

The Effects of Arab Spring and Syrian Uprising on Lebanon

This paper seeks to analyse the multiple dimensions of the effects of the Arab Spring and Syrian uprising on Lebanon since its inception in 2010. For obvious reasons, the main body of this work will be dedicated to the effects of the Syrian turmoil on the Lebanese scene. The main arguments hereafter will try to show two main effects on Lebanon. Firstly, I will highlight the spill over effect the Arab Spring had on certain groups of the Lebanese civil society and how these actors mobilized a population to address a claim for the abolition of the sectarian system. Secondly, I will underline the polarization effect the Syrian conflict creates in the political scene in Lebanon due mainly to Lebanese actors who use some of its main dimensions (e.g., political, sectarian) for their own purposes.

In order to develop these arguments, I will divide the presentation in three sections; the first section will demonstrate the initial impacts on the Lebanese society and also delve in the first political reactions about the Arab Spring and its spreading in Syria since March 2011. The second section will explore the direct impacts on the ground of the latest crisis, focusing on security issues and refugee questions, describing the State positioning, to underline the representations of the potential danger that are threatening Lebanon. The third section will illustrate the process of sectarian division that deepened among the Lebanese Muslims sects, mainly Sunnis and Shiites, and highlight the strategies followed by the antagonistic political coalitions of 8th and 14th March, mainly their two leading political formations Hizbullah and Al-Mustaqbal.

1. First Impacts on the Political Scene and Civil Society

What exactly *are* the impacts of the Arab Spring on Lebanon? During the first year in Beirut, a sceptical attitude toward the answer was usually underlying the fact that “of course, almost nothing happened!” because the Lebanese perceived or would like to persuade themselves that their country was above these contentious demonstrations against the regime that only took place in authoritarian regimes. Of course this answer was missing the fact that historically, Lebanon has always been a resonance chamber for all local crises, for instance, the Israeli–Palestinian crisis, the Shia–Sunni divisions, or the US Bush Administration’s vision to transform the Middle East.

Regarding the Arab Spring, one can acknowledge that uprisings in the Maghreb have not significantly impacted Lebanese politics. They have been perceived as quite far from the local scene, as their regime were seen as authoritarian. Even the Bahraini uprising was seen as far from the Lebanese scene, and only Hizbullah played the local Shia card of this uprising to loudly criticize the Bahraini power. It is only the Syrian case that has dragged the local scene in the general turmoil of the “Arab Spring.” But this scene cannot be separated from the civil society who expresses needs and demands related to politics in–line with Arab uprisings.

The Lebanese political scene

This Syrian uprising emerged in a context of a political vacuum in Lebanon, due to the overthrow of Hariri's government in January 2011 under the pressure of Hizbullah's March 8th coalition,¹ and contradictory pressure put on the new Premier, Najib Miqati, to gather a new government. Within this context, both political coalitions had to take into account of a Syrian role in the Lebanese government formation process. The political blockings that Miqati faced during the six months that it took to find an agreement generated contradictory explanations regarding their causes. For the 14 March coalition, it was clear that Damascus had interests to maintain a political vacuum in Lebanon in order to transform its political scene as battlefield to send its messages addressed to the International community. 8 March analyses was at the opposite, suggesting that US pressures on the Premier, Najib Miqati and President Suleiman explained the postponing of government formation. The fact is that an agreement was found thanks to Nabih Berri to form the government a few days before the Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL) unfolded an indictment against 4 of Hizbullah's members in Rafic Hariri's assassination investigation. Needless to say, the new political coalition in power did not hurry to try to catch these four men.

Examining the political spectrum, the least that one can say is the events in Syria greatly interested Lebanese elites. Seeing the former ally (or ruler) being challenged by such an important social protest was surprising, and the brutal responses the Syria regime gave tended to deepen the split of the Lebanese political scene along the dividing line of 8/14 March groups. The length of this "Syrian Spring" and its social repercussion in North Lebanon with refugees fleeing combats zone worried Lebanese officials. Less so because of refugees themselves than the answer the Lebanese State has to give. The sinking of Syria in a slow motion civil war also worried the Lebanese people in general. First, because of the political crisis that happened at the same moment following the fall of Saad Hariri's government and resulting in the vacuum of power that lasted six months (from January to June 2011), and second, because of a radicalization of Syrian power and its opponents that led the Lebanese scene to mutual accusation of support to both the Syrian Liberation Army (SLA) for the 14 March and to the government's "shabiha" for the 8 March.

Most of the Lebanese 14 March statements refers to or are articulated by international actors' positions towards Syria as if what is at stake is not what the Syrian population wants, but how the current crisis affects Syria's position in the international game. It means that, following the international community, 14 March leaders stayed mute in front of Deraa's first uprisings in March–June 2011, but changed their opinion and voicing against Syrian regime after the massacres that occurred during that summer. On the pro–Syrian side of the political spectrum, other international player, like China and Russia, are working like assets for 8 March positions that has adopted the governmental scenario of "armed gangs" that spread violence putting the Syrian State security and unity under threat. Mostly, 8 March saw and continue to see in popular contestation a plot to destabilize the Syrian front against Zionist/American hegemony over the Middle East.

¹ If the 8 March coalition withdrew from Hariri's cabinet, on 12 January, the input came from Hizbullah's parliamentary bloc who was worried about the attitude that such government could adopt when facing the STL accusation affecting Hizbullah's members. It is also clear that such strategy was adopted after an agreement with Jumblatt's block joining the 8 March coalition and so providing a new majority in Parliament.

By the end of July 2011, after an extremely brutal repression in Hama (80–100 dead), the UN Security Council decided to isolate Syria in denouncing such actions which led to a pull back on the international scene of a few Syrian allies (like Turkey) and created a significant distance with the Arab League members that added to sanctions by the end of November 2011. One country seemed to follow its own way by refusing such marginalization: Lebanon. It abstained to vote any sanctions in the Arab League and on the UN Security Council (as a non–permanent member in 2011). Warning signs for some “neutral” politicians on the Lebanese scene arrived from Damascus two days after the Arab League decided to stop its observatory mission in Syria.² In fact, Lebanon appeared to be stuck between its external allegiances and its internal challenges to maintain a political equilibrium.

A part from the two main political positions of 8/14 March groups, few more neutral/central figures emerge during the crisis due to their specific role (like Prime Minister Miqati or President Suleiman), or due to their personal tactical strategy (as the Druze leader Walid Jumblatt). The evolution of the positions of such a power broke (on the local Lebanese scene) are quite revealing of the slow but real inflexion that can be observed regarding Syrian power in Lebanon mirroring its internal crisis. Historically aware of adopting cautious stances regarding its own sects’ interests, in March 2011, Jumblatt started to be “an ally of the Syrian regime” wise enough advising Bashar Al–Assad to enforce reforms. This position was most dictated by warning signs of avoiding any repercussion of a Syrian crisis in Lebanon. Jumblatt’s position changed after Hama’s repression and the subsequent UN condemnation. More recently, due to several episodes of international condemnations and sanctions through the UN, Jumblatt seems to have come back to 14 March positions as noted by few leaders of 14 March—since its support to sit–in for the Syrian uprising by end February 2012.³ This figure is quite illustrative of that local pragmatism of cautiousness and cowardice. Another actor, the Maronite Patriarch Raï, created an earthquake among Western chanceries when he declared on 7 September 2011 that Bashar Al–Assad needed more time to implement new reforms. This statement, immediately identified as a pro 8 March position, was, in reality, quite understandable regarding Christians worries in Middle East in the perspective of a breakdown of Assad’s power. More recently, Greek–Catholic Patriarch Gregorios III reaffirm that riots in Syria were gang’s responsibility (April, 2012), contrary to Patriarch Raï who has since switched to a neutral position in March 2012, calling for a non–violent Arab Spring.⁴

Among the 8 March coalition, the main trend in statements slowly became that Damascus could succeeded to launch and run several reforms, more than a strong fidelity to that regime. Another aspect that gained ground in most of 8 March groups statements is that one has to stay out of Syrian security affairs to consolidate the “Arabism fortress” in order to avoid any sort of political abuse from Western powers to overturn Lebanon in a stronghold of counter attack against Syria. If Michel Aoun, leader of the Free Patriotic Movement, used to think the popular revolt in Syria as an international conspiracy, Hizbullah adopted at the beginning one of the strongest line of defense of the Syrian regime, as they said that preventing in this way “any attempts to undermine the Resistance.” In the meantime, one has to notice a contradictory position of Hizbullah when the party stated that Tunisian and Egyptian revolts were “great victories” without any sort of external US interventions. In the same vein, strong statements in support of the Shia uprising in Bahrain against the monarchy were released by Hizbullah when the movement faced a heavy repressive response. A first slow down appeared in Hizbullah’s statements, following Iranian inflexion by the end of August 2011, when

² See: www.nowlebanon.com, 31 January 2012.

³ See: www.nowlebanon.com, 24 February 2012.

⁴ Regarding several meetings he attended that month, focusing on Christian–Muslim coexistence.

Hassan Nasrallah called for the Syrian regime to implement reforms for the first time. Later on, observers noticed less and lower statements of Hizbullah regarding Syrian politics. More recently, in a mid-March 2012 speech, Nasrallah started to call both sides to simultaneously lay down their weapons and condemning “all forms of massacres” because anarchy was not turning beneficial for the Resistance. But, in that same speech, he also raised the point of introducing a counter-violence at some point of the deterioration process in Syria in order to avoid any bad consequence for Hizbullah (Noe, 2012).

The 14 March support to Syrian protesters was at the beginning mitigated even if this coalition is the outcome of the so-called “Cedar Revolution” process that ended the Syrian imperium on Lebanon. One of its leaders, Saad Hariri, waited until July 2011 to express his open “compassion” for the Syrian people. One can observe that, until mid-summer, the whole 14 March coalition chose to follow a “cautious” approach to the Syrian crisis, arguing that it was an “internal affair” and probably afraid of outcomes that could spread to Lebanon. However, with the pursuit of the repression, some members of this coalition started to call for an end to this bloodbath. Then, after Hama’s massacre and the Saudi condemnation followed by Obama’s call to President Assad to stop such behaviour, the 14 March coalition started to more openly criticize the Syrian regime, describing it as “criminal,” and also started to describe 8 March coalition as supporting “the last authoritarian stronghold” that should breakdown soon. Knowing that Iranian *pasdaran* have probably been sent to Syria in order to help and advise Assad regime on how to deal with massive protest movements, the 14 March coalition started spreading the idea that some Hizbullah fighters went to Syria in order to help in the repression. Such accusation that appeared in Autumn and Winter 2011/2012 have been followed by same accusation of 14 March supporting the protesters, notably in arms smuggling and financial support to the Syrian Liberation Army (SLA).

The Civil Society: The Anti-sectarian Movement

Out of its effect on the political Lebanese scene, the “Arab Spring” gave a new input to civil society groups, opening a new imaginary among the Arab youth and large sector of the societies (Challand, 2011). And in Lebanon there is a tradition of mobilization, in the post-civil war era (from the civil movements of the 90s to the Cedar Revolution in 2005) that allow them to launch their claims through digital and social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, using the same slogan heard in Tunisia and Egypt: “the people wants the regime to fall” (*al-shab yourid isqat al-nizâm*), and just adding “confessional” (*al-taïfi*) to define the regime. This showed a charged dimension of this political system, its over determination by confessional belonging through power positions devoted to sects at the upper level of the State, and also it denotes how heavy the power of religious authorities is perceived by this part of the civil society. “Each Arab country have one dictator, we, in Lebanon, have at least seven or eight” said the protesters. Their claim targeted a secularization of the political system, a struggle against corruption, and increased social justice.

The anti-sect movement (ASM) founded support and resources in the civil society actors network stemming from militant groups of the 90s that all sustain an ideal of a secular society for Lebanon. These groups, associations, and NGOs brought their expertise and skills built during years and through past experiences into the ASM. There are several generations of actors within it and no linear history, but one can find at least a starting point in 2010 with the first “Laique Pride” movement. This first gathering originated on Facebook talks among activists to promote a secular change in Lebanon, focusing on a claim for a secular law for

personal status including marriages. Many among these people still had a militancy network and were involved in promoting, in a way or another, secularism in Lebanon. For instance, groups or NGOs which respond to the call for a “Laique Pride” were for instance “Union des Jeunes Libanais Démocratiques,” “le Mouvement de la Sté Civile” linked to the “Mouvement Social” created in 2001 by Mgr. Gregoire Haddad, the Secular Club of AUB, and “Le Rassemblement Populaire pour la Laïcité.” When the demonstration of the Laique Pride occurred on 25 April 2010 and gathered roughly 5,000 participants, it created hope to follow-up and re-open the debate among a vivid civil society. An informal meeting took place, under the name of “Rencontre Séculière” that aimed at coordinate efforts to shape an anti-sectarian movement of broader size. The main strategy of organizers was to target the confessional system through specific problematic like the reform of the electoral law and the law for a civil personal status, etc.

On 17 January 2011, Tunisian President Ben Ali is forced to flee abroad under popular pressure that erupted a few weeks after a massive uprising. Following this example, Egyptian people gathered massively beginning 25 January and President Mubarak fell from power on 11 February. It’s in this context that the Laique Pride gave a press conference on 20 February to announce the 2011 edition of this demonstration. During the press conference, a split happened as several members express their will to expand their claims, regarding the regional context. The “Rencontre Séculière” then launch a call on social networks to gather on Sunday 27 February in order to claim for the abolition of sectarian system. If no long-term strategy was initially taken, this new born anti-sectarian movement succeeded to gather numbers of participants in several cities of Lebanon (Saida, Nabatiyé, Tripoli, Tyre, etc.) to hold this slogan, and in Beirut, 20 March 2011, a rally turned to a great success when approximately 20,000 participants marched from East to West Beirut. In their view, implementing a secular State that would change the power establishment, would create a “domino effect,” undermining the impact of sectarianism on society and so on clientelism, a corrupt and poor governance of public goods responsible for a lack of social justice. These demonstrations were also a great success regarding the diversity of people they brought together: Lebanese as well as Palestinians, woman and men from several age categories and from several sects too. On the ideological side, several civil society associations and advocacy NGOs came as well as few leftist and secularist intellectuals or even religious personalities and some leftist political parties. Thus, the Anti-Sectarian Movement (ASM) re-introduce in the public debate this question of secularization of the political system as part of political topics at stake.

After four months of dense activism, the ASM ended its activities to focus on more theoretical work in order to learn lessons and analyse problems it faced in order to draw some lines for the future. A major problem has been identified by ASM activists is that due to a massive influx of new young members bringing pluralistic point-of-views, two options have been created for the future. One could be described as reformist line, calling for opportunistic alliances with several political parties, and the second option that can be describe as the revolutionary line which refuses any kind of collaboration in order to avoid any sort of legitimization this social movement could give to any political party. Another problem that ASM faced was political interferences as SSNP and Amal tried to take control of the movement, sometimes using threat. Such problems came to light in the moment several members wanted to express solidarity with the Syrian protesters. One can note that some members then chose to leave the ASM in such troubled ambiance. Briefly, this ASM experience during the 2011 mobilization showed on one hand a possible enthusiasm of some segments of the civil society and on the other hand, illustrated the blocking of the political system facing such social demands.

Regarding this last aspect, the opportunistic attitude of the ruling class has been twofold; either to use the ASM claim in order to bring a new asset in the political debate (Jumblatt, Berri), or to try to integrate the movement in a political campaign (Hariri)—all positions having a political agenda and none of them wanted to treat the movement as a social force in itself. Several segments of this ASM group re-launched a new mobilization for social justice that gathered 400 people on 27th February 2012, expecting to reawaken the anti-sectarian movement.⁵ Some others gathered with the annual Laïque Pride that had a mitigated success in 2012, gathering only 3000 people for a March on 6 May.⁶ And last but not least, another group emerging from ASM chose to mobilize in a Civil Campaign for Electoral Reform on 13 May and organized a March toward the Parliament, asking for a new electoral law based on proportionality and decreasing the voting age to 18.⁷

2. The Lebanese State and the direct Syrian Impacts: Security and Refugee Issues

After the civil war and the Taïf Agreement (1989), and since its military withdrawal in 2005, Syria's tutelage over Lebanon have consolidated the dependency of all major players of the political scene built since the end of the civil war (1990). And even after 2005, the internal stability clearly stays in the Syrian hands and its influence on some political parties remains significant. In this balance of power between the two countries, the Syrian popular protest against the Assad regime and the war they have been slowly dragged on due to the brutal repression it faced is having side effects on Lebanon at several levels. Two dimensions will be discussed here. First, I will analyse the security issues and the State policy as to find a “neutral” posture regarding its powerful neighbour and the political rivalry between 8/14 March blocks. Secondly, I will examine the Syrian and Palestinian refugee question and the danger they represented in seeking refuge in Lebanon.

Security Issues and the State Policy

The combination of lack of power in Lebanon and riots in Syria that have lead to significant amount of Syrians to seek refuge in North Lebanon produced a general fear for violent clashes. If nothing on this scale happened, one has to notice several abductions and attacks that continued after the formation of Miqati's government. Since September 2011, Syrian military incursions started to occur, and several Lebanese citizens were killed. Since October 2011, the Syrian army mined its border with Lebanon in the North, and in the meantime, the uprising decided to form a military branch, the Syrian Liberation Army (SLA). The Miqati government then tried to react in a “neutral” way, in bringing back to their country former Syrian soldiers who fled in Lebanon or “repatriate” some Syrian opponents, in coordination with the Syrian regime. Several other incidents like the killing of two Sunni clerics at a checkpoint in May 2012 opened the door for some accusation regarding Lebanese Army's loyalty sent by 14 March MPs.⁸ These very dangerous accusations were also targeting the State policy, contested by 14 March coalition, as it has been promoted by Prime minister

⁵ See: *The Daily Star*, 27 February 2012

⁶ See: www.nowlebanon.com, 6 May 2012

⁷ See: www.nowlebanon.com, 13 May 2012

⁸ Statements made just after the killing of the two clerics in Kwaikhat, but also explicitly referring to the blockade imposed on Syrian refugees (Wadi Khaled episode) in November 2011.

Najib Miqati under the label of a “dissociation policy.” This policy which tried to keep a balanced posture for Lebanon between its own opposition and the Syrian regime has been supported since its inception by 8 March coalition and the President Suleiman as a way to preserve Lebanon from contamination of violence. In other terms, Lebanese authorities have constantly tried to ease their relationships with the Syrian regime in avoiding any provocation or criticism. For some analysts, this policy has probably protected Lebanon from any direct attack from the Syrian regime to destabilize the country (Salem, 2012). In the meantime, this policy has not protected the 8 March government against a wave of distrust that emerge in the aftermath of the assassination of the security chief officer Wissam el-Hassan and Miqati was advise to resign by end of March 2013.

The direct investment of Syrian intelligence or actors in destabilizing Lebanon appeared several times, mostly in a blurred manner. In 2011, three roadside bombs exploded on 27 May and 26 July in the nearby of Saida, and 9 December near Burj al-Chemali camp near Tyr, targeting and hurting UNIFIL patrols. Each time, several scenarios were raised about who would have interest in hitting UNIFIL international soldiers, and each time a “Syrian hand” seemed to be a serious hypothesis. The third time, a change occurred; it was no more 14 March members who brought such suggestion, but the French Foreign Minister Alain Juppé who expressed his concern about a Syrian threat targeting UNIFIL through its local ally, Hizbullah. This hypothesis has its foundation in Syrian official reactions stating they will react to US and EU economical sanctions against several top Syrian officials. For US and European leaders, as well as for the 14 March coalition, the tense strategy in Lebanon was built to divert attention from Syrian battleground. Meanwhile, all these statements are grounded in political interests, each State having its own agenda regarding a possible military intervention (as it was discussed at some point during that winter). On another occasion, the implication of the Syrian authorities seemed to have been clearer. At the beginning of August 2012, a so-called “plot” was revealed by ISF who just jailed former minister Michel Samaha, a closed ally of the Assad family. Explosive charges were found in the trunk of his car after he just came back from a trip to Damascus and, moreover, he seemed to have made confessions about plans for several attempts in order to destabilize Lebanon. These revelations shed a brutal light on a Syrian strategy to attracted Lebanon in its internal war in targeting sectarian leaders. They also put Syrian allies like Hizbullah in a very uncomfortable position to the point that no statements were made to try to “save” or at least protect M. Samaha. On its side, State leaders as Prime minister or the President asked for explanations to Syrian authorities and to Bashar Al-Assad himself without receiving any answer.

Regarding abductions and disappearances, the Syrian implication seems to be clearer. One of the most well-known and discussed in the media was the abduction in the Bekaa valley of 7-Estonian bikers on 23 March 2011. After their release mid-July, one of the kidnapped gave an interview, clearly mentioning its belonging to PFLP-GC, a Palestinian-Syrian-led group still active and stipend by Damascus. Moreover, in February 2011, three protesters and activists spreading flyers calling for reforms in Syria disappeared. At the end of May, Chibli al-Ayssami, 86 year-old co-founder of Baath Party, and member of the Syrian opposition disappeared. This lead to virulent diatribes between Hizbullah and Saad Hariri that accused Syrian Embassy in Beirut to be the central command of all these abductions and disappearances.

In Tripoli, the North-Lebanon capital, a Sunni city with a significant Alawite minority, numerous riots have occurred, opposing two suburbs roughly classified as pro-Hariri in Bab al-Tebbaneh and Pro-Syrian in Jabal Mohsen. These two strongholds of antagonist identities

regularly entered in violent confrontations (snipers, shellings) since the Syrian military withdrawal of Lebanon in 2005, and have their roots in the civil war when the Syrian troops took over Tripoli in 1984, killing hundred of Sunnis in Bab al-Tebbaneh and arming the Alawite militia of the Arab Democratic Party (ADP) located in the Jabal Mohsen suburb.⁹ Regardless of a ban to protests in the city, approved by the Security Council of the North, a pan-Islamist party, Hizb al-Tahrir organized two demonstrations in 2011. During the second one on 17 June, violent riots occurred opposing Sunnis and Alawites in a brutal way, which left 6 dead and more than 20 injured. Since then, Tripoli has become a sound box of the rivalry between pro and anti-Syrian groups in Lebanon with no less than six rounds of violence happening between the two suburbs, the last one in December 2012 leaving no less than 17 dead and 100 injured after one week of fight, raising questions about the capacity of Al-Mustaqbal leaders to stop the killing and the Lebanese Army not intervening sooner. Apart the violent confrontation, what slowly took place among the Sunnis of Tripoli is the identification of the enemy not only as “the Alawites” but also as “the Shiites.” In this sense, one can talk about of the importation in Lebanon of categories of enemies at war in the Syrian conflict. It seemed to having take place when Hizb al-Tahrir shouted anti-Hizbullah slogans during one of their last demonstrations in November 2011, translating the Sunnis-Alawites antagonism into a Sunnis-Shiites one. It erupted on a larger scale mid-May 2012, after the arrest of an Islamist supporting the Syrian uprising, with strong battles in Tripoli between Bab Tebbaneh and Jabal Mohsen followed by riots in Beirut in Tarek al-Jdideh area when pro-Hariri supporting the Syrian uprising and opponents of the ADP fought after the aforementioned killing of two anti-regime Sunnis clerics near Halba.¹⁰

If the violence seemed to reach Beirut, one may notice many demonstrations occurred to support Syrian protesters as well as in support of the Syrian regime without skidding in violent clashes. They were sometimes strong and intimidating, notably when both groups faced in front of the Syrian embassy in Hamra. Several organizers of anti-Assad demonstration mentioned difficulties to succeeded their mobilizations pointing out that counter-mobilization systematically occurred at the same place in the same hours, as a way to discourage any public support to Syrian protesters. Even the Bristol Hotel which was supposed to host a 14 March demonstration supporting Syrian opposition in Spring 2012 decided to cancel its reservation when facing threat from pro-Assad partisans.

Since November 2011, many Syrian incursions of the Army regime occurred near the Syrian border in North of Lebanon as when, for instance, gun fire erupted over the border, targeting fugitives or smugglers, but also reaching Lebanese citizens in the northern area and North East Bekaa near al-Qaa village causing damages and civilian victims. For instance, in September 2012, a journalist of a pro-Syrian newspaper was killed by a fire shot across the border.¹¹ In general, such incursions and incidents dealt with a manhunt, abductions, and sometimes assassinations of regime opponents or army deserter. In fact, it occasionally put political pressure on Lebanon in widening the division among Lebanese political forces in re-enacting the never-ending debate about the State power and its weakness when facing Syrian threat. Each of the border issue with Syria provoked a political tension as 14 March immediately launch accusations against the complicity of Miqati’s government and the inability of the Lebanese Army to protect its own population because of political choices that let the Syrian Army violate the Lebanese sovereignty.

⁹ See: ICG (2010)

¹⁰ See: *Le Monde*, 22 May 2012.

¹¹ See: *al-Akhar*, 9 April 2012.

Despite this difficult context, the 8 March coalition members and the government seem to have succeeded to stay in control of the security institutions or using them to keeping the activities of their political rivals under control. It appeared bluntly when Hizbullah's intelligence services have shown its capacity to put the pression on some political actors of the 14-March coalition, in showing Okab Sakr's support to the Free Syrian Army in December 2012 (see below)¹². Talking about the border, the securitization of some segment of it seems to be the result of a bilateral collaboration between the two State official institutions through a Joint Security Committee that stem weapons and fighters border crossing (ICG, 2012). In the meantime, as shown with the Eرسال's killing of Lebanese soldiers, 1 February 2013, during a manhunt in that village of the Bekaa close to the Syrian border, there is a process of politicization of the borderland region due to the emergence of the FSA. As explained by Eرسال's Mayor¹³, contraband and smuggling that were common for villagers with the Syrian Army just shifted since the popular uprising in Syria took control of vast areas of the Syrian territory and border zones with Lebanon as well, acknowledging the collaboration that smugglers have developed with FSA as the new force in control there.

The Refugee "Issue"

The border is also a location of transition, slowly transforming the surrounding areas in "border zones," as a sort of redefinition of a space thanks to its changing function. In the past, people from this region were surviving mainly in doing contraband and smuggling goods from one country to the other across this porous border. Today, this contraband has transformed in a new trade: helping the Free Syrian Army (FSA) and anti-regime fighters that need support, shelter and supplies¹⁴. In this sense, the North of Lebanon slowly became a new frontline for internal issues related to the security aspects of borderlands because of the massive influx of refugees arriving from Syria knowing that a part of them are members of the Free Syrian Army.¹⁵ On 29 April 2011, several thousands of Syrian refugees, mainly women and children, crossed the Lebanese border in North of Lebanon, fleeing repression and a terror strategy in their town Tell Kalakh (Balanche, 2011). From its inception, this flow of refugee was a concern for the Lebanese State and officials regarding the treatment and their categorization. The first groups that arrived found shelter through kin and clan help, local communities in Wadi Khaled and Akkar area, and also thanks to UNHCR and High Committee for Relief, a Lebanese institution that Saad Hariri as then-Prime Minister asked to assist Syrian refugees.

With the shift of government and the pro 8 March being on duty, the new Prime Minister, Najib Miqati, adopted a far more ambiguous attitude toward refugees. First, it stayed mute, preferably using force to close the border, trying to expel Syrian civilians seeking refuge in Lebanon, even threatened to jail several people and deported others, and turned a blind eye to the fate of people identified as traitors. Facing a growing arrival of refugees in 2012 as the current crisis in Syria continued, Miqati, still following its dissociation policy, tried to avoid any further problem in asking the ICRC to label refugee as "displaced persons" instead of "refugees" in order to avoid any gathering in camps or treatment under refugee international

¹² See for instance several newspapers during the first week of December. For a sum up, see *L'Orient le jour*, 7 December 2012.

¹³ See *Al-Akhbar* english online, 5 February 2013.

¹⁴ Interview with a journalist, Beirut, September 2012.

¹⁵ The Lebanese Army gives the figure of a quarter of them being members of the FSA. See *L'Orient le jour*, 12 October 2012.

convention. One can also notice a sort of criminalization of the refugees¹⁶ that lead Miqati to lean on Higher Relief Council more than on ICRC in order to enforce the use of “displaced persons” as a legitimate terminology as Social Affairs Minister Wael Bou Faour put in April 2012. It clearly appeared—regarding the political affiliation of the government—that this strategy relied on a fear, the meddling of the refugees with the Free Syrian Army, and a hidden agenda, the building of a pre-definition (or a categorization) of Syrian refugees as trouble makers as to justify in advance any type of repression. Finally, by the end of 2012, the Lebanese government shifted from a “no problem” policy to a “urgent international call” policy, acknowledging that Lebanon is facing a massive influx of Syrian refugees entering and staying in the country. This shift is correlated to the international call for donation launch by UNHCR at the same time. In April 2013, President Sleimane even stated that Lebanon is reaching its limits to take Syrian displaced persons in.

Since then, their numbers have grown in a significant way, thanks to UNHCR statistics, increasing rapidly between August 2012 and the end of the year, raising from 36,000 to approx 150,000 people, and knowing a major influx in the first trimester of 2013 to reach 428’000 by 18 April 2013. One must take note that such number is an estimated number of of Syrian refugees staying in Lebanon as some of them simply refused to register, fearing for their own security as Lebanon’s government is identified as a pro-Assad regime. The majority of them are now located in the North and the Bekaa, according to UNHCR and Beirut received a growing amount of them (reaching 18%) as well as the South of Lebanon (14%) now that Syrians are also fleeing through the Shebaa Farms area¹⁷. This can be explained by several factors, one of them is history and the second one is the conflict in Syria itself. History of the borderlands with Syria are ones of blurred areas, as far from the central power as they perceived themselves as Syrian more than Lebanese, according to oral testimonies (ICG, 2012). Transborder links, like marriages, traffics, and markets, existed previous to the delimitation of the “Grand Liban” in 1920 and persisted further as the separation have been seen as artificial and also because of the lack of interests of the central power in Beirut for such margins, defined like South of Lebanon as “under developed.” Today, conflict in Syria incites refugees to stay close to their country but in shelter behind the Lebanese borders. It is the same thought-process used by combatants of the Free Syrian Army and other anti-Assad groups as the area allows for the set-up of training camps. With the massive presence of refugees, it is not a surprise that North of Lebanon became a sanctuary for anti-regime activism, from where weapons are smuggled and injured combatants are tended.

Everything is happening as if the main fears of the Miqati government turned to be true; the northern part of the country has now become a stronghold for the Syrian uprising. It is either not surprising to discover that, regarding this new configuration, prominent politicians of the Mustaqbal appeared to have send money and weapons to support the anti-regime struggle. In this context, it is clear that settling down Syrian refugees in camps could ease the task of the Syrian uprising for recruitments of combatants and supporters. In the meantime, under the pressure of the international organization like ICRC, Miqati’s government seems to have adopted a strategy of “laissez-faire” turning a blind eye to a slow motion process of self-organization among refugees and the set-up of camps in a foreseeable future.¹⁸ More broadly, the 8 March coalition seems to be also afraid of another collateral issue if camps are provided for these refugees: their possible long stay in Lebanon. In effect, if the crisis ended by a

¹⁶ See Culture Minister Gaby Layoun statements in *Al-Nahar*, 4 April 2012

¹⁷ See *Al-Monitor*, 17 April 2013.

¹⁸ Interviews with ICRC Head of Mission in Beirut, September 2012 and April 2013.

government victory, needless to say that most of them will not go back easily. On the event of a breakdown of the regime, the ensuing chaos that will prevail will not be secure enough for most of the refugees to go back quickly (ICG, 2012).

A recent new issue appeared for Lebanon as a consequence of the Syrian war: the entering of thousands of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon after the fall of Yarmouk camp in Damascus. This new influx of refugees happened after a fierce battle during which Free Syrian Army and Islamists took over from Syrian security forces and Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine–General Command (PFLP–GC)¹⁹. It is a major turn for Palestinians in Syria regarding their cautious neutral position in the current conflict, after the withdrawal of Hamas from Damascus during the Spring 2012. The positioning of Hamas with the Syrian uprising and the internal division of PFLP–GC that occurred with the fall of Yarmouk camp are potential issues Palestinian refugees are bringing in Lebanon. Recent clashes in Ein el-Hilweh camp between Islamists partisans of Al-Nusra Front, that emerge in the battlefield in Syria, and the pro-Bashar PFLP-GC and the Saiqa headquarters²⁰ have ring the bell among the several factions of the camp. Afraid of any renewal of Nahr el-Bared scenario (destruction of the camp by the Lebanese Army), they have deal with that issue as no other political violence happened since then, undermining the dark scenarios of the erection of a new Islamists stronghold²¹. For Lebanon, to see Palestinian refugees arriving in such massive way unveiled old demons linked to the civil war and the division among Lebanese they provoked. The main tensions can arise from the living conditions these new refugees are facing, as they gather in overcrowded camps near Saida and Tyre. ICRC estimates their number up to 36'000. Other sources underline the mobility of two third of them as they are now able to go to Syria and come back without paying the individual entrance tax (50 US\$) more than one time. It put another pressure on the government as well as on UNRWA's inability to cope with such situation.²² And in the current context of tension among Muslim sects, the Palestinians, mainly Sunni, are stirring up the tension on that matter.

3. The threat of a sectarian confrontation Sunnis–Shiite

The Arab Spring, wrote an analyst, is a process that is experiencing a larger strife between Sunnis and Shiites across several countries of the Middle East. And a Shiite axis (Iran, Syria, and Hizbullah) seems to have provoked an objective alliance between USA, Saudi Arabia, Israel, and Turkey in order to limit its scope of influence (El–Alaoui, 2013). In this international context, Lebanon looks like as if it gathers all the contradictions of the region and also the tensions among enemies (as pro–Western elites have been openly confronting pro–Syrian elites for ten years). The second year of the Syrian uprising created more side effects in Lebanon as the initial hope of a quick resolution of the crisis is faded away. Several rounds of urban war in Tripoli in 2012 and a slow decline of the two parties at odds—Al–Mustaqbal and Hizbullah—have driven the country on dangerous paths of private violence (with the Moqdad episode last summer and the Sheikh 'Assir phenomenon in Saida). The Syrian strife between the Alawite power and the opposed Sunni–led armed groups seem to have spread to Lebanon through an older Sunnis–Shiites tension that found its basement in the political opposition 8/14 March. Actors between these two political blocks are using this

¹⁹ *Al–Akhbar*, 17 December 2012.

²⁰ See: *Al–Akhbar* english, 4 February 2013.

²¹ Interview with a leading figure of the Democratic Front for Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), April 2013.

²² See: *Al–Monitor*, 10 January 2013. ICRC decided to help UNRWA to face the crisis in providing first aid kit.

sectarian opposition to reinforce their discourse and position at the risk of provoking escalations that could get out of control.

Dangerous Games: Al-Mustaqbal and Hizbullah's Strategies

The sectarian dimension that has arisen is the by-product of a legacy of previous tensions and frustrations and a dangerous strategy followed by the two political parties that have tried to gather Sunnis in Al-Mustaqbal—the Hariri-led party, and the Shiites in Hizbullah—a clearly religious oriented party. The legacy appeared here as a process of crystallization of a belief among the Sunnis regarding their political marginalization that started with the assassination of former Prime minister Rafic Hariri followed by the return of a Syrian imperium on Lebanon through Hizbullah's arms power.²³ This should have been illustrated by weaponry demonstrations during the 2006 July war against Israel and, more problematic, the take over on West Beirut in May 2008 when Hizbullah launched a “coup” over the capital in order to conquer militarily a political decision that the party of God was not able to win through democratic rules. This explanation of what happened is, of course, partial but translates a major fear against a Shiite axis and a feeling of disregard for Sunnis' pride. From this point-of-view, there has been a reading of the “Sunni struggle” against Hizbullah as a mirror of the struggle of the Syrian uprising against the regime of Bashar Al-Assad. In other words, the Syrian uprising just came to bolster this sectarian perception of a broader struggle at the scale of the Middle East against a “Shiite axis,” giving confidence to Sunni Islamists to settle old and deep scores.

More concretely, as noted by ICG (2012) last report, the conflict in Syria allowed all Islamist groups to bolster their standing and reconnect with the sectarian depth. Which means a systematic sectarian reading of every event that affects any Sunni militants, as in May 2012 when riots started after a Lebanese Salafi anti-Syrian was arrested to have jihadi-leaning with “terrorist groups.” It is the same feeling that spread all across the community when two Sunnis clerics were killed on an military check point in North Lebanon and, moreover, when a prominent Sunni figure of the security apparatus, Wissam Al-Hassan, was assassinated in a car bomb in Ashrafiye in October 2012. The rage seen in the street of Beirut the next day was the result of this mobilization on sectarian strings. It also showed the dangerous game Al-Mustaqbal leaders have been playing and the price they paid that day in being unable to mobilize in a peaceful way along a political line. It is revealing at that point that the March 14 call for a demonstration against the Miqati government launch did not succeeded to gather more than hundreds of people. Both examples showed an erosion of the legitimacy of political leaders and among Al-Mustaqbal the continuation of a process of implosion (ICG, 2009), aggravated by the flight of the party's leading figure, Saad Hariri, in Paris for security reasons for over a year.

In December 2012, a pro-Syrian newspaper, *Al-Akhbar*, unveiled that Okab Sakr, an MP of Zahlé member of the Hariri party of Al-Mustaqbal, was clearly supporting the Free Syrian Army with money and weapons. The source of such revelation was the Information service of Hizbullah and this allows M. Sakr to launch a series of accusations that generated counter-accusations and raising the tension between the two political groups. Similarly, Hizbullah was accused in last October to have send combatants in Syria to take side with the Syrian regime

²³ And this representation of Hizbullah as the main enemy of the Sunnis became stronger after the indictment of four members of the God's party by the Special Tribunal for Lebanon in June 2011.

against the Free Syrian Army.²⁴ It appeared that several combatants of the party of God crossed the border to enter Shiite villages near Lebanon in order “to protect them” from the Syrian uprising at the risk of importing the conflict itself in Lebanon.²⁵ Both examples show how the tension among sects can be used to justify action, mobilize a group, and define what is right and wrong. They both illustrated the danger for Lebanese political actors to take side in the Syrian crisis at the risk of dragging Lebanon into the Syrian conflict or importing its main dynamics in Lebanon.

For its part, Hizbullah’s strategy regarding the current crisis in Syria relies on a strategic partnership with the Syrian leadership since the experience of 2006 July war when Damascus helped and supported the God’s party. More deeply, Syria is historically the strategic depth for Hizbullah, the country through which its role as the Resistance against the Israeli threat has been entrenched in the post-civil war era. In such condition of existence, Hizbullah never felt that another sustainable alternative to its support of the Syrian regime would have existed. In the meantime, its perception of the Syrian conflict is by large disconnected with the Syrian daily reality as Hizbullah never fostered a deep and strong relationships with any segment of the Syrian society, and always stayed in a more political and strategic cooperation level of analysis (ICG, 2012). In Lebanon, Hizbullah perceived itself as a powerful group with a high self-confidence regarding its lead on the political stage and its role in maintaining the Miqati government. This has some effects in the prolonged Syrian crisis environment: it seemed to reinforce the attraction the party can have towards its constituencies. One side effect is the collateral reinforcement of the sectarian belonging as the Shiites perceived themselves as vulnerable in the middle of the current Sunni-led turmoil of the Syrian uprising.

During the second year of the Syrian crisis, Hizbullah kept its alliance with the Syrian regime although it keeps a low profile about it. On the internal political stage, its alliances with Michel Aoun’s Free patriotic Movement and Nabih Berri’s Amal movement defined the core system of 8 March coalition around the main interest of preserving Lebanon’s stability. Various reasons why Hizbullah wants to keep this stability can be listed. First, it maintains a military status quo with Israel. Second, this stability is a key component to avoid any major clash between Sunnis and Shiites. In this perspective, Hizbullah uses the polemic around the American ideological movie “The Innocence of Muslims” to appear as a gathering figure crossing the sectarian differences and united against the US and Israel.²⁶ Third, the stability is provided through the containment of the 14 March opponents, continuing to refuse any erection of camps for the Syrian refugees and in the meantime supporting them with help and care and dissociating the political dimension of the crisis from its humanitarian aspects²⁷. Fourth, Hizbullah is making some concessions to support Miqati’s “dissociation policy,” for instance, in allowing the funding of the Special Trial for Lebanon or in not trying to support Michel Samaha, a close ally of the Syrian regime suspected of planning terrorist attacks.

The Raising of Entrepreneurship of Violence

A major concern that slowly appeared during 2012 is the lack of capacity of control that main political actors seem to have on their respective constituency. Several salient problems raised

²⁴ In its last inquiry, ICG (2012: 19) stated that, until now, Hizbullah have a minor involvement in the Syrian conflict.

²⁵ See: *L’orient le Jour*, 17 October 2012.

²⁶ See: *Al-Safir*, 18 September 2012.

²⁷ See: *Daily Star*, 1 October 2012.

that question during the past year and should warn any observer of the region: the rising power of entrepreneurship of violence. The eroding legitimacy of the political party, more the one of Al-Mustaqbal than the one of Hizbullah, lay on a lack of leadership that became apparent after the killing of Wissam Al-Hassan and conflicting interests among the party (regarding Islam, the alliance with the US, and the attitude toward the Shiites in Lebanon). For Hizbullah, the Al-Moqdad armed branch erupting and kidnapping Syrians during the summer have been revealing of the wear of social control the party can have over the southern suburb of Beirut. But other unfolded trafficking, corruption, and privileges of some relatives of Hizbullah's leaders have crippled the image of strong morality of the party of God and could reduce its impact on people's lives.

The kidnapping by the Al-Moqdad militiamen of almost 50 Syrian refugees supposedly linked to the Free Syrian Army and one Turk shed a crude light on the political scene last summer. Their justification for such a mass kidnapping was simple: one of their relatives had just been captured in Syria, presumably by the FSA. In effect, none among the State or political actors seemed to be able either to freed the Al-Moqdad relative in Syria or dismantle the "armed branch" of the Al-Moqdad clan in order to freed the kidnapped people.²⁸ During this crisis, Hizbullah kept a strangely mute posture although all the kidnappings and Moqdad's press conference happened in Beirut's southern suburb, one of the stronghold of the party. At first sight, a "manipulation" was seen as congruent hypothesis as the party would benefit from a pressure on anti-Syrian regime actors in Lebanon and also on members of the FSA entered as refugees in Lebanon. And of course, Hizbullah was supposed to be the key actor to unlock that situation and so appeared as an influent mediator in such crisis instead of being identified as taking side for the Syrian regime.

In fact, the way things turn later on that summer and the fact that, instead of intervening with their own people, Hizbullah let the Internal Security Forces (ISF) troops take over the area and capture the Al-Moqdad kidnappers unveiled another explanation: a weakness or incapacity to intervene before, during and to solve the problem. The reason behind is not that much a question of lack of force but probably more a lack of legitimacy, and raised the question of disturbance capacity that a Shiite clan can have. In fact, it is used in a Hizbullah stronghold, knowing that Hizbullah would avoid any direct confrontation as this 10,000 clan's members have a social and political weight that none can ignore (Harb & Deeb, 2012). What have happened can be analysed as a form of autonomization among the Shiites towards the leadership of Hizbullah within its own stronghold. As the Al-Moqdad deployed in arms, it can be seen as a new step in the dereliction of security control over the Lebanese territory—as it is also the case elsewhere in some areas of the country like in the Bekaa Valley. There, private vengeance groups acting like outlaws and the rise of a criminal market of hostages lead to a process of disenfranchisement of the sovereignty of the State over Lebanon's territory.

The ISF intervention against the Al-Moqdad clan put a temporary end to this anarchy in the southern suburb. Still remain the ripples and long standing effects in the mind of people regarding the way things can be done; it seems now possible for other groups, clans, and families to seek for their own justice if parties, leaders and the State are not powerful enough to do the job. This scenario could be read as following the "de-sectorization" process described by the French sociologist Michel Dobry (1986) who tended to describe a stage of growing insecurity, called "political fluidity" (*fluidité politique*) where the disconnection

²⁸ Cf. *Le Monde*, 16.08.12

among sectors of the society reduce the predictability of every day security. In Lebanon, the lack of power of the State is not really new but what seems to have masked it was the power of post-militia parties during the post-civil war era. The erosion of their capacity of control tends to reveal a far more chaotic security scene and as a consequence, a commination of the national territory in fragments more or less under the State power.

On the side of the 14 March coalition, the landscape seems more worrying as the phenomenon of militiamen erupting in the city and provoking significant clashes like the ones in Tripoli seem to have expand in Saida with the protest movement initiated by Sheikh 'Assir and its possible militarization. One can explain the appearance of 'Assir protest movement at the junction of a pauperization process of the city (and the lack of investments) and of an indirect effect of Hizbullah's weapons creating a deep frustration based on an powerlessness feeling that have spread among the Sunni community.²⁹ This constitutes a fertile ground for mobilization and seeking weaponry in order to gain a power of deterrence more than a capacity to confront Hizbullah (ICG, 2012). On a regular basis since last summer, Sheikh 'Assir tried to import this way of reading the reality in Beirut but failed to mobilize, although he threatened to set up a militia after a fight with Hizbullah's militants that turn to the death of several partisans of the Sheikh.³⁰ More recently, he made new attempts in the North of Lebanon³¹ when dead bodies of Lebanese fighters killed by the Syrian regime were repatriated, but it didn't seem to have been a successful as the local scene is already defined by several actors that monopolized the political expression.

In Tripoli, the entrepreneurship of violence seemed to have reached a normalization process, a form of autonomy that could alarm the 14 March coalition and Al-Mustaqbal in particular. With small groups of anti-Syrian regime Salafis, the suburb of Bab al-Tebbaneh seems to have developed small companies that are selling their militia power to other actors, like the Gulf monarchies, that sponsored other similar actors in Syria or Iraq. Broader interests seem then to lie behind the fight between Bab al-Tebbaneh and its counterpart the Alawite Jabal Mohsen suburb and deepen the rift among the two sects that both claim to be besieged by the other group against whom only force can be the way to affirm their own identity.³² One of the most worrying aspects of this privatization of war is the emergence of former Professional of the Army who decided to recruit combatants from several nationalities, like former Col. Hammoud, to set up a Sunni militia. In the case of Hammoud's militia, as reported by *Al-Akhbar* newspaper, he trained and send fighters on several frontlines, in Tripoli as well as in Syria and then succeeded in relocating its activity with rank and files in Beirut Sunni stronghold of Tarek al-Jdideh without being arrested or accused³³.

Finally, one of the last entrepreneurship of violence, the Jihadists, is also related to the current crisis in Syria, less as a by-product of this conflict but probably more as one possible card that foreign government could use to destabilize Lebanon. Talking about the most well-known among them, al-Qaeda, it appears thanks to recent analysis that such groups could contribute to grant some major logistics to the anti-regime struggle in Syria across the border, using Lebanon as a launching site (Chararah, 2013). This could also have an impact on the battle in Syria and raises the question if the Lebanese government would chose to confront

²⁹ Interview with Ahmad Beydoun, Beirut, December 2012.

³⁰ See: *L'Orient le Jour*, 17 November 2012.

³¹ See: *Daily Star*, 16 December 2012.

³² *Al-Akhbar*, 24.10.12

³³ See *Al-Akhbar*, 24 October 2012.

such Jihadi groups at the risk to see Lebanon becoming a land for Jihad. The other scenario could be a Syrian intervention in the North of Lebanon in a limited military strike.

Conclusion

Scenarios for a near future are uncertain as the evolution on the Lebanese scene seems unpredictable now that Miqati's government resign and that Tammam Salam, the new Premier, declared his commitment to a purely technocratic government focus on the parliamentary elections. If some analysts see the continuation of such slow motion unrest with occasional irruption of violence³⁴, others, outside Lebanon, underline the strong effects that a change in Syria could produce in Lebanon³⁵. But one hypothesis has to be explore further: the continuation of a *status quo* in Syria and in Lebanon as well. These concluding remarks would lay on this highly probabilistic scenario.

As seen in this report, there are several vectors of importation of the Syrian crisis and war spill over in Lebanon. Apart the direct implication of Syrian officers in destabilizing Lebanon – a scenario that even Hizbullah wouldn't approve, Lebanon's stability is actually a pillar of its strategy – both 8/14 March political forces are using for their own purposes the Syrian turmoil in order to mobilize or affirm a strong position. The main danger seems that in using categories used in the battlefield such as Sunnis vs Shiites, terrorists vs government, the type of mobilization created could escape the hand of political actors and spread in the society, becoming a new matrix of perception of the other, defined as an enemy. At some point, this could ease the task of entrepreneurs of violence to enrol new militants with radical messages and the use of violence. Unfortunately, the political division in the country is sending messages of discord, even among members of the 8 or 14 March coalitions, revealing a fragmentation process where every little event could degenerate in less controllable fights.

The Lebanese State's security apparatus, namely the Army and the ISF, know the same process of internal division and the assassination of Wissam el-Hassan can reminded it. The suspicion that grew after this event about a possible "inside job" related to al-Hassan's involvement in supporting the FSA left a bad taste in the mouth of most of the citizens, undermining a little bit more the belief in State's institutions capacity (and interests) to face the crisis and so losing a little bit more of its legitimacy. The case of Tripoli's battlefield and northern Lebanon border zone is another example of a risky scene for the Lebanese army as it's inaction as well as its brutal reactions generated a slow process of de-legitimization of its presence, its action and in the end, its motive to act (leaving the impression of supporting one side against the other). It seems that whatever the Lebanese army do, it is subject to a condemnation of one side or the other, which describe the strong political rift that exists within Lebanon. And the growing number of refugees arriving from Syria plus the postponing of the parliamentary elections are increasing the pressure for divisions.

Another centre of unrest lies with Israel's provocative behaviours as recently seen with the building of y new patrol road along the border with Lebanon³⁶ although the main danger of war could come from the red line drawn by Israeli government after the Damascus bombing of a military convoy³⁷ in case unconventional weapons would cross the Syrian-Lebanese

³⁴ As stated by Ahmed Beydoun, interviewed in Beirut, December 2012.

³⁵ See for instance Berthelot (2012).

³⁶ See *Al-Monitor*, 13 February 2013.

³⁷ See *Al-Monitor*, 6 February 2012.

border to reach Hizbullah's arsenal. This file is also linked to the Iran-Hizbullah connection and to Iranian nuclear facilities that Israel seeks a pretext to hit. The Syrian battleground could offer this opportunity as a recent statement of Iranian official warned that "external military attack on Syria would be considered an attack on Tehran." The 30 January Israeli strike on Damascus suburb could be the beginning of another dangerous game that could affect Lebanon reminding us how intricate the regional security is³⁸.

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³⁸ See *Le Point*, 31 January 2013.