointed out since the very beginning of its implication in Syria. In its official explanations in favor of this intervention, the Party of God is invested by a noble vocation of protecting on one hand the “back of the resistance” (to Israel), and also on another hand the pluralist Lebanon, its identity, security and even its existence as we know it from all kind of regional or international conspiracies prepared against it (Al Mussawi, 2014). This direct participation on the Syrian scene had also affected directly or indirectly many of the internal Lebanese political, security and social events. Indeed, some consequences on Lebanon were put directly on the Hezbollah’s responsibility which was therefore considered by some as entirely to blame for them.

After this brief introductive presentation, a very controversial question raises up about this revealed and active involvement of the Hezbollah in the Syrian ongoing civil war: the interference of the Hezbollah in the Syrian conflict is more a determinant and crucial step for the safety and preservation of Lebanon and its resistance, or is it rather an adventurous move that will affect Lebanon negatively and even maybe import the conflict to it?

For a better clarification concerning the mentioned issues, the following analysis begins with a presentation of the Hezbollah, the description of its activities in Syria, and the contextualization of this party within the Lebanese political field. Then in another part, the causality of its interference is broadly developed. After this, an analytical enumeration of the diverse consequences is presented, and finally, a part tries to give an attempt of an answer for the problematic question mentioned above about the outcome of this involvement in Syria.
1- A presentation of the Hezbollah and the contextualization of its activities in Syria

Among all the various political factions, movements, groups and parties in Lebanon, the Hezbollah or what is in Arabic literally the “Party of God” is definitely the most controversial and interesting one especially when regarding its composition, its presence on a wide number of diversified political and social fields and above all its capacity of adaptation to different local and regional political situations (Légaré, 2013) that are sometimes ideologically opposed.

After a brief presentation of the party itself, this chapter frames its activity within the Lebanese internal background, before describing the chronology of its interference in the Syrian conflict itself.

- The Hezbollah: origins and nature

The Lebanese Hezbollah was born in the beginning of the 80s in the context of the Lebanese civil war (1975-1990) and more exactly after the Israeli invasion of South Lebanon and Beirut in 1982. Created with the help of the newly constituted Islamic Republic of Iran, it was first only a clandestine organization of resistance mainly against the Israeli invasion of Lebanon among others operating under the name of “Islamic Jihad” (Mervin, 2008). This embryonic movement was modeled according to the values of the Islamic republic installed in Iran and found gradually an increasing support among the recently urbanized and rural hopeless Lebanese Shiite youth jaded by the desperate local situation. Disorganized and vaguely structured at its launching, the group indoctrinated by Iran had a very chaotic activity illustrated for instance by the recurrent kidnapping of western foreign journalists (Légaré, 2013), or even by its attacks against the multinational force of interposition -mainly composed of US and French troops- present at that time in Beirut. The movement was more or less representing the interests of Iran – which was financing its activities and forming its elites since the very beginning- in a country where each and every armed group was fighting for the interests of another foreign State (Thual, 2002). Those Iranian interests were at that time in a concurrence with
the Syrian regime which armed forces were present in the country since 1976. Back there, Lebanon was separated into mainly three sectors: The Christian parts of Mount-Lebanon added to Eastern Beirut controlled by right-winged Phalangist Maronite party and its militia called the Lebanese Forces, Northern and Eastern Lebanon added to West-Beirut (excluding the time lapse of the Israeli invasion) under the direct rule of a huge number of leftists militias and Palestinian armed groups and the indirect rule of the Syrian army, and finally the southern part of the country occupied by Israel. The vacuum created by the elimination of PLO’s activity by Israel (which led to the forced exile of Yasser Arafat and his militants to Tunisia) was replaced by the Amal movement: a Shiite laic secular pro-Syrian party (Thual, 2002). But due to this Syrian-Iranian concurrence and rivalry, violent and fratricide combats (Légaré, 2013) took place between Amal and the young Hezbollah which stopped only after the strategic rapprochement of the two mentioned regional powers. On another front, and under the tacit help of Syria, the Shiite Islamic movement gradually monopolized the resistance against Israel in South Lebanon (Légaré, 2013) by eliminating one by one, peacefully and violently, the other resistance factions of which the most important was the Lebanese Communist party.

After the end of the civil war, all the Lebanese militias were summoned to render their weapons to the State except the Hezbollah which managed to evade this measure because of its description as being rather a resistance movement against the Israeli occupier of South Lebanon than a militia (Légaré, 2013). Here came the first big issue which proves the tremendous capacity of adaptation of this organization to crucial metamorphoses in its political environment. This issue was related to the very nature and identity of the party. Indeed, Hezbollah was built on the values of the Islamic Republic of Iran and therefore had a final aim of installing a similar Shiite Islamic Republic in Lebanon in addition to the mission of resistance (Mervin, 2008). But by accepting the Taef agreements which settled the peace over Lebanon, the Party of God was indirectly accepting the pluralist Lebanon in which all religious minorities are proportionally represented with granted rights. Consequently, the party adapted its ideology to a more pragmatic logic and participated politically by acceding democratically to the parliament as an elected political party (Légaré, 2013). That was its first drastic turnover. During the 90’s, in addition of leading guerilla actions of resistance against the Israeli occupation of South Lebanon and participating in the political institutional process, Hezbollah managed
to strengthen its wide net of social, health and educational welfare system by filling in by
the strategy the absence of the central State particularly in the Shiite-majority regions.

The second major adaptation happened after the unilateral withdrawal of the
Israeli forces from South Lebanon in 2000 which on one hand was considered as a
victory of the policy of resistance of the Hezbollah, but on another hand questioned the
future legitimacy and reason of maintaining the weapon arsenal. Therefore, a valid
excuse was found by the leadership of the organization for this last problem: a renewed
function of dissuasion against an eventual recidivating Israel in addition to the liberation
of captured prisoners in Israel and the Shebaa Farms still occupied reactivated the
endangered legitimacy of the weapons of the Hezbollah.

This leads us to analyze next the local and regional political context preceding the
Syrian conflict started in 2011. This context started with the assassination of former PM
Rafic Hariri and consequently the withdrawal of the Syrian armed forces in 2005.

- **The general context of Hezbollah’s intervention in Syria**

Until 2005, the military role of the Hezbollah was not really criticized or
questioned because of the prescribed unanimous national discourse about the subject
which was guaranteed by the Syrian guardianship over the Country, because of its active
control on the internal political field. The liberalization and democratization of the
domestic political scene, enhanced by the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon,
rose up seriously the debate about the legitimacy of the arms of the party, especially
when Syria was suspected by the assassination of Hariri, and that Hezbollah was
considered as the intangible ally of Damascus in Lebanon. All of this has to be inscribed
in a regional growing Sunni-Shiite confrontation launched in Iraq after the US invasion
of it. This questioning was ultimately strengthen after the Israeli war of July 2006 against
Lebanon causing the death of more than 1000 Lebanese civilians and material losses of
Billions of USD worth. A last relevant point preceding the Syrian unrests is nevertheless
the clashes of May 7th 2008 and the following Doha agreement which reestablished a
pseudo-order but sacred the military and political power and influence of the Party of
God. Several following actions such as sapping the government of national unity by
resigning from it was seen by the anti-Syrian opponent factions -led by the moderate
Sunni movement of Hariri as a hegemonic domination over the country. The result of it is a Sunni community that is feeling (from the moderated ones to the Islamists) humiliated by a Shiite armed party which is supported by a Regime that this community suspects for the murder of its most important leader. It is in that particular atmosphere that starts the Syrian conflict which is seen by many Lebanese Sunnis again as the oppression made by an Alouite regime –principal ally of the Hezbollah- of a Syrian Sunnis uprising. But also, this situation is seen as an opportunity for this community’s leadership to grab back from the Shiite movement the lost political influence possible because of the gradual vulnerability of the Hezbollah caused by its support to a weakened Syrian regime (Calabrese, 2012). This last idea explains better the determination of the Party of God in its support to the vacillating regime of Damascus because of its fear of seeing the arrival into power of a Sunni Syrian regime that could cut the weapon backup of the party and endanger its influence in Lebanon. This leads us to present the progressive step by step involvement of the Hezbollah in the Syrian conflict.

- **The chronological overview of the gradual implication of Hezbollah in Syria**

As previously mentioned above, after the starting of the unrests in Syria, the Lebanese political parties agreed (at least officially) to distance themselves from it. But soon, after a few months of the beginning of the conflict, the party was starting to be accused of participating variously in it. First appeared as accusations from its opponents, the involvement of the party was formally recognized by its secretary general Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah in his speech of April 30th 2013 (youtube, 2013). Since then, it is quite generally admitted that the Hezbollah is backing up the Assad regime mainly by sending men to crucial battle zones such as Qussayr (Syrie : l'intervention du Hezbollah inquiète, 2013), the Qalamoun and the Shiite suburb of Sayyida Zaynab near Damascus. The participation in the Qussayr battle seems to have been decisive for the regime’s victory there (Al Mussawi, 2014). In a special interview10 accorded in January, Ammar Al Mussawi, head of the Party’s foreign relations department insisted on the fact that in Qussayr, the Hezbollah was fighting alone on the ground; the Syrian army was “only

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10 The integrality of the translation of this special personal interview can be found at the end of this study, in the annexes.
assuring artillery and air support” (Al Mussawi, 2014). The Qalamoun battle is still in process when this study was written, but the role of the Hezbollah there is undeniable and very important. Some of the clashes even happened to be in the Lebanese part of the Jurd region between Qalamoun and the Bekaa.

After this quick descriptive overview of Hezbollah’s nature and environment, it would be wise to dig in the multiple strategic causes of this participation in the Syrian civil war.

2- Causes of Hezbollah’s interference in the Syrian conflict

The causality of the active military involvement of the Hezbollah in the Syrian civil war is multiple and complex. However, its analysis can be separated into two parts: first by presenting the official discourse of the party and its affiliated media consortium, secondly by going beyond this discourse and evaluating the geostrategic issues of this intervention.

- Hezbollah’s declared version of the Causes for the interference in Syria

The official discourse of the Hezbollah about the importance of its military involvement is Syria is based on a well structured argumentation placed in the frame of its ideology. First of all, the Party considers the Syrian war as a foreign conspiracy against one of the key State actors of the so called “axis of resistance”, which is Syria. This axis is constituted by the States and organizations which still do not recognize Israel as an entity and pushes towards a more equal peace process with the Palestinians, even through the armed option if necessary. It is mainly composed by Iran, Syria, and Hezbollah as well as before the Syrian conflict by the Hamas and the Islamic Jihad. According to the logic of this alliance, the Syrian uprising was a well prepared Western conspiracy, elaborated with the help of some regional States from the Gulf in addition to Turkey, to get rid of the Assad regime (Al Mussawi, 2014). By establishing there a pro-Western regime, these states would eliminate a major member of the axis of resistance, but also would eventually cut off the backup support of the Hezbollah, push back the influence of Iran in the region, and ultimately guarantee to Israel a bigger security. This
would be done by this aggressive breakdown of the established status quo. Therefore, Hezbollah’s involvement in that optic is meant to secure the back of the resistance as said by Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah on April 30th 2013 (“Bila Hasana”, 2013). So “if you have a brother next to you who is suffering and having difficult days, you must help and intervene” says Al Mussawi (Al Mussawi, 2014). The party underlines very strongly that the involvement came as a reaction, both against the international implication in Syria mentioned before, but also against the domestic implication of some Lebanese actors in that war. Ammar Al Mussawi when he says that “we were the last ones to go to Syria” (Al Mussawi, 2014) he makes an allusion towards the hints which accused on several times some members of the Future movement of arming and financing the opposition forces there, and this, previously to Hezbollah’s implication (Mortada, 2012).

There is nevertheless a more complex argumentation of the Hezbollah’s leadership about this subject. In a recent interview on OTV, the Secretary General Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah presented point by point the motives and the logic behind this involvement (“Bila Hasana”, 2013). First, Hezbollah’s involvement was minimal, and started in early spring 2013 by a logistic support of approximately estimated 30 000 Lebanese citizen residing in Qusayr’s region which has special economic and social ties with the Northern Bekaa region in Lebanon mostly inhabited by a Shiite pro-Hezbollah majority (“Bila Hasana”, 2013). When this logistic help was not enough anymore because of the lack of the Syrian forces there and the big number of foreign Jihadi fighters arrival to this front, the party sent some of its fighters there to protect the population. Nasrallah stated that this involvement was crucial because without it, these armed groups would have invaded the region and would have connected directly with the Lebanese borders from were arms smuggling was already very important (“Bila Hasana”, 2013). This decisive intervention led to the cleansing of Qusayr and its region from these armed groups. In the meantime, around 40 to 50 Hezbollah fighters were defending the grave of Sayyeda Zaynab in the suburbs of Damascus (“Bila Hasana”, 2013). This mausoleum is highly relevant to the Shiite faith worldwide, and according to Nasrallah, the invasion and destruction of it would have caused a violent religious war in the whole region (“Bila Hasana”, 2013). So the presence of the party there was very important to avoid this fatal booming of violence. Finally, Hezbollah’s leadership considers that the invasion of Syria’s bordering areas with Lebanon by Jihadi armed groups would have dramatic
consequences on Lebanon: dozens of car bombs would be smuggled to Lebanon’s territory causing by these eventual explosions a Sunni-Shiite sectarian war in Lebanon. The intervention of the party in Syria is by that mean a saving step to Lebanon’s stability by avoiding the dragging of the country into civil war again. As Al Mussawi said it, it is considered as a preventive war for the survival of the pluralist and multicultural Lebanon (Al Mussawi, 2014).

But there are some incremental causes of this involvement that goes beyond the official discourse of the Party of God. The next part will try to summarize them.

- Tacit causes of Hezbollah’s intervention in Syria’s conflict

The causality of the participation of Hezbollah in the Syrian conflict is not only resumed to the declared motives by the official discourse of its leaders. Some of them can be framed more in a regional logical approach. These unstated causes can be mainly summarized in two major ideas.

The first explanation of the involvement in Syria is linked to the alliance of the Party with the regime of Bashar Al Assad. The fall of this regime will endanger not only the arm supply road of the party that starts from Iran and passes through Syria to Lebanon, but also threaten the very viability and existence of the party in Lebanon. Indeed, the activity and the strength of the party on the Lebanese local political scene was backed up during the 90’s by the influence of the Syrian regime which let for the party a stronger positioning on this scene. Without the dissuasive backup of the Syrian regime of the Hezbollah, political groups that are opposed to the strategy and the activity of the party will beneficiate from a wider margin of maneuver in their political struggle against the local influence of this party.

That leads us to the second issue which is included in the same logic but from a regional approach. The downfall of the Assad regime will strongly cut off the links of the Hezbollah with the regional Shiite crescent that includes Iran, Iraq, and Syria with its
Alaouite regime. The defense of the regime of Damascus by the Party of God is in that sense more than existential for the sake of the pan-Shiite transnational axis.

But the involvement of the Party of God in the Syrian civil war, even if based on a much diversified causality argumentation, resulted in the emergence of a number of direct or indirect consequences that will be developed in the next section.

3- Consequences of Hezbollah’s involvement in the Syrian civil War

The active implication of the Hezbollah in the Syrian civil war resulted in a various number of direct and indirect security and political consequences on Lebanon. The following part will first present the direct visible facts that are linked to this involvement, and then will try to analyze the issues that are suspected to be caused by it.

- The visible consequences of Hezbollah’s participation in the Syrian conflict

It is clear that political, social and security activities of various Lebanese actors are tightly correlated in a cause and effect interaction. The effects of the activities of Hezbollah as a major Lebanese political actor seem to be even more important. By conducting a chronological overview of the major political and security issues of the past two years on the Lebanese political scene we can notice some relevant facts that can be directly linked to, on one hand the alignment of the party besides the Syrian regime, and on another hand, the later military interference of it in this neighboring country.

When the Hezbollah was officially only denying the legitimacy of the uprising in Syria in its discourses during the first year of the conflict, it suffered a lot concerning its already weakened and questioned popularity among the Lebanese non-Shiite citizens. The Sunni street showed a more threatening radicalized oppositional vehemence against the party (Majidyar, 2014). Voices began to rise demanding from the party the same reaction that was chosen by the Hamas: concretely the divorce with the Assad regime as a reaction to the repression of the Syrian revolution. By choosing the support of the regime, the Hezbollah enforced the sentiment of oppression of the Lebanese Sunnis already enhanced by the party’s attitude and actions on the Lebanese domestic political scene since 2005. Another issue that happened to occur during this preliminary period is
nevertheless the kidnapping of Lebanese Shiite pilgrims near Aleppo in their way back from Iran to Lebanon in a bus on the 22th of May 2012. Regardless the happy ending of this chapter on the 29th of October 2013 by the liberation of the hostages in exchange of two Turkish pilots kidnapped in Beirut during summer 2013 (Malkin, 2014), the event shows how the choice of Hezbollah’s alliance with the regime endangered a whole Lebanese community and put it in a risk of revenge actions by the foreign and domestic supporters of the Syrian opposition. Of course these direct consequences gained in importance with the official declaration of the military involvement of the party in Syria. This unilateral decision weakened the bases of the strategic political alliance with the major Christian political ally of the Party, the Free Patriotic Movement of General Michel Aoun (Légaré, 2013). The alliance has played a key role for the Hezbollah in breaking its political isolation and going to a trans-sectarian equilibrium since the redeployment of Syrian troops from Lebanon in 2005 (Légaré, 2013). Undeniably, this coalition based on a bilateral agreement between the two political formations managed to revitalize the legitimacy of the Party of God at least by opening towards other Lebanese minority groups. But the agreement between the two parties was based on the interactional dialogue around the weapons of the Hezbollah and the issue of its use. By this unilateral implication in Syria, the Party of God endangered one of its last important links that impeaches its confinement in the Shiite Lebanese community.

But there is still more visible security consequences caused by the engagement of the party in Syria. Their enumeration here is highly relevant. We have to mention a few incidents that are highly connected to the involvement. At the very beginning of the military intervention in Qussayr, and as an act of vengeance, rockets began to hit on a daily basis some of the Lebanese Shiite towns and villages of the Hermel region bordering Syria. The responsibility of these acts was claimed by the Syrian rebels. Later on the 29th of May 2013, two rockets were also launched against the Shiite majority inhabited Southern suburbs of Beirut, considered as the major stronghold of the Party (Rizk, 2013). And finally the most dangerous of all is the consecutive two car bombing explosions that hit these same mentioned suburbs on the 9th of July 2013 and on the 15th of July 2013 (alkhabarpress.com, 2013). Both of them happened in crowded residential popular areas and caused a lot of civil casualties (alkhabarpress.com, 2013). Then, although maybe not that directly linked, we have to mention the double suicide bombing attack
against the Iranian embassy that is also situated in this same suburbs and which happened on the 26th of November 2013. Finally the recent series of suicide bombings in Haret Hreik’s Al-Arid street of January the 2nd and the 21st -attributed to various radical wings of the Syrian rebellion- (Annahar, 2013), as well as the suicide bombings in Hermel and the rockets that hit that Northwestern city during January 2014 as well as the other terrorist attacks enumerated previously in this study, can be considered as a consequence of their involvement in Syria’s war.

All these incidents shows a gradual and growing willingness of vindictive revenge against the implication of the Hezbollah in Syria which have drastic consequences on the security and the stability of precisely the Shiite regions of Lebanon, and globally on the whole country and its distancing policy towards the Syrian conflict and its importation.

However, here also, the pro-intervention discourse is using the same arguments but in another order. For Ammar Al Mussawi, the preventive war managed Lebanon from a greater wave of terrorist attacks against not only the Shiite-majority inhabited regions, but on the whole country (Al Mussawi, 2014). In this logic, the terrorist attacks are not an act of retaliation or vengeance against the Party’s implication in Syria, but rather is a danger that ultimately would hit Lebanon anyways, since the Takfiri radical Islamists do consider Lebanon as a part of an eventual great Sham Islamic Emirate. For the Hezbollah, conducting a preventive war in Syria happened to weaken the impact of the wave of terrorism coming from Syria towards Lebanon (Al Mussawi, 2014). This argumentation can maybe find its relevance to some extend with the visible decrease of terrorist attack’s intensity since March 2014, which happened in concert with the important military achievements of the Syrian regime and the Hezbollah on the Qalamoun front (Nassief, 2014). The succession of military successes on that front could contain the flood of smuggled car-bombs from Yabroud.

Behind these factual visible consequences there is a large range of indirect and hidden consequences that are presented in the next part.
The indirect consequences of Hezbollah’s participation in the Syrian civil war

The indirect effects of the active involvement of the Hezbollah beside the Syrian regime is linked to its consequences on the radicalization of the Lebanese Sunni community, as we saw it earlier, which considers itself politically dispossessed by the Shiite movement since the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafic Al Hariri in 2005, especially that a majority of the this community considers the Syrian regime as the responsible of this criminal act. So the help provided by a Shiite Islamist Movement to an Alauite regime which is repressing a Sunni Syrian population in its majority is perceived as an aggression to their community. And since the systematic incapacity of the Lebanese moderate Sunni political formations led by the Future Movement of containing this trend, the Sunni street is more and more, day after day, dragged towards radical Islamist and Salafist national and transnational formations that are extolling a flaming speech that encourages a violent resistance to this trend (*L’implication du Hezbollah en Syrie, entre accusations et démentis, 2013*). Especially that some of Lebanese Sunnis are since the beginning of the unrests in Syria, getting involved there by adhering to various radical Jihadi fighting formations (*Gresh, 2013*). That means in a way that Lebanese are actually getting to fight each other in Syria with all its severe consequences on the social and national cohesion regarding the frame of a healthy state building process in Lebanon.

In addition to these statements, but nevertheless in the same logical analysis, the parenthesis of Al-Assir phenomenon developed earlier is important to mention here as well (*Gresh, 2013*). This Salafist radical Sheikh, mentioned in the second chapter, started to have vehement preaches against the unjust and unequal role of the Hezbollah both on the Lebanese local scene and regarding its participation in the Syrian conflict (*Kostrz, 2013*). Soon, he began to urge his audience to react against this situation, first pacifically then by encouraging his community to get armed for regain the honor and protect the Sunnis in Lebanon, and to go to Syria for the holy Jihad against the regime and its allies. Despite the elimination of his movement, at least formally, from the Lebanese landscape that happened later by the intervention of the Lebanese National Army against his stronghold in Saida (*Kostrz, 2013*) -as a reaction to the bloody ambush perpetrated by his
men against the army\textsuperscript{11}, the raise of such political or religious figure tells a lot about the dangerous consequences on the Lebanese stability of Hezbollah’s involvement in Syria.

Moreover, we can’t forget the stagnation and impasse that resumes the Lebanese political situation more and more going to emptiness in its institutions. It started with the parliament when its members, trapped in the impasse of agreeing on a consensual new electoral law for the legislative, unanimously postponed the date of the legislative elections for a year and the half; But also the inability of a compromise regarding the formation of a new government after the resignation of Prime Minister Najib Mikati that lasted for 11 months. Of course the involvement of the Hezbollah in Syria is not the only reason of the institutional coma, but still it is considered as a major factor in this regard, especially when analyzing the discourses of the opposition, which refuses any deal until the withdrawal of Hezbollah’s fighters from Syria.

Also, legitimizing such kind of intervention under any type of argumentation opens the door for other formations or groups to do the same.

Finally, the intervention of the Hezbollah in Syria led to a very important, albeit neglected consequence: according to Ammar Al Mussawi, the listing of the party’s military wing on the European list of terrorist organizations is directly related to its intervention in the Syrian conflict. The “Europeans let us know that they understood our involvement in Qussayr’s battle, but they told us to stop there” he said. “When we answered that we will go wherever we are needed, they added us on the list” he added (Al Mussawi, 2014). More globally, this listing would influence the Lebanese banking and economic sectors, and put a little bit more pressure on the back of the party.

As a conclusion, we must say that after presenting the Hezbollah in its actual political frame which showed the complexity of the situation, this study case presented some of the motives and causes that led to engage militarily the Shiite Islamist Movement actively in Syria’ civil war. The most important of them are related to the preservation of the regional status quo balance that endangered the so called “Axis of Resistance”; but also related to the containment of

\textsuperscript{11} See about this subject chapter II in part B paragraph 4, in this study.
the destabilizing flood of radical Jihadis which may imperil the security and the very existence of Lebanon. Finally, the analysis showed that this intervention had cost a lot to Lebanon regarding the consequences on its security, political and social levels. Responding to the problematic question asked in the introduction, it is very difficult to evaluate the involvement of the Hezbollah in Syria especially that the ongoing conflict there will last and is still in actuality now with all the uncertainties concerning its ending. The answer to whether this implication protected somehow Lebanon’s safety or, in a contrary, is a major factor in pulling the country towards a contamination from Syria’s war, remains most likely somewhere in the middle: the presumed validity of the arguments that are in favor of the interference in Syria are certainly relevant concerning the containment of the violent flood of Jihadi and Salafist organized armed groups with all their aspects (we just have to look in to Iraq as a counter example, with the recrudescence of the violence there since the control by these armed groups of the Syrian side of the border, and all of its consequences on the Anbar district). But the costs and consequences of this decision are nevertheless very harmful for the already fragile Sunni-Shiite Lebanese coexistence. The hope horizon lately drawn by the Iranian-American rapprochement will maybe in some extend help the Cedars’ country in avoiding the ultimate catastrophe.

But, albeit the most important and the most decisive, the Hezbollah has not the exclusive monopoly of the Lebanese initiatives in intervening in the Syrian conflict. Other actors attest about a deep involvement in this neighboring war. The next part will mention them in a brief overview.
B- Other implications in the Syrian civil war

The daily observation of the Lebanese mainstream media, the political declarations, statements and talk shows, lead the analyst to discover various forms of accusations and counter-accusations which accuracies can be discussable. This is due to the actuality of the subject which is still deprived of deeper scientific study that needs some time to maturate. Considering this, the following paragraphs can only enlighten the possibility of the veracity of such accusations, by presenting them as they are, just to have a clear total view on the ongoing events related to the topic of this research. The main concerned groups are definitely the different Islamist radical movements emerging inside the Sunni Lebanese milieus, which are much diversified, but still marginal compared to the moderated forces in this community. Beside these formations, and framing it within the observation mentioned above, the Future movement was the first, way before the Hezbollah, to be accused of arming and supporting the Syrian rebellion. The most concerned person by these accusations is the Future movement MP Okab Sakr, who in partnership with Saad Hariri, was suspected by some local newspapers and televisions of organizing this support from his self-exile in Istanbul (Mortada, 2012; Kalam Ennas, 2013). The other actors of this implication are described under the next parts of the chapter.

1- The Lebanese Salafists and Takfiris Radical movements

We have seen through this study the rise of the radical Islamist Sunni movements to the level of constituting a major part influencing the situation of the internal Lebanese scenery (Mazis and Sarlis, 2012, p.85). To avoid redundancy, the following paragraph will very briefly clarify the different aspects of this phenomenon. The growth in importance of such movements is inscribed in the general sentiment of marginalization among the Sunni community to which the moderate parties failed in bringing any considerable solution (Hamoui, 2012). This sentiment of marginalization comes because on one hand the Sunni community feels incapable to contain the paramount power of the Shiite Hezbollah on the Lebanese domestic scene, and on another hand because of the implication of Hezbollah next to the Syrian Alauite regime which is seen as a part of a big conspiracy against the Syrian Sunni community (Hamoui, 2012). But the phenomenon of the Islamist Salafists and Takfiris in general is older than the Syrian current civil war. The creation of such groups—which some
of them are affiliated to Al-Qaeda- rose up for the first time in 2000, when one of these groups attacked and entered in combat against the Lebanese army in Donnieh in the North (Haddad, 2013). Then in 2007 came the events of the Naher El Bared Palestinian refugee camp of Tripoli. At that time, the Lebanese army entered a bloody military campaign of eradication against the Islamist Jihadist terrorist group of Fateh Al-Islam which proclaimed an Islamic Emirate within the camp, and launched an open war against this army (Rougier, 2012; Haddad, 2013). A lot of the captured terrorists are in Roumieh’s jail and waiting for their trial.

There are nevertheless a category of tolerated Sunni Islamists. These groups are mainly present in Tripoli and Sidon, two Sunni strongholds. These Salafist and Ahbash groups are various. Some of their leaders are notorious. We can mention here Sheikh Omar Bakri Fustok –previously expelled from London- or Dai Al-Islam Al-Shahhal, but even Ahmad Al-Assir before becoming outlawed, whose case was developed earlier in this text. Some of these leaders have openly encouraged their militants to go for fighting in Syria, by proclaiming Fatwas for this end. Some of them are organizing the recruitment and the sending of the combatants (Lefevre, 2014). The previously mentioned Tal Kalakh ambush which caused the death of dozens of these fighters is a direct result of these activities.

Finally, the third level of this phenomenon is the recrudescence of the Al-Qaeda affiliated groups which are already operating in Syria, but are turning towards Lebanon in a vindictive way, especially since the Hezbollah’s involvement in the conflict. There are a lot of these kinds of Takfiri and Salafist terrorist cells in Lebanon; and some of them are cooperating with each other, but also with the previously established mentioned Fateh Al-Islam, and Jund Al Sham. These cells used the security vacuum of the absence of the Lebanese state inside the Palestinian camps of Ain El Helwe and Naher Al-Bared to deploy there and to prepare various kinds of attacks (Chararah, 2013; Al-Akhbar, 2014). We can list in this matter the Al Nusra’s Lebanese wing, ISIS’s Lebanese wing, the Ahrar Ahl Al Sunna Fi El-Bekaa, and also, the one that showed to be the most dangerously effective one: the Abdullah Azzam Brigades. This last group is responsible of the majority of the previously presented blasts against the Southern Shiite Suburbs of Beirut. The Lebanese army’s intelligence forces managed to gradually stop their activities, by first catching their leader Majed Majed –who eventually died mysteriously while in custody- and a lot of key operators
such as Naim Abbas, who ultimately switched and sworn allegiance to the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria or ISIS (*Al-Akhbar, 2014*).

The tight interrelations that link the two countries are visible on this field to, with the deep trans-bordering implication and cooperation of a big number of Islamist radical organizations. This is done in both directions: from Lebanon to Syria, and from Syria to Lebanon, with the participation in the two trends, of Lebanese, Syrians and even Palestinian refugees. These activities shook on several times directly the Lebanese security and stability, and represent a major factor in the risk of the Syrian war’s spillover to Lebanon from its sectarian Sunni-Shiite prism.

### 2- Other minorities’ implication

When it comes to the other minority groups that can possibly be implicated in the Syrian conflict, we consider the Christian minorities, but also the Druzes. The Lebanese Druzes are probably the community of which leadership are showing the greatest respect to the distancing policy. The Christian leadership is also doing the same, but some elements tend to raise an alternative frame of analysis concerning the issue of their involvement. Until now, Lebanon has been the only place in the Near-East where the phenomenon of Christian fighters has relevantly emerged. It was during the Lebanese civil war, when the various Christian parties formed their own well organized militias. But since the unrests in Syria have taken a dramatic and bloody tendency, sparing nobody from violence, the Syrian Christians are getting militarily organized for their self-defense, mostly on the regime’s side. Even if the neighboring Lebanese Christians are deeply divided on the subject of the Syrian war, no Christian Lebanese leader has called to get involved in Syria to help the Christians there (*El-Zein, 2014*). This shows a contradictory position with both the Lebanese Sunni and Shiite which, as we saw it previously, are actively taking part in the conflict. However, tacitly, the Lebanese Christians have expressed some wishes in joining the Syrian battlefield, but their eventual number and activity remain very marginal and mostly coming from personal unorganized initiatives. We witnessed this trend essentially on social media during the invasion of the Christian town of Maalula (*Facebook, 2013*). This involvement can be measured on three different levels. The first one, which is the most concrete one, concerns the bordering Christian villages in the northern part of the Bekaa valley, where
citizens have expressed their growing fear from the threat of Takfiri groups that may attack them in the frame of the neighboring Qalamoun battles (D’Arc Tailor, 2013). Indeed, some local notables of the Christian towns of El-Qaa and Ras Baalbeck attested of an activity of arming some men, in collaboration with the Hezbollah, for self-defense, in face of the eventuality of the arrival of Takfiri groups to the region. The second level can be linked to the recent reports of individual European initiatives of joining the battle zones in the Kurdish area in the fights against radical Islamists. These Europeans have Syriacs and Assyrians, Syrian or Iraqi origins (Hamish, 2014). The eventuality of the participation of Lebanese citizens from these communities can maybe prudently be predicted or envisaged in the future. But we have to underline that this is just a prognostic statement. The third and final level to be mentioned here is the probability of the involvement of the Armenian community in Lebanon. In fact, many of the Armenian Syrians found a refuge among their Lebanese fellow brothers. And since the deep cooperation and sense of mutual aid within this community, the recent events that took part in early 2014 in the Armenian Syrian town of Kassab—with all the ink that flowed internationally on social media, which even involved Armenian US celebrity Kim Kardashian (Tremblay, 2014) - open the eventuality of the implication of some members of this community in the neighboring war.

This is how the various factions, groups, communities and sects of Lebanon are being implicated actively in the neighboring Syrian conflict, out passing by that the state’s institutions, borders and threatening the integrity, security, stability and even the identity of the country. The analysis leads the reader to reconsider the notion of Lebanon itself, by questioning its future destiny that will be definitely affected by the presented various activities of its citizens.

12 Some personal connections with citizens of these villages attested and confirmed during summer 2013 the organizational activity of arming the locals for the eventual self-defense in front of the radical rebel groups that are threatening the region via the Qalamoun’s Jurd.
Conclusion: Beyond the Impact of the Syrian conflict

The reader of this concise presentation about the many aspects and consequences of the impact of the Syrian civil war on its Lebanese neighbor is definitely dragged towards pessimistic thoughts when it comes to the future of the region, and specifically its outcomes on Lebanon’s destiny. We have witnessed through the text that the Syrian crisis is affecting Lebanon on all possible aspects that can be imagined. Starting from the huge weight that the refugees represent, to the various security developments, the political situation and the economy’s health, it seems more than obvious that Lebanon is suffering and struggling for the survival of its identity and existence. In addition to these different problems which Lebanon has to go through, the deep and active involvement of many nationals –groups or individuals- is worsening and complicating the situation, linking by that more and more strongly, the respective destinies of both countries. This is why, reading the body of this study may push to losing hope in Lebanon. But hope is still not gone. If the will of the contagion was adopted, the country would be in chaos since long time ago, if according to the data presented previously. Until now, the strong will of sparing Lebanon from the contagion has been very clear. This will is measured both nationally and internationally. The domestic political actors, all of them, besides their day to day fights for influence, attested a relatively high level of maturity. They finally understood that the recurrence of violence in the shapes of a civil war would harm them all. Their dangerous playing with fire stops always at a crucial point right before the possibility of a failover. This domestic tendency seems to be accompanied by an international tacit agreement of setting-apart Lebanon’s stability from Syria’s, and saving it from a spillover.

In addition, it is important to underline that the Lebanese domestic political field is very rich and diversified. The analysis of its realities and dynamics has to go broader than the confinement to the tight scope of its political parties and formations. In fact, the civil society is very developed and its actors are actively taking part in all the issues of the public life. Scholars and analysts have neglected the role of this force. The reason of this can be found in the exclusive nature of the Lebanese political system, in which the only leviers are found within the frame of the sects. Reaching political power is mostly only possible throughout the religious community of the citizen, which is a sort of a midway bubble between the citizen and the state, unavoidable for the success of this quest. Sects are like the syndicates or the corporations in the Western democracies. This mechanism was institutionalized by the Lebanese unique political system. But the weakening of this political system due to a partial failure in state building process, which is
enhanced by the repercussions of the Syrian conflict, could let the emergence of the civil society from the outside of this sectarian establishment. Ultimately, this lift up could maybe question the system as such, and open the way towards a wider reform process such as the taboo subject of a possible constitutional revision for instance. To simplify the idea, the civil society could play the role of the catalyst in a systemic change of a weakened regime. The developments related to this civil society in the past two years are numerous. We can mention the “Thawrat Al Banadoura” or the tomato revolt against the self-prolonged members of the parliament. Also, the first civil marriage celebrated in Lebanon, thanks to a clever bypass of the law by a couple. The constant civil and cultural events in Beirut and Tripoli, even during the clashes there, to show the world about the true image of tolerance and coexistence in the country is nevertheless a relevant example. The spontaneous popular reconciliation of the two rival neighborhoods in Tripoli right after the declaration of the empowerment of the national security plan there, the commemoration of the Lebanese civil war and many other events assure the maturity of a great majority of Lebanese citizens considering any retaliation of a former civil conflict.

To conclude the prognostic view of the probable outcomes of the Syrian conflict’s impact on Lebanon, all the data tend towards the same observation. The neighboring war seems to have frozen the Lebanese democratic mechanisms, tended to the dilution of the borders between the two countries, strongly affected the state building process, and endangered the Lebanese identity. But despite the dangerous character of these realities, the Lebanese are showing a high level of immunization. This is done by a low profile attitude. Indeed, the fields where the contagion might happen are simply and pragmatically shut downed in the waiting of the end of this long-lasting war, without taking into consideration moral or theoretical principles.

But what is the solution for Syria? On what model could be made an ultimate compromise for peace there? Would the Lebanese experience of its own civil war be an example for Syria? What about the minorities there? Will they have the destiny of the Iraqis? The Lebanese experience of Taef has until now failed in achieving its goals of reconciliation. In a contrary, it has legitimizd the accession to power of the former militia leaders, due to the amnesty law about the war crimes. The official Lebanon is living amnesia about its own past, and there is no possible agreement on a common history until now. In theory, the most probable scenarios for Syria are three: a split into small sectarian states, a modern laic state including all the minorities, or the endless continuation of a bloody war. Until now, the third probability seems the most legitimate
one, since there is no concrete hope in the short run to a possible solution, and history has proved that these kinds of civil wars need time to reach compromise’s maturity.

But speculating on the Syrian future cannot be done without its contextualization in its regional frame. The role of Iran and Saudi Arabia is very important in the war, but the simplification of the events to its Sunni-Shiite aspect is misleading again the complexity of the analysis. Clearly, here again, there is the very controversial question of the clash of models. Are we the witnesses of Huntington’s clash of civilizations? Or the Middle Eastern paradigm of the traditional religious and cultural coexistence will be the winner? The two trends were concretized in the creation of two neighboring states: Israel and Lebanon. The first is based on the communitarian monopoly of one ethno-religious group, namely the Jewish; while the second was born from the common agreement of 18 religious minorities in forming together a model state where all communities coexist in mutual respect and guarantee of their respective rights. The final remaining question is which tendency will be applied upon Syria in the future? The future of the Lebanese identity’s survival is linked to this last mentioned issue. For Lebanon, it is clearly told in this famous saying: “awwalouha Sham, wa akhirouha Sham” (It starts in Damascus, and ends in Damascus).
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Annexes

A- Interview with Sayyed Ammar Al Mussawi
B- Interview with Elie Ferzli
Interview With Sayyed Ammar Al Mussawi
Hezbollah and the Syrian Conflict

By Elias Dahrouge

Subject: The impact of the Syrian civil war on Lebanon.

Interviewed: Former Lebanese MP Sayyed Ammar Al Mussawi, Head of the International Relations of Hezbollah party.

Interviewer: Elias Dahrouge.

Place: Mussawi’s office, Sfeir, Southern Suburbs of Beirut, Lebanon.

Date: Wednesday January the 29th 2014.

Language: Interview made in Arabic, translated to English by Elias Dahrouge.
1- What is Hezbollah’s position about what is happening in Syria?

A. Al Mussawi: “What is happening in Syria is not only an international conspiracy against the Syrian regime and the strength of its central power and influence over Syria, but also over the Syria of the past that we use to know.

Syria had a key role in the region during the past decades (Golf War, Iran/Iraq war, Arab/Israeli war…). This role tended to be usually not compatible with the Western policies for the region.

For this reason, we consider that what happened in Lebanon in 2005 was to force Syria to go out from Lebanon. This was of course framed in the post 9/11 US policy of George W. Bush’s administration, including the war on Afghanistan and Iraq, which consisted in a plan for 8 countries (including Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Sudan, Syria and Lebanon…) for a project of a so-called new Middle East. We can see that for instance this project succeeded in Sudan lately with its partition.

Of course we cannot deny the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people for freedom and democracy, but what happened there after the beginning of the unrests is not coherent and irrelevant for this process. The legitimate motives were quickly perverted: the peaceful protests were transformed into a militarized conflict for the annihilation on purpose of Syria.

The danger of this concerns all the neighbors of Syria and not only the Syrian land. The Jihadis are even a threat to Europe! But European policy makers are not clear with their citizens about the reality of this problem.

So for us, the Syrian conflict is a conspiracy based on the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people. This statement is proved by the current situation with all the Jihadis presents in there and their actions. All of this is done to hit Syria from inside and probably for the aim of its division or partition.”

2- What is the main cause of Hezbollah’s intervention in Syria? Any unrevealed cause?

A. Al Mussawi: “The reason is 30 years of alliance with Syria which helped and protected the resistance (Hezbollah) and helped the outstanding against Israel. And of course because it is a conspiracy and that we are attached to Syria and its wellbeing.

I can list for you three main causes:

First, it is a right and a duty to stand by your neighbor.
Second, it is better to have a helping allied regime rather than an aggressive one which is against the Resistance. The resistance will be surrounded (Israel in the South and Syria East and North) in that situation.

Third, the disaggregation and crush of the Syrian regime and its control will lead to the rise of those extremist terrorist groups. Those groups (which are proliferating in Northern and Eastern Lebanon as well) are a threat for all Lebanon, All groups included. The intervention of Hezbollah there is a preventive war for it. It is a moral duty to defend Lebanon and the Syrian regime which has a lot of bad things but has also a lot of good things and advantages. If presidential elections were done today, Bashar Al Assad would get 65% of all of the Syrian voters… Syrian citizens asked for a change, but it is not that change that they want.

For the second part of the question, of course we have nothing unrevealed, we state everything openly.

And I want to add something: why it is that the majority of these Jihadi groups operating in Syria have Saudi citizens on their heads? Is it not weird? Even if the Saudi state says that those are wanted men, the reality is different. France which is actually combating the same people in Mali is helping them is Syria, of course adding it to Saudi Arabia and Qatar…

And for those who say that those groups are made by the Syrian regime to change the identity of the initial Syrian revolution the answer is that they cannot do anything without support right? Even if the regime released them from jails when it proclaimed general amnesty, they would be useless without support. They are a part of the Salafist Jihadi matrix.”

3- Is Hezbollah’s intervention a decisive one?

A. Al Mussawi: “Yes, I can assure it, Hezbollah’s involvement in Syria created great differences on the balance of the battlefield and its equation. Even the Westerners say it: the intervention of Hezbollah in Syria was a great turning point in the conflict. And the crucial battle that concretized it is Al Qussayr’s battle. Why? Because Hezbollah is well prepared and trained for those combats which are guerilla and urban combats. So the Hezbollah’s intervention changed the whole situation. And this point is what led to the madness of Saudis. And so the car bombs came here. All of this shows the fail of the Saudi investment in Syria. They were expecting to have a quick change there, but this revealed to be a failed plan. The Syrian situation will bring changes in Turkey and in Saudi Arabia. This change already occurred in Qatar this summer: the changes there were highly linked to what happened in Syria especially after Al Qussayr. Qatar changed because of the resistant tenacity of Syria. They were first betting on that the regime will fall within 6 months…”
4- **Was the participation of Hezbollah in Al Qussayr’s battle crucial, decisive? No victory without this intervention?**

*A. Al Mussawi:* “Yes, the participation was crucial, and I can tell you that Hezbollah was fighting alone on the field there. The Syrian Arab Army was only assuring artillery and air support.

This battle will be taught and explained in strategic military lessons. Some military analysts already started studying it.

And to prove also the importance of this battle, when it had ended, the Europeans let us know that:”we understand your involvement in Qussayr, but it is enough now”. Our answer was “we will go wherever we will be needed”. For that reason they put us on their list of terrorist organizations.”

5- **To what extend is the decision of Hezbollah in participating in the ongoing Syrian war is independent vis-à-vis the decisions of the Islamic Republic of Iran?**

*A. Al Mussawi:* “Iran supports us of course, but we actually showed the Islamic Republic that we deserve this support. We are not a tool in Iran’s hands as the world often describes us, we are partners and we do collaborate and interact with each other on bases of mutual respect and equality. And I will tell you even more: if Hezbollah was not sure enough of the imminence of its intervention in Syria, it would not intervene. Even more than this, it is the visionary analysis and argumentation of Hezbollah that drawn Iran into the Syrian conflict with this level of weight and intensity. The real fear and danger that represents this war is not on Iran: for Hezbollah it is a matter of survival and an existential issue, for Iran it is only a strategic one.”

6- **Against whom are you fighting in Syria?**

*A. Al Mussawi:* “As I said earlier, we are fighting against the armed groups. There is nothing called “Free Syrian Army”. It is only about murderers and street cutters who are destroying everything. We are fighting those who are threatening the future of Syria.”

7- **In which areas are you fighting? Where exactly?**

*A. Al Mussawi:* “We are fighting wherever we are needed.”
8- Is there any possibility of withdrawal from Syria in the near future? What would be the causes of such decision?

A. Al Mussawi: “When the causes of our intervention will be gone we will go out from Syria. Hezbollah was the last faction to get involved in Syria, and I mean it and stress on it: the last one!”

9- Is there a relation between putting the Hezbollah on the European list of terrorist organizations and the role of the party in Syria?

A. Al Mussawi: “Yes of course. As I said earlier Europeans let us know that they understood our involvement in Al-Qusayr’s Battle. But they told us to stop there. When we answered that we will go wherever we are needed they added us on the list. The Burgas bus blast was a cover for that. We actually tell and we are proud of our acts when we do them. But it is not of our interests to do such acts especially that far and against civilians. France was actually the last significant bastion to be against the listing of Hezbollah. But France changed its mind especially due to the Saudi pressure on it. Saudi-American relations are going a little bit bad lately, so Saudi Arabia is turning towards France successfully (we can see the investments made there) and can make pressure on France because of this.”

10- How the decision of the intervention did come?

A. Al Mussawi: “If you have a brother next to you who is suffering and having difficult days, you must help and intervene.”

11- Which are the most dangerous consequences of your intervention?

A. Al Mussawi: “One of the most dangerous consequences is the growth of the depth of the Lebanese political vertical division. Lebanese are axed in two camps. It is very important because parties are betting either on the downfall or on the survival of the Syrian regime, and are acting depending on this bet on a local level. This is affecting the inter-Lebanese relations.

The disaggregation of the Syrian situation was also partially caused by the interference of the Lebanese interior forces intelligence department (fere’ al Ma’loomat). Who let the Lutfallah II ship full of weapons enters Lebanon before that the Army stops it?

The Syrian refugees are now more than 1.5 million in Lebanon. The costs of the crisis on Lebanon are until now more than 9 billion USD. This is resulting in a real tension and pressure on the local Lebanese situation.

The danger linked to the refugees can come with the regularization or legalization of their statuses. If they get refugee cards or status, it will let us fear the renewal of the Palestinian experience even if the Syrians can go back after. But this last point depends on how long will last the crisis in Syria…”
Do not forget that until now there are more than 250,000 Lebanese citizens who have lost their jobs because of the Syrians (who are a cheaper manpower than the Lebanese).

And then let me speak about the explosions:

For the explosions and bombings there is a big disagreement between those who think that Hezbollah drawn this situation to Lebanon and those who think that this form of terrorism would actually come sooner or later and was already actively present in the country. Actually the conditions for these events were already given by the Syrian situation so the result is not surprising. There are specific costs and actually we are paying the price of the Sunni incompetence: it is the responsibility of the Sunni leadership and elite which did nothing to eliminate the causes of these threats. Just look at Akkar region, it is not developed despite the fact that Sunnis ruled for 15 years, why? And the bombers were until now all Lebanese Sunnis.

We can say that the Sunni community has a grown anxiety concerning the rights of their community because of the Syrian conflict.”

12- What is the link between the unrests of Tripoli and the Syrian conflict?

A. Al Mussawi: “The events of Tripoli are older than the Syrian conflict and preceded it. But they totally developed and grew bigger due to the neighboring conflict. In Tripoli there are some local factors that engender escalation of violence. The last round of fights for instance has nothing to do with Syria: It was a street message from Ashraf Rifi to Saad Al Hariri because Hariri accepted to cooperate with Hezbollah…”

13- Al-Assir, was it particular case? Or a trend?

A. Al Mussawi: “Al-Assir was a special case. And this file was treated without a visionary analysis. What was wrongly done is the initial cooperation with him on an official level for the assimilation and absorption of this phenomenon.”

14- Is there a threat on the Lebanese entity? How?

A. Al Mussawi: “We can say that Lebanon’s destiny is related to what happens in Syria.”
15- Where is Israel in all of this?

A. Al Mussawi: “The Syrian war is advantageous for Zionist Entity: the Arabs are busy between each others. But the Entity is also worried because it is not capable to predict the outcome of this conflict exactly. The Israeli position is in between feeling of comfortable and the fear of the unknown. The Mossad’s leader recognized that there is around 30 000 Jihadists operating in Syria. There are also the rockets launched from South Lebanon on Northern Israel. The Jewish State knows that the perpetrators are Islamist Jihadi groups, but it can use it as a motive to strike anytime on Lebanon.”

16- What is the solution in Syria? Until when?

A. Al Mussawi: “The solution is the partnership and the cooperation. The solution is the political solution, without any diktat from outside. Geneva II conference is only a waste of time, and there is no solution in the near future because the world is not ready to recognize that the status quo in Syrian cannot be broken. But there is an urgent need of fighting against terror which is threatening everybody.”

17- Is it a sectarian war?

A. Al Mussawi: “The Syrian conflict has the forms and shapes of a sectarian war, but it is actually not. It is a war between those who are defending the unity of Syria and between those who want it to be ripped off and divide. The proof that it is not a sectarian war is that most of the members of the Syrian army are Sunnis. This army is composed of more than 400 to 500 brigades. Only one of those brigades has declared the desertion.”
Interview with Elie Ferzli
Lebanon and the Syrian Conflict

By Elias Dahrouge

Subject: The impact of the Syrian civil war on Lebanon.

Interviewed: Former Vice-President of the Lebanese Parliament and former Minister and MP Elie Ferzli

Interviewer: Elias Dahrouge.

Place: Ferzli’s residence, Baabda, Lebanon.

Date: Monday February the 2nd 2014.

Language: Interview made in Arabic, translated to English by Elias Dahrouge.
1- What are the relations between Lebanon and Syria, and what is the impact or the Syrian war on Lebanon beyond the apparent and obvious discourse?

Elie Ferzli: “We have to search for these relations far away in the History. We have to go back to the Ottoman Empire: Mount Lebanon during the Mutasarrifiyya was an equation at that time, a special entity submitted to a contract. This deal was the protection and deterrence of this entity of the foreign invasions versus the protection from the Arab inlands. But when Mount Lebanon tried to show up and break this equation (like during Fakhreddine for instance) the inlands invaded it. So it was in a sense the protection from possible gaps in exchange of autonomy or independence. The equation stayed the same even with the creation of Greater Lebanon with the famous quote “we do not want Lebanon nor a land of passage neither a land of residence” (“La nuridu lubnan mamarran wa la maqarran”). The security of the inlands which happened to be Syria was related to the assurance that Lebanon would be in the same path. This quote was later on developed and became the famous “unity of path and destiny” (with Syria). This quote was also redeveloped lately by the Maronite Patriarch who said that “we do not want to be the path of instability towards Syria”.

So let’s sum up those relations in 4 major points:

First there is the geography which is important to be mentioned here. Lebanon throughout the decades had changing political borders, but the reality, the real Lebanon is the same since the ancient times (as mentioned also by the Torah). Lebanon is the mountain and the only entity that has defined natural borders that separates it from its neighbors. The others are all artificial borders. These borders are defined by the chains of Mount Lebanon, Anti-Lebanon and the Bekaa valley in-between. And this region was the aspiration of everyone.

So these security and geographic relations impose a reality: any problem in Lebanon would be a kind of intervention in Syria and vice versa. The security of Syria emanates from Lebanon and the security of Lebanon emanates from Syria. There is a strong interdependence especially after the implantation of Israel in the region and the attachment of the Palestinian issue with the Lebanese.

Second, the economic relations: the only path or corridor for Lebanon with the Arab inland is the Syrian border, and vice versa. Let me tell you an anecdote concerning this particular point: in the end of the 90s we took a decision in the parliament, we approved the so-called “Dahieh Project” which was planning the building of the modern Beirut-Damascus highway. In a meeting with the US ambassador at that time, he asked me “will you ratify the project? I like Lebanon so you have to be fast and ratify the project.” I was
troubled and did not understand the reason of this speech. Of course as a Bekai I wanted the project because it will link the region to Beirut. Then I understood why he told us to be quick and let us jump on the opportunity. It is linked to the story of Haifa and its port, the port of the Israeli Empire. Israel’s project on a long term is to transform Haifa as the port of the Middle East, the transit point between the Mediterranean and the Arab inlands. This role was given initially to Beirut. Lebanon would have become for Syria and the Arab World the same as Hong Kong is for China. But the Israeli conspiracy works towards the undermining of this project.

Third, there is the information and the media relations. Lebanon is the perfect tribune and media platform for the region. All the Arab putsches were prepared in Beirut. Syria’s media security is in Beirut and this since the Roman Empire when the Lebanese capital hosted the greatest faculty of law.

The fourth point is in relation with the geographical relation. It is nevertheless the most important. It is the social interrelations. The Syrian social environment is very similar to the Lebanese one. All the religious communities are present in both countries, and are sometimes relatives (such as the Druzes which have transnational families). The Sunni-Shiite conflict which initially started in Iraq after the US invasion was easily brought to Lebanon because of this similar social constitution. It was imported by Hariri.”

2- **Is there a concrete way to respect the policy of self-distancing towards Syria?**

*Elie Ferzli:* “There is no self-distancing. This policy requires an abstract and just Lebanese mind which is impossible. The best that Lebanese can do is what was said by the Maronite Patriarch. But this cannot be done because Lebanese have all a mercantile mind…”

3- **The Hezbollah’s intervention is more a danger upon Lebanon’s stability or more a preventive war that will protect Lebanon against the unknown?**

*Elie Ferzli:* “Hezbollah’s intervention in Syria is a preventive war against the Takfiri Jihadi Salifist movements and armed groups which see Lebanon as a part of the great Sham Emirate and this fact is non discussable. They want an Islamic Emirate state in the region where there will be no place for anybody. This threat is even more dangerous on Hezbollah than Israel. The war in Syria will last long; it will not stop in the short term.”
4- Is there a real threat due to the affluence of the massive number of Syrian refugees to Lebanon?

*Elie Ferzli:* “Yes of course, the threat is first of all economic but also social and related to the security (we can see it with the many sexual aggressions for instance) but also the intelligence threat (from both side, the Takfiris and the regime). The threat is also with its impact on the demography; it is a real challenge on the Lebanese social environment.”

5- Is there a threat on the Lebanese entity?

*Elie Ferzli:* “Of course, it is the threat of the federalism. The war in Syria is inscribed in the continuity of the so-called clash of civilizations. It is the new form of colonialism in the region. Israel is the concretization of this project in the region: divide it according to the religious communities. It is the plan of the American Neo-conservatives and they are trying to apply it in Syria. You must read Kamal Dib’s book about the fall of Christian Lebanon…”