POLITICAL PERSPECTIVES FOR LEBANON: THE CRISIS SETTINGS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Marcio Magno de Farias Franco e Silva[1]
Jansen Coli Calil N. A. de Oliveira[2]

ABSTRACT

The Lebanese Republic is characterized by its multireligious, ethnic and cultural configuration. It is a notable country for its political instability and for being a battleground for different peoples. Thus, this article aims to present the historical evolution of Lebanon, demonstrating the importance of confessionalism as a catalyst of Lebanese society, its implications for the unique system of political power; the international dimension of Lebanese domestic politics, the precarious social intertwining; the challenges conquered by UNIFIL. It also presents a perspective for the country's near future, due to the recent reformulation of the electoral law and the constant possibility of a wide conflict in the Middle East.

Keywords: Lebanon. Confessionalism. Middle East. UNIFIL.

[1] Admiral, Escola de Guerra Naval, Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brazil. egn.spp@marinha.mil.br
[2] First Lieutenant (RM2-T), Escola de Guerra Naval, Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brazil. jansen.oliveira@marinha.mil.br

INTRODUCTION

The Lebanese Republic has historically attracted international attention for being an Arab country open to contemporary customs. Unique in its multireligious, ethnic and cultural configuration, its fame is disproportionate to its area and importance. This attention usually comes from episodic moments triggered by crises that tend to disappear almost as quickly as they arise. However, the underlying causes of these critical moments have never disappeared.

Not surprisingly, the realism of these crises analysis reveals a more or less acceptable assessment of the future of the Lebanese State, namely that of unpredictability and uncertainty. The most recent progress achieved with the approval of the latest electoral law, the perspectives for economic development coming from the promising possibility of exploring energy reserves on Lebanon's Southern maritime boundary and the strategic review by the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) in 2017 are analyzed aspects throughout the text.

Based on this perspective, this study presents Lebanon's historical conjuncture evolution, aiming to elucidate the role of confessionalism as a structuring element of Lebanese society and its implications as a system of political power division; the international dimension of Lebanese domestic politics, whose development and stability are conditional on the performance of regional peers; the security challenges UNIFIL faces; and as a consequence of the latter, the implications for Brazilian performance in the UNIFIL Maritime Task Force.

Part of the data was taken from colloquia and seminars conducted under the aegis of the non-attribution policy. Thus, some information is not referenced, referring to the authors' opinions.

GEOGRAPHY AND GEOPOLITICS OF LEBANON: THE SOUTH STRATEGIC POSITION

Lebanon is a State with a restricted area, considering the standards of the Brazilian territory. It is about 10,500 km^2, with an average of 220 km in length and 55 km wide. Its coast is only 210 km long, equivalent to Rio de Janeiro state coast, from the beginning of Ilha do Cabo Frio to the end of Restinga da Marambaia (figure 1). Mount Lebanon is the major geographic attraction, whose peak is over 3,000 meters high. In the winter, it accumulates snow, being the region major water collector that flows into

the fertile Beqaa Valley and into the Litani River. Its slopes are inhabited by a diverse natural vegetation, highlighting the country's symbolic tree, the Cedar of Lebanon, now rarer and found only in protected areas. The mountain descends West to the Mediterranean Sea, in a terrestrial geography suitable for the construction of ports such as Tyre, Sidon and Beirut, capable of accommodating large ships. The typical climate is the Mediterranean, with cold and wet winters, and hot and dry summers.

Figure 1
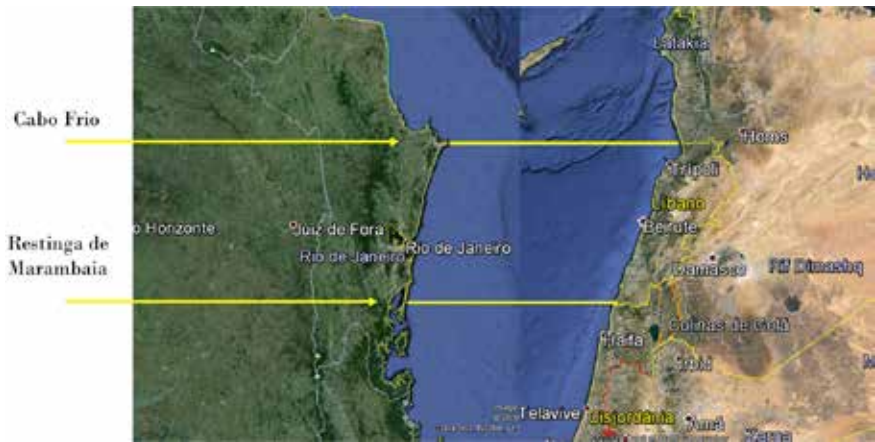
Source: Presentation at Escola de Guerra Naval, 2017.

From a geopolitical perspective, Lebanese territory is considered strategic for the surrounding States and "international powers." Regionally, the country opposes two States, bordering Syria to the North and East, and Israel to the South (figure 2). Internationally, as Hirst (2010) states, "Lebanon, it seems, was almost designed to be the everlasting battleground for others' political, strategic and ideological conflicts, conflicts which sometimes escalate into their proxy wars."

Figure 2

Source: https://www.britannica.com/place/Lebanon

According to Kneissl's (2009) assessment, the region to the South of Litani River in Lebanese territory (figure 3), which has as main cities Tyre and Naqoura, has become a military buffer zone, and the absence of power—social and political—, generated by decades of neglect by the central Lebanese authorities was the main reason why this geographical area became ground of conflicts. Beirut often ignored the economically less–favored Southern region, perhaps because of the proximity with the Jewish State, which was constantly belligerent to Muslims in that region. More recently, this situation of regional neglect made room for Hezbollah[3] to progress with social action in areas abandoned by the central government. The lack of internal security, which UNIFIL has tried

---

[3] Shiite Muslim–oriented paramilitary organization also stands out as a political party in Lebanon, providing and administering public services, social actions, school and hospital institutions, as well as being responsible for agricultural activities, and, more seriously, for the defense of the country.

to fix, remains and poses as a problem considered central to the diverse local population.

Shab'a Farms and Ghajar are two other geopolitically sensitive areas of Southern Lebanon that constitute the mosaic of disputes. The first is a sparsely populated agricultural area with poorly defined geographical boundaries unrecognized by the parties. The second, Ghajar, is a village of Alawi Muslim Syrian population, whose Northeastern part is under Israeli military occupation, despite several proposals made by UNIFIL for the withdrawal of these troops. Ghajar is important because the *Blue Line*, the UN–negotiated dividing line to accompany and confirm the departure of Israeli troops from Lebanese territory in 2000, crosses it.

Figure 3 – Southern Litani River

Source: http://geology.com/world/lebanon-satellite-image.shtml

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: CREATION OF THE LEBANESE STATE AND THE BASIS OF THE CONFESSIONAL POLITICAL SYSTEM

The Lebanese State, as we know it today, arose from the spoils of World War I, when the Turkish-Ottoman Empire disintegrated. Lebanon became part of the new order of the Middle East, a new colonial yoke imposed on the Arab States by the leading colonial powers of the period— the United Kingdom and France—by the Sykes–Picot Agreement[4] of May 16, 1916, which put Syria and Lebanon under French administration. Under the aegis of the Agreement, France could institute any kind of direct or indirect administration over the territories and this possibility resulted in the creation of the "Greater Lebanon," with its current dimensions defined in 1920, incorporating the coastal cities of Beirut, Tyre, Sidon and Tripoli, as well as the Beqaa Valley inland.

At the time, the French colonial offensive had strong political support of the then majority Maronite Christian community in the country, but Lebanese Muslims and the Syrian State were strongly opposed to this new territorial configuration and demanded that the Lebanese area remained under Syrian control. The Maronite community and French politicians disagreed, saying that the new boundaries of the "Greater Lebanon" formed the country's natural borders. This impasse triggered a process of confrontation, political instability and social upheaval until the early 1940s (CJPME, 2007).

The diverse, culturally independent European (French) colonial civilization, embedded in the heart of the Arab world, was quickly opposed by traditional Lebanese religious groups conquered and supported by Syria. However, the common population interest in eliminating foreign political dominance in the region enabled the first conciliatory experience of the division of power among the main Christian and Muslim religions in 1943 in what became known as the National Pact.

---

[4] The Sykes–Picot Agreement was a secretly negotiated agreement between the United Kingdom and France, which established the early distribution of the Ottoman Empire's assets in the Middle East. This agreement addressed interests of the colonial powers, especially regarding the Suez Canal and the oil fields. This agreement is seen as a turning point between the Arab States and the West, as the Arabs felt betrayed by being allies in the war against the Turkish-Ottoman Empire and were not contemplated in their political-territorial aspirations.

In this Pact, Muslim religious leaders agreed to break the demands and pressures to incorporate Lebanon as an Arab State "united" with Syria, and to accept the new borders of the "State of Greater Lebanon," while Maronite Christian leaders pledged not to turn to France or other Western countries for interventionist military support. This arrangement has allocated strong political positions to religious communities in a sectarian manner, which determines and divides, to this day, the Lebanese population between the 18 "religious communities" or "confessions."[5] Thus, the Lebanese political confessional formula was consecrated in the Constitution: The President of the Republic is a Maronite Christian; the Prime Minister is a Sunni Muslim; and the President of the National Assembly, a Shiite Muslim. Initially, Christians and Muslims were represented in Parliament at a ratio of 6:5, which would later change with the country's demographic changes (KHATIB and GARDINER, 2015).

Confessionalism[6] has become a relevant factor as it is considered an inseparable structuring instrument of Lebanese society. The mosaic of religious and cultural communities in the country is unique, pointing both to the persistent instability of that State's political configuration and to the internationalization of the conflict. As Hirst elucidates (2010, p. 2),

> "(...) it is not simply Lebanon's small size, sensitive location between East and West, or the special interest European powers have always taken in this largely Christian country, which accounts for its susceptibility to outside interference. It is, above all, its unique internal composition. For as an amalgam of religious communities and their myriad sub-divisions, with a constitutional and political order to match, Lebanon is the sectarian state *par excellence*."

---

[5] Regarding religious diversity, there are six different Muslim sects (by population: Shiites, Sunnis, Druze, Ismailis, Alawites, and Nusayris) and 12 different Christian sects (in numerical order: Maronite Catholics, Greek Orthodox, Melkite Catholics, Armenian Orthodox, Syriac Catholics, Armenian Catholics, Syriac Orthodox, Roman Catholics, Chaldeans, Assyrians, Copts and Protestants).

[6] Confessionalism is a system of government that proportionally divides political power between the communities of a country, whether religious or ethnic, according to the population numerical representation. According to Canvas (2015), although useful to reconcile disagreements, confessionalism shows a negative face to the ideals of national unity: education, health and care sectors are "sectarianized," favoring one religious group. In Lebanon, if the current system of power distribution was consolidated in the 1943 National Pact, the origin of Lebanese sectarianism stems from the Ottoman period. In that ancient Muslim empire, various peoples, religions and ethnic groups lived together. The judicial and legislative systems were separated so that each minority managed its internal affairs.

Confessional formula was initially useful to maintain social peace, bringing promising perspectives for gradual development and democratic stability for the young State, but paradoxically, by "aggregating" the 18 religious communities, this system internalized the extension of Middle Eastern politics in Lebanese domestic affairs (HARB, 2006). Since the late 19th century, population has changed significantly, motivated by Christians who intensified their emigration to South America, especially to Brazil and Argentina, by the natural expansion of the Muslim population and the mass immigration of Palestinians, most of them Sunni Muslims[7]. It is important to note that for every 2 or 3 Lebanese citizens, 1 is a Palestinian or Syrian refugee[8].

It is significant for historical understanding to argue that the 1943 National Pact, based on the fragile confessional arrangement, resulted in the great civil war of 1975-1989, characterized by fragile sectarian divisions and alliances and refinements of cruelty. The Lebanese civil war would come to an end with the 1989 Taif Accords, which restructured the parliament, increasing the number of deputies in the National Assembly to 128 (again equally divided between Muslims and Christians), reduced certain political powers of the President of the Lebanese Republic, transferring it to the Council of Ministers, and recognized the National Pact, consecrating the confessional system as one of the pillars of support for the fragile Lebanese democracy.

Since then, the abolition of the confessional system has remained as one of the main challenges to Lebanon's political stability, but not the only one. To understand the international dimension of the Lebanese political conjuncture a crisis with multiple actors expressing divergent and conflicting interests, as well as the establishment of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) in 1978, along with broadening the scope of its mission over time, are important elements to understand the current system of power and the perspectives for the State.

---

[7] Available from www.icarabe.org.

[8] Information obtained in the lecture "Operação de Paz-UNIFIL-MTF," given by Rear Admiral Claudio Henrique Mello de Almeida to the student officers of the Curso de Estado Maior to Commissioned Officers at Escola de Guerra Naval, on November 22, 2017.

INTERNATIONAL ACTORS IN THE GAME OF POWER: INTERESTS AND ACTION

Lebanese civil war (1975-1989) resulted from a set of internal and external problems, and from the interaction between these two spheres deriving from the growing dissatisfaction of Muslims with parliamentary representation, which no longer reflected the country's demographic changes. Palestinian refugees and Palestinian resistance movements, arising from the Arab-Israeli war[9], especially the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), often attacked Israel from Southern Lebanon, and Israel responded militarily to the PLO's offensive assaults, consequently decreasing the Lebanese civilian population. Christian Lebanese strongly opposed PLO involvement in the Lebanese conflict, while most Sunni Muslims supported Palestinian resistance movements, which were also Sunnis. A last but not least complicating factor was the fact that many Lebanese, especially Sunni Muslims, attracted by the Arab nationalism ideas, still cherished Lebanon's ancient ideal of unifying Lebanon with Syria territory (TRABOULSI, 2007).

The great Lebanese civil war developed in four main phases: the first, from 1975 to 1977, with confrontation and massacres between Christian-Maronite forces and Muslim militias. It was characterized by strong Syrian intervention, requested by the then Lebanese president Suleiman Frangieh, who, supporting Maronite Christian forces, overcame the Muslim militias and imposed a weak peace until 1977.

The second phase, between 1977 and 1982, was characterized by the Israeli intervention in Southern Lebanon, the Operation Litani. Constant PLO attacks against the Jewish populations of Northern Israel made it rapidly occupy most of the Lebanese area to the South of Litani River. Protests and international pressure and from the UN Security Council led Israel to withdraw its troops in 1978, but it retained control of the Litani River region, establishing a security zone under the surveillance

---

[9] Also known as the Six–Day War, it was an armed conflict that opposed Israel to a coalition of Arab countries: Egypt, Jordan and Syria, supported by Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Algeria and Sudan. The escalating tensions between the Arab countries and Israel in mid-1967 led both sides to mobilize their troops. The conflict began when the Israeli air force launched a major offensive against Egyptian air force bases at Sinai. Israel claimed that Egypt was preparing a war against its Jewish nation and that the attack was a preventive action.

and support of the South Lebanon Army (SLA), a militia made up of Maronite Christians, interested in destabilizing and expelling PLO.

The third phase, from 1982 to 1984, was notable for the Israeli military invasion throughout Lebanese territory, and especially for the storming of the capital Beirut, retaliating the continuing attacks by the PLO, consequently expelling the leadership of this organization from the Lebanese territory in 1982. The generally independent and economically and politically marginalized Shiite community, compared with Sunnis and Christians, has been reinvigorated by the 1979 Iranian Islamic Revolution and by local leaders alike. Amidst the extensive conflict, the Islamic Republic of Iran established a military base in the Syrian–controlled Beqaa Valley area and trained, armed and funded the Shiite Hezbollah paramilitary group (KHATIB and GARDINER, 2015).

The fourth phase, between 1984 and 1990, was led by the Taif Accords, signed in Saudi Arabia, which created conditions to cease hostilities in 1990. The Accords reaffirmed the confessional political system and expanded Syria's role in Lebanese domestic affairs. In practice, Israeli forces remained in Southern Lebanon, controlling what Israeli officers called the "security zone" (a buffer zone supposed to prevent attacks on Northern Israel) until their troops were completely withdrawn in 2000.

Syria, which controlled the rest of Lebanese territory, only withdrew its troops in 2006, when it was forced to leave the country after collaborative pressure from Lebanese popular protests and diplomatic intervention by the United States, France and the United Nations, as a result of the assassination of the then Maronite Christian Prime Minister Rafik Hariri one year before. Hariri's death has reshaped Lebanese politics, with the emergence of two new blocs: The March 8 Alliance and the March 14 Alliance, representing respectively pro-Syrian and anti-Syrian segments (HUMUD, 2017, p. 3).

All these years of civil war would witness changes in internal and external alliances between the warring parties and the consequent emergence of new actors that would make the Lebanese issue even more complex. In this conflicted scenario, internal factional violence was as common as factional conflict, since sectarian leaders sought to maintain control over their communities. These sectarian groups also often changed their alliances according to the different forms of intervention from Syria, Israel, or the United States.

With the end of the civil war, new actors came forward and became important to the destinies of Lebanon: the well-known Syria, Israel, Iran, Saudi Arabia, USA and the former USSR, as well as the new Hezbollah, PLO and the UN, represented by UNIFIL.

UNIFIL'S CREATION: MANDATE, EXPANSION AND THE BLUE LINE DEFINITION

UNIFIL was established in 1978 by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolutions 425 and 426, in the context of the invasion of Israeli forces into Lebanese territory to combat Palestinian militant groups. The Resolutions mandate determined: 1) monitoring and confirming the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Southern Lebanon; 2) restoring international peace and security; and 3) assisting the government of Lebanon to regain its effective authority in the area.

Since its inception, UNIFIL has undergone changes in its scope and mandate as a result of the increasing conflict environment in Lebanon. The first adjustment was made after the second Israeli assault in 1982 on the so-called "Operation Peace for Galilee" to fight back well-trained and motivated Palestinian militant forces. In 1985, Israel partially withdrew its troops, but remained in an extensive security zone in Southern Lebanon controlled by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) and by the SLA, which remained active until 2000. The UNSC recognized that UNIFIL would be unable to execute its mandate under Resolutions 425/426 and adopted Resolution 511, allowing troops allocated to UNIFIL, if possible, to extend their protection and humanitarian aid to the Lebanese and Palestinian refugee population. For three years, UNIFIL acted circumscribing the Resolution 511 determination (ONU, 2016).

The Israeli government's announcement of the IDF withdrawal from Lebanon's exclusion zone in 2000 was followed by the SLA dissolution, and by UN preparations to demarcate a Blue Line, whose purpose was to facilitate the finding and control of the complete IDF withdrawal from Lebanese territory, following Lebanon's internationally recognized boundaries. According to the UN documents, Blue Line represents no international border and does not offer any limitation or damage to future border–limited negotiations between Israel and Lebanon (ONU, 2016). As explained by Kneissl (2009), an essential part of the UN mandate concerns the territorial aspect. Although it is not considered a formal demarcation,

Blue Line provides accurate and secure cartographic documentation. This is a crucial point, as the governments of Israel and Lebanon respect it, albeit with a few exceptions, and believe that the establishment of this demarcation line is of UN's unique responsibility, both for monitoring and for arbitration of possible violations.

UNIFIL started a new phase with its expanded mandate[10] with the UNSC resolution 1701 (2006) after IDF attacks against Hezbollah when it captured two Israeli soldiers. According to Mooney Jr. (2007, p. 29-30), the later withdrawal of IDF troops gave Hezbollah ample freedom of maneuver, enabling them to rearrange themselves, to train local militias, and to conduct close surveillance of Israeli opposition forces. This emptiness of regional local power has also enabled it to establish numerous combat positions, weapons depots, mobile rocket launching sites, which proved effective in the conflict in 2006.

The provisions of Resolution 1701—which suspended hostility between Israel and Hezbollah—guide UNIFIL's expanded mandate and current operating structure. This resolution purposes are to: 1) monitor the cessation of hostilities; 2) accompany and support the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) in their application in Southern Lebanon, including Blue Line, as Israel withdraws its troops from Lebanese territory; 3) coordinate activities to achieve a permanent ceasefire and a long-term solution between the governments of Lebanon and Israel; 4) extend assistance to ensure humanitarian aid to civilian populations and the safe and voluntary return of displaced persons; 5) support LAF in establishing an area free of armed personnel, resources or weapons, except those already occupied by the LAF and UNIFIL, the Blue Line and the Litani River; and 6) assist the Lebanese government in border security and other entry points to prevent illegal entry of weapons or smuggling–related material.

A byproduct of this 2006 conjuncture, and of vital importance for what it means in terms of level of conversation and understanding between representatives of the governments of Israel, Lebanon and UNIFIL, is the "Tripartite Forum." Over the years, this Forum has become a key mechanism for crisis and conflict management, addressing violations of Resolution 1701, and identifying military and security operational issues.

---

[10] UNIFIL is currently comprised of more than 10,500 military personnel from 40 countries contributing with equipment and troops, supported by approximately 820 local and international civilian employees. The mission is also assisted by 56 military observers from the UN Truce Supervision Organization.

These are important periodic meetings of mutual trust building. The main innovation of Resolution 1701 concerning peacekeeping missions was the creation of the Maritime Task Force (MTF), with immediate effect on the suspension of the Israeli naval blockade, whose mission is to support and train the Lebanese navy to monitor its territorial waters, protecting the Lebanese coast and preventing the entry of unauthorized weapons or war–related material into Lebanon (figure 4). MTF is particularly important for Brazil as it is actively participating in a UN Peacekeeping Force abroad, and for the Brazilian Navy because the Task Force is under the command of a Brazilian admiral.

Figure 4 – UNIFIL Maritime Task Force Operation Area
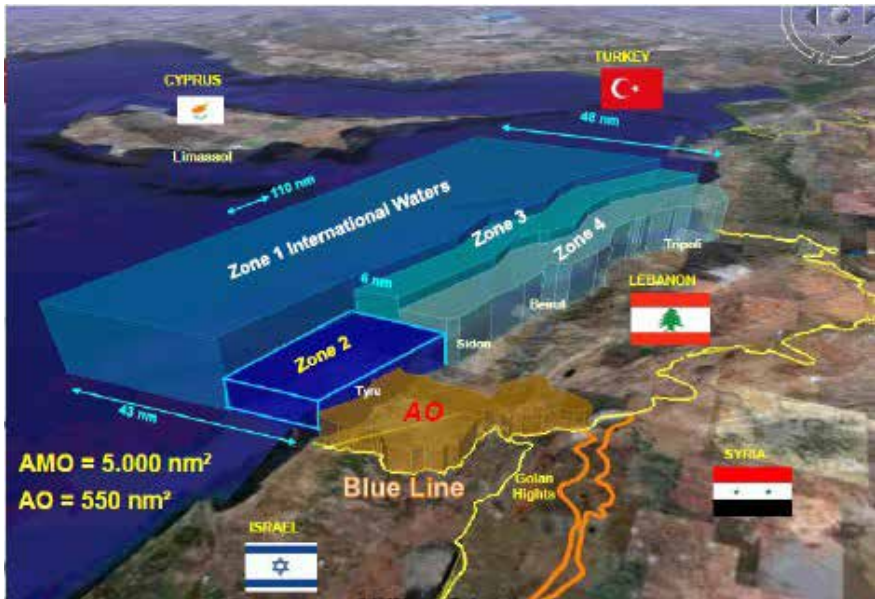
Source: Presentation at Escola de Guerra Naval, 2017.

BRAZILIAN COOPERATION AT UNIFIL

The Brazilian Navy has been in charge of the UNIFIL Maritime Task Force since 2011, an unprecedented force in UN Peace Missions[11]. The Task Force has two main missions: the first is performing maritime interdiction operations, monitoring Lebanese territorial waters, providing security to the country's shoreline and preventing unauthorized entry of weapons and related material by the sea. The second is a longer-term objective—to assist the Lebanese Navy in enhancing its capabilities with collaborative training and exercises to properly assume tasks required in maritime security[12]. As explained by Makdis (2009, apud Franco, 2016, p. 428), it is important to note that it is up to the LAF Navy to carry out inspections aboard ships and vessels, enabling the Maritime Task Force (FTM) to maintain neutrality and, consequently, a high degree of credibility, being respected by the actors.

In the opinion of Admiral Luiz Henrique Caroli, former FTM commander (2011-2012), Brazilian participation in operations such as UNIFIL provides a unique opportunity to train troops for real missions, in addition to the possibility to establish an exchange with the armed forces of other countries[13]. Abdenur (2016) points out another significantly important aspect: commanding a peace mission, in this case an unprecedented component of the UN naval force, represents a substantially different level of experience gain for the Brazilian Navy compared with, for example, the Brazilian experience in commanding the UN military mission in Haiti. Even more significantly, Brazil is the first non-NATO-member country to command a multinational peacekeeping naval force in Lebanon.

Generally analyzing the Brazilian performance at UNIFIL, it is noted that the peacekeeping naval force not only aligns with the country's maritime strategy, but also effectively contributes to globally projecting the country in peace missions and to expanding and consolidating its image and performance as a contributor to humanitarian efforts (ABDENUR

---

[11] Regarding the Brazilian acceptance of the UNIFIL Maritime Task Force command, Abdenur (2016) points out three main reasons: the Brazilian objective of having more projection in the field of international security, strengthening its bilateral relations with Lebanon, and the possibility to expand its naval capacity.

[12] UNIFIL Maritime Task Force. Available from: https://unifil.unmissions.org/unifil-maritime-task-force

[13] Information obtained in an interview during the preparation of the monograph "O Papel do Brasil na UNIFIL," presented at Escola Superior de Guerra by Albert Zaki Hyar, in 2015.

2016, p. 409). Vice Admiral Fernando Eduardo Studart Wiemer, Chief of Staff of the Armada (2012-2013), already stated this idea that the Brazilian Navy participates in the Naval Force under the aegis of international organizations of collective defense arrangement and of peace missions and humanitarian aid as part of its objectives to broaden its international relations and actions.[14]

THE EVOLUTION OF THE LIBANESE CONJUNCTURE

UNIFIL's actions and future depend largely on the evolution of Lebanon's internal and external circumstances. In recent decades, Lebanese political groups have been unable to guarantee political stability and to elect leaders to stay in power on a regular basis, leaving Lebanese politics with periods of presidential vacancy, as a result of the unique confessional system, a dysfunctional administration, as well as the lack of work in the Lebanese Parliament. A rational and consistent political agenda could give rise to politically coherent decisions, not only based on ideas of the religious group that represents it. In this sense, two main rival and political coalitions currently stand out: the March 14 Alliance, led by the Sunni Future Movement Party, mostly pro-Western parties, is nationalist and against the current Syrian government; and the March 8 Alliance, led by the pro-Bashar al-Assad regimen, anti-Israeli Shiite Hezbollah group[15], and by the Amal Movement, to which the current Maronite Christian president, General Michel Aoun, joined[16] (CANVAS, 2015).

The recent Lebanese conjuncture has evolved as follows: Maronite Christian Michel Aoun won the Lebanon presidential elections in October 2016, after two years without a president. In this context, a government of national agreement was formed in December 2016, led by Prime Minister Saad Hariri (Sunni). But regional dynamics (especially the Syrian crisis) and subnational differences (religious and economic) have brought new political challenges and the need to set new priorities for the Lebanese

---

[14] Words spoken in the inaugural class of High Military Studies course at Escola de Guerra Naval in 2013.

[15] Hezbollah is a multifaceted organization. It is considered, at the same time, an Islamic movement, a political party (since 2005), an armed resistance group, and even a terrorist organization. Hezbollah strongly influences the Lebanese State security and regional policy and is supported by Iran.

[16] Information supplemented by the *Carta Capital* article *"É real o risco de uma ampla guerra no Oriente Médio,"* 11/07/2017. At: https://www.cartacapital.com.br/internacional/e-real-o-risco-de-uma-ampla-guerra-no-oriente-medio.

government. A profound electoral reform for parliamentary elections was urgently needed to reflect the population religious composition, the maintenance of institutions, and the improvement of state services (CANVAS, 2015). Lebanese political parties finally reached consensus

and approved a new electoral law in June 2017, which amends the 1960 rule and paves the way for legislative elections in 2018. The new system is based on proportional representation, but it welcomes opposition from traditional sectarian groups that resist to changes in the confessional political system.

November this year, the then Prime Minister Saad Hariri surprisingly—even to his followers—resigned from his position in a televised speech in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. He claimed in his tragic-political speech that he is set to be assassinated by his Shiites opponents, as was his father, Hafiq Hariri, in 2005. The Saudi kingdom possibly pressed Saad Hariri for this surprising resignation, as his political position gave "Sunni credibility to the growing Iran–Hezbollah influence." Hariri also accused Iran and its "Lebanese–Hezbollah partner" of interfering in Arab affairs and of leaving their country in great uncertainty. Politically, Iran has the control by the Maronite Christian president Michael Aoun and Lebanon's Shiite political party, Hezbollah. Hariri's resignation could potentially bring the Lebanese State into a new phase of instability. According to Lima (2017), current events in the Middle East are guided by the logic of opposition between Iran and Saudi Arabia, whose geopolitical and economic clash has increasingly sectarian contours, intensifying the conflict between Sunnis and Shiites, with internal consequences for the Lebanese State. Lebanon once again reinforces its role as "battleground for proxy wars."

Another determinant aspect of changing in political and security scenarios in Lebanon is that the United States, Saudi Arabia and Israel consider, in different ways, expanding Persian Iran's influence as another threat to the security of their interests in the Syria–Lebanon region. Thus, an identity of common interests is translated into a hidden but strong union against Iran and its partners, mainly the Shiite Hezbollah group. More than political support, Hezbollah is religiously loyal to the leader of the Iranian regime, currently Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. This scenario makes the possibility of stability of the Lebanese State more unsure (LIMA, 2017). In recent statements, the French and US governments have

issued messages of support for Lebanon's "sovereignty, independence and constitutional process" in a clear reaffirmation of interest in the region.

UNIFIL, in recent diagnosis, evaluates the area of operations under its responsibility as "quiet" and "relatively stable." However, they admit the "sensitive fragility condition." This environment of relative lack of confrontation is attributed to the recent balance of political power; to the cessation of hostilities and to the respect devoted to the Blue Line; to the surveillance of the Lebanese government and its armed forces from Southeastern Lebanon to the Blue Line, except in the Northeastern Ghajar region under Israeli occupation; in addition to the lack of evidence of arms trafficking in the area of operation. On the other hand, this positive situation is weakened by the small but constant violations of the cessation of hostilities—the most recent ones promoted by Hezbollah in 2015 and 2016—; the potential conflict arising from belligerent statements by the IDF and Hezbollah; the insufficient physical presence of LAF troops; the sensitive situation of the Golan area and Shab'a Farms in the Southeastern UNIFIL's area of operation; and the prolonged violations of Resolution 1701 (Ghajar and air space).

The presence and action of extremist non-state groups makes the task of guaranteeing Lebanon's fragile borders and political stability substantially more complex. According to Humud's (2017) analysis, since 2014, the LAF have intensified their operations along the North–Northeast border trying to dislodge militant groups, particularly those linked to the so-called Islamic State (IS) and to the Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), linked to Al Qaeda, which have been carrying out terrorist acts within Lebanese territory. Hezbollah acts to limit entry and infiltration of IS and HTS members into Lebanon as it considers these groups a threat to the Shiite community. Importantly, these LAF and Hezbollah actions against common enemies occur in parallel and uncoordinated. Also, these actions do not reduce the conflict between these actors. A recent US State Department's 2016 Country Reports on Terrorism report, published in July 2017, reveals that Lebanon remains a safe haven for certain terrorist groups.[17]

---

[17] *"Lebanon remained a safe haven for certain terrorist groups. The Lebanese government did not take significant action to disarm Hizballah or eliminate its safe havens on Lebanese territory, nor did it seek to limit Hizballah's travel to and from Syria to fight in support of the Assad regime or to and from Iraq. The Lebanese government did not have complete control of all regions of the country, or fully control its borders with Syria and Israel. Hizballah controlled access to parts of the country and had influence over some elements within Lebanon's security services, which allowed it to operate with relative impunity."* State Department, Country Reports on Terrorism 2016, Chapter 5: Terrorist Safe Havens.

Regarding the economic situation, the Lebanese Labor and Investment Council expects more Saudi resources if the former Prime Minister Hariri regains his leadership position as planned before the resignation. Resources are also expected from Iran if the Hezbollah party establishes in the power. The government budget must once again stimulate the currently stagnant economic environment and attract foreign direct investment, especially in the largest and most important sector of the Lebanese economy—services, which constitutes about 69% GDP. The strong presence of immigrants and refugees in underemployment condition and in the informal market (20%) reinforces the economic stagnation, especially unemployment. High dependence on food imports and economic productivity are essentially influenced by regional and international events (CANVAS, 2015). The economic conjuncture must also be evaluated by the repercussions it has on the confessional political system, as Humud notes (2017, p. 21).

> "The Lebanese government is unable to consistently provide basic services such as electricity, water, and waste treatment (...). As a result, citizens rely on private providers, many of whom are affiliated with political parties. The retreat of the State from these basic functions has enabled a patronage network whereby citizens support political parties—including Hezbollah—in return for basic services."

It is noteworthy that the UNIFIL Maritime Task Force has consistently contributed to increasing maritime trade and to providing access to the exclusive economic zone, especially to guarantee Lebanon access to oil and gas reserves in maritime areas disputed with Israel. This geopolitical scenario has favored Lebanese sovereignty in the disputes between Israel and Lebanon on the demarcation of their maritime boundaries and the territorial sea (figure 5). Trying to garner support for their plea, the Lebanese authorities asked the UN in 2011 to establish a maritime blue line, which was promptly rejected by UNIFIL for it was not part of its mandate (HUMUD, 2017).

Figure 5 – Maritime area disputed between Lebanon and Israel
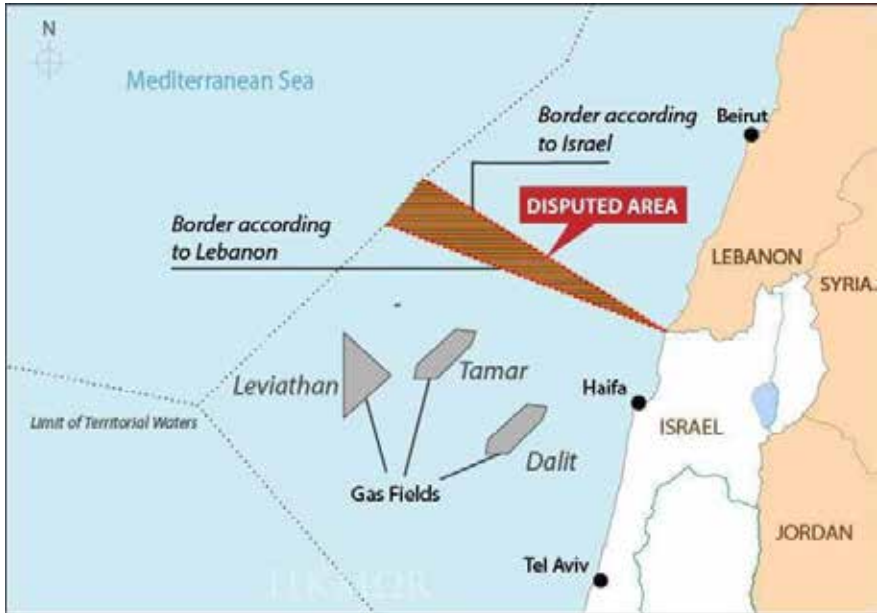
Source: http://tekmormonitor.blogspot.com.br/2017_03_19_archive.html

Many of the historical challenges remain unsolved, especially the most sensitive issue for political stability—the end of the confessional system—, and a definitive solution is invisible within a clear time horizon. Lebanon's political and economic environment has generated big frustration and dissatisfaction among the population, which makes remote the possibility to solve problems.

SCENARIZATION

Analysis of current regional context resulted in an outline of four scenarios capable of affecting UNIFIL:

Scenario 1: The resumption of hostilities between Israel and Hezbollah in large scale, either along the Blue Line or in Golan. From UNIFIL's perspective, this is not the most likely scenario in the short term, but it is the one for which they are preparing;

Scenario 2: The Syrian situation impact could increase border activities, mainly terrorism and the refugee crisis, as Lebanese anti-government groups (Salafist and jihadist) may infiltrate the border. This scenario is also improbable; however, the issue of local terrorism is the most likely situation;

Scenario 3: Highly likely to occur, especially by political and religious pressures from Iran and Saudi Arabia, the collapse of internal order and the consequent return of the civil war in Lebanon; or

Scenario 4: A combination of the previous scenarios, in such a rapid sequence that civil war will reestablish and UNIFIL's mission will be threatened.

Apart from these possible scenarios, the assumptions that condition the scenario to be faced are: the governments of Iran, Saudi Arabia, Israel, Lebanon and Syria, as well as Hezbollah, are probably not seeking a confrontation in the Blue Line area; the conflict in Syria will continue to impact Lebanon's border security conditions as there is no perspective of solution to the Syrian crisis in the short term; both the LAF and the Internal Security Forces (ISF) continue to receive international support to combat anti-government armed elements; the LAF will not cross Lebanese borders to act against anti-government armed elements; and lastly, no substantial change in UNIFIL's structure or strength is foreseen, a matter widely reported last year.

In January 2017, following determinations of UN Security Council Resolution 2305 (2016), UNIFIL underwent a strategic review to assess the fulfillment of the Mission's mandate, which did not include changes in mandate or change in maximum composition of the 15,000 military personnel. The strategic review identified three priorities to implement UNIFIL's mandate, including one specifically to the Maritime Task Force.[18]

> "(ii) Support the efforts of the Government of Lebanon to increase the capacity of the Lebanese Armed Forces and its presence in southern Lebanon and the territorial waters of Lebanon at an accelerated pace, particularly in relation to prioritized land and maritime capabilities, through the strategic dialogue between the Lebanese Armed Forces and UNIFIL and through the advocacy work of the International Support Group for Lebanon, as appropriate, not

---

[18] Letter dated March 8, 2017 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council, March 9, 2017, S/2017/202.

only as a prerequisite for the gradual assumption of effective and sustainable security control of the UNIFIL area of operations and Lebanese territorial waters, but also as a key element to supporting steps towards a permanent ceasefire."

This aspect interests Brazil the most for its continued participation in the UNIFIL Maritime Task Force, especially in this new phase of the Mission.

PERSPECTIVES

To discern any (foreseeable) future for Lebanon, and consequently for UNIFIL, must be a cautiously taken task. Although the new electoral law can be considered a historic success and generates some optimism in the population, it tests the confessional political power system and does not guarantee the country's political stability, nor does it provide a solid basis to form a stable national unity.

Changes in the regional conjuncture may set the new course for Lebanese politics. The blurring of the Syrian refugee crisis is the most sensitive point in Lebanese foreign relations, as the high flux of refugees pressures the Lebanese State's capacity to provide basic services to the population. An even more serious matter is that the future of Lebanon depends on fierce disputes between the Muslim countries Saudi Arabia (Sunni) and Iran (Shiite). The political situation provoked by the former Prime Minister Saad Hariri will probably bring more instability to the country, as Saudi Arabia and Iran will intervene in the country's internal affairs.

Economically, the political agreement sealed in the electoral law and the perspective of exploring the discoveries of hydrocarbon deposits suggest a slow resumption of economic activities in the country, always depending on political stability. The congressional consensus may enable budget discussions for the coming years and oil exploration may stimulate direct foreign investment in the Lebanese economy productive and service sectors.

Some critical factors will substantially impact the continuity of UNIFIL's mandate if they are not observed. The parties are expected to remain committed to the provisions of Resolution 1701, which have been constantly violated. Homeland security largely depends on the expansion of LAF's operational capabilities, which are largely under UNIFIL's responsibility. A direct result of this process of LAF's strengthening is the

need to ensure the credibility of this institution in the face of the actors involved in Lebanon's political life. Also regarding security, it is imperative that the LAF effectively oppose the paramilitary militant groups and mainly seek Hezbollah disarmament, leaving it only as a political party.

Of the scenarios, the incidence of terrorist activities on the Syrian border, mainly due to infiltration of elements hostile to the Lebanese government amidst the Syrian refugee crisis, is likely to occur in the medium term, but the Israeli-Hezbollah hostilities will probably increase. This set of challenges with a complex approach thus composes the framework of uncertainty that dictates Lebanon's life, the continuity of UNIFIL and possible changes in the Mission mandate.

As for Brazil's perspectives for MTF, no changes are foreseen in the short term, although the recent UN strategic review for Lebanon made specific reference to the tasks of the Maritime Task Force.

REFERENCES

ABDENUR, Adriana Erthal. Rising powers in stormy seas: Brazil and the UNIFIL maritime task force. International Peacekeeping Vol. 23, Issue. 3, 2016.

ALMEIDA, Claudio Henrique Mello de. "Operação de Paz-UNIFIL--MTF". Palestra ministrada aos oficiais-alunos do Curso de Estado Maior para Ofi- ciais Superiores da Escola de Guerra Naval, 22 de novembro de 2017.

CANVAS (Centre for Applied Nonviolent Action and Strategies). Analy-sis of the current situation in Lebanon: situation, pillars of support and possi- ble outcome. September, 2015. Available from: http://canvasopedia. org/ wp-content/uploads/2015/12/lebanon-analysis.pdf. Access on: Oct. 10, 2017.

CJPME (Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East). Understan-ding Lebanese Confessionalism. Factsheet Series no. 26. May 2007. Avai-lable from: http://www.cjpme.org/fs_026. Access on: Oct. 10, 2017.

FRANCO, Luiz Gustavo Aversa. Peacekeeping at Sea? A Case Study of the Maritime Task Force in Lebanon. Revista da Escola de Guerra Naval, Rio de Janeiro, v. 22 n.2, p. 411-440, mai./ago. 2016.

HARB, Imad. Lebanon's Confessionalism: problems and prospects. Thursday, March 30, 2006. Available from: https://www.usip.org/publica-tions/2006/03/lebanons-confessionalism-problems-and-prospects. Access on: Nov. 3, 2017

HARRIS, William. Lebanon: A History, 600-2011. Oxford University Press, 2012.

HIRST, David. Beware of small states: Lebanon, battleground of the Mi-ddle East. New York: Nation Books, 2010.

HYAR, Albert Zaki. O Papel do Brasil na UNIFIL. Monografia apresenta-da à Escola Superior de Guerra em 2015.

HUMMUD, Carla E. Lebanon Congressional Research Service, September 20, 2017. R44759. Available from: www.crs.gov. Access on: Oct. 4, 2017

KHATIB, Lina; GARDINER, Maxwell. Lebanon. Centre on Religion and Geopolitics, April 17, 2015.

KNEISSL, Karin. UNIFIL: How and until when will the "interim" continue? Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2009.

LIMA, José Antonio. É real o risco de uma ampla guerra no Oriente Mé- dio. Carta Capital, Internacional, 07/11/2017. Available from: https://www. cartacapital.com.br/internacional/e-real-o-risco-de-uma-ampla-guerra-no-Middle East. Access on: Nov. 10, 2017.

Letter dated 8 March 2017 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council," March 9, 2017, S/2017/202. Available from: http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_2017_202.pdf. Access on: Sept. 17, 2017.

MOONEY JR., William K. Stabilizing Lebanon: peacekeeping or nation--building. Parameters, 3 (Autumn 2007).

New York Times. www.mobil.nytinos.com/2017/11/04/world, Access on: Nov. 24, 2017.

TRABOULSI, Fawwaz. A history of modern Lebanon. London: Pluto Press, 2007.

UNITED NATIONS. UNIFIL Press Kit. Available from: <http://unifil.un-missions.org>.

UNIFIL Maritime Task Force. Available from: https://unifil.unmissions.org/ unifil-maritime-task-force.

UNSC Resolution 1701. Available from: http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/1701

UNSC Resolution 425. Available from: http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/425

UNSC Resolution 426. Available from: http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/426

US State Department. Country Reports on Terrorism 2016, Chapter 5: Terrorist Safe Havens. Available from: https://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/ crt/ 2016/272237.htm. Access on: Oct. 10, 2017

WIEMER, Fernando Eduardo Studart. Aula inaugural dos cursos de Altos Estudos Militares da Escola de Guerra Naval no ano de 2013: a concepção político-estratégica e a atuação internacional da Marinha do Brasil. Revista da Escola de Guerra Naval, v. 18, n.2, p. 189-206, 2012.