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The quest for a new National Defence Strategy for Lebanon: Politics influencing defence and defence influencing politics.

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The views expressed are only those of the author

In this study:

- an explanation of the relationship between Lebanese politics and the national defence of Lebanon will be given through a description of the political split in confessional Lebanon and a historical overview of the recent political movement in the field of the national defence strategy.

- the problems to achieve a national defence strategy are being looked at through a political-military analysis. Therefore the place of the Islamic Resistance and the Lebanese Armed Forces within the defence of Lebanon and their respective capacities will be examined more thoroughly.

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INTRODUCTION

If you read the term ‘national defence strategy’ in a Belgian-European perspective you would think that this is about the definition by politicians or, more specifically, by the national army authorities of the outline of the national defence policy in the long term. In a Belgian context, this can best be illustrated by the shift in the focus of national defence against an attack by the Warsaw Pact toward the use of defence in the framework of crisis response operations. The immediate result was the conversion of a relatively large conscription army with heavy capacities for a battle with limited supply lines into a small professional army² with lighter but more mobile and air transportable equipment.

In Lebanon, the term ‘national defence strategy’ has a different content. This term is used within the framework of the National Dialogue that was launched after the Doha-agreement in May 2008. The National Dialogue is a process of several conversation rounds between the various political leaders under the chairmanship of the Lebanese president, in which the political and military stabilisation of Lebanon is being discussed. Reaching a new national defence strategy is in this context used as a political euphemism for finding a way to bring the military of Hizbullah under state control. Therefore, the question is not: “What are we going to do with our national army?” but, “How do we arrive at a national army?” The national defence strategy is in the case of Lebanon not the same as the strategy of the Lebanese national army.

In this paper, we will start with a brief political sketch of Lebanon in which the Lebanese political system, confessionalism, will be discussed together with the current divide in Lebanese politics it has caused. Understanding this connection is essential to the quest for a Lebanese national defence strategy. Then the recent history of the Islamic Resistance and its place within Lebanese politics, will be explained. After the historical sketch attention will be given to a politico-military analysis of the ability to achieve a national defence strategy, followed by a conclusion.

² The use of keeping an army comes under domestic pressure when there is a lack of external danger. In such a case the people (in fact the political elite) question the necessity of maintaining a large and expensive army. Therefore a smaller and, by consequence, cheaper army is built. Some academics see the professionalisation as a means to prevent a too direct feedback between defence and the civilian population, and to avoid the criticism that money be spent on defence rather than on social facilities.

1. A POLITICO-HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION TO THE DIVISION IN CONFESSİONAL LEBANON³

As will be made clear in the following, politics and national defence are closely connected in Lebanon. The difficult search for a national defence strategy is a reflection of the political conflict between the Shiite 8 March opposition bloc under Shiite domination and the Sunnite 14 March majority.⁴

In Lebanon the religious community one belongs to constitutes the basis to be involved in politics, this type of politics is called confessionalism or *ta'ifīyya*. Each Lebanese citizen has to testify to one specific religion only, with which he is associated through his identity card. Lebanese citizens who refuse to join this system, e.g. Lebanese nationals who testify to the unrecognised Baha'i-religion, simply cannot fully take part in the political game.

Those who really pull the strings in Lebanon are the leaders of the various religio-political factions, who generally come from families that are situated on top of the feudal pyramid in their religious community and who, in that capacity, constitute the link between sectarian and national politics.

Lebanese confessionalism was introduced by the French at the time they created the state of Lebanon out of the League of Nations mandate Syria entrusted to them in the aftermath of World War I. The *ta'ifīyya* had its roots in the socio-cultural reality of the virtually complete division between different religious groups in proto-Lebanon. Only under French mandate with the creation of Lebanon a global state structure appeared for the previously separate religious communities. The French mandatary intended to create a Christian nation in the Middle East that would be well-disposed towards France. The Maronite Christians were given the rule in Lebanon, a situation that persisted until after the independence of the cedar state in 1943 and this until the Lebanese civil war, which started in 1975 and raged until 1990.

The Maronite Christians were forced to hand over a lot of their power after the civil war, which was sealed by a new political order through the Ta'if Accord of 1989 which made for a more balanced distribution of power among the three major religious communities: Shiites, Sunnites and Maronites.⁵

³ For a more detailed analysis of Lebanese confessionalism see Pieter-Jan PARREIN, *Het Libanese confessionalisme: van christelijke dominantie naar een sektarische tweestrijd tussen soennieten en sjiieten*, Veiligheid en Strategie N°101, Brussels, October 2008.

⁴ Named after the major demonstrations held at these dates in 2005 following the deadly assault on former prime minister Rafiq al-Hariri, respectively pro-Syria (8 March 2005) and anti-Syria (14 March 2005). Opposition and majority are relative terms in Lebanese national politics, since the confessional basis makes both majority and opposition take up Seats in a national unified government, due to the fact that all religious communities must be represented in the government, and religion is tied up with particular political factions.

⁵ In total there are 18 recognised religious communities: 4 Islamic: Shiites, Sunnites, Alavites and a very small Group of Ismaelites, 12 Christian: Maronites, then Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholics, Armenian Orthodox, Armenian Catholics, Syrians Orthodox, Syrian Catholics, Assyrians (Nestorians), Chaldean Christians, Copts, Evangelicals, Roman Catholics and then there are the Drusians and the Jews. (State department: Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, 'Lebanon', *International Religious Freedom Report 2007*, 14 September 2007.) The Shiites, Sunnites, Maronites, Drusians, Greek Orthodox, Armenian Christians and Greek Catholic Christians are demographically speaking the dominant religious factions, counting approximately 1.36 million, 800,000, 760,000, 320,000, 240,000, 240,000 and 200,000 members respectively on a total population of around 4 million Lebanese, in Lebanon. (Alfred B.PRADOS, "Lebanon", CRS Report for Congress, 24 July

Nevertheless, the (Maronite) Christians retained, demographically speaking, a disproportionate share of the power as compared to the Sunnites and Shiites, in areas such as the number of seats in the Lebanese parliament and through the fact that the president and the army chief had to be Maronites.

Ta'if held the initial impetus to a deconfessionalisation, which, however, was never seriously pursued. The continuous entanglement of Syria and Lebanon after the civil war in 1990, both military and political, resulted in the sectarian debate being pushed into the background as well as the political fading away of the Christians, the fiercest opponents of a permanent Syrian involvement in Lebanon.

The departure of Syria from Lebanon in 2005, in the aftermath of the popular protests following the murder of former Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri, brought about a revival of Lebanese confessionalism, which got mixed up with the fight between defenders and opponents of Syrian involvement in Lebanon. The prominent religious communities of both factions were the Sunnites and Shiites, the respective opponents and defenders of Damascus. The elections of May-June 2005 centred on the issue Syria, in which case there was only contestation against both political factions from the part of the Christians. The Maronite Christian general Aoun managed to gather a major share of the Christian vote to the detriment of the traditional Christian leaders who had joined the anti-Syrian 14 March bloc. However, due to political opportunism and out of a desire to seize the Lebanese presidency, Aoun joined the pro-Syrian Shiite alliance, which is the more striking, since he himself had been driven away by the Syrian army at the end of the civil war and, consequently, had pleaded in Washington for a more stringent approach of Syria by the US. Nevertheless, Aoun had to leave the presidency to a fellow general, Michel Suleiman. At present, the Christians appear to hold the key for which coalition winning the elections of June 2009: the Sunnite-dominated pro-Western, anti-'Syrian involvement in Lebanon'-coalition, or, the Shiite-dominated pro-Syrian coalition.

2006, p.3.) Nevertheless, the political balance of power – which is partly a misbalance due to confessionalism - is especially made apparent in the number of parliamentary seats that has been set for these different sects: 27 for the Shiites, 27 for the Sunnites, 34 for the Maronites, 8 for the Drusians, 14 for the Greek Orthodox, 6 for the Armenian Christians and 8 for the Greek Catholics. (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, "Lebanon", *Arab Political Systems*, consulted on 30 March 2008.)

2. A NATIONAL DEFENCE STRATEGY FOR LEBANON: RECENT EVENTS

In this section a recent historical survey is given of the tensions between Hizbullah and the Lebanese government as well as later, when Hizbullah from 2005 onward had joined the Lebanese unified government, between Hizbullah and the Lebanese majority, on the armed status of Hizbullah. There are two major turnovers following the factual monopolisation by the Islamic Resistance, being the Hizbullah militia, of the fight against the Israeli occupier after the civil war. As a matter of fact, the Lebanese army kept itself apart and needed all of its energy to reorganise. This monopoly was made possible by Syrian opportunism alone, which allowed the Islamic Resistance to keep its arms, despite the Ta'if Accord that brought about disarmament of the other Lebanese militia.

A first turnover occurred onward from the retreat of the Israeli army from South Lebanon in May 2000. Ever since, the necessity of a permanently armed Hizbullah has been a matter of serious dispute, as well as confiding the defence of Lebanon to a sectarian power of resistance. This process gained momentum after the departure of patron Syria in April 2005. Through the participation of Hizbullah in the al-Siniora government after the elections of May-June 2005, and, more specifically through the suprasectarian 'Memorandum of Mutual Understanding' with the party of the former Maronite army chief, Michel Aoun, this 'dispute' has been politicised through the formula of national dialogue. This dialogue was reinstated in May 2008 - after the military action of Hizbullah - through the Doha Agreement, after the summer war of 2006 with Israel had caused a breaking off of the talks.

A second major turnover was the reemergence of the Lebanese national army as a result of Resolution 1701 of the UN-security Council after the summer war between the Islamic Resistance and the IDF⁶. This evolution was strengthened by the actions of the LAF⁷ in Nahr al-Bared, which made the prestige of the Lebanese army soar and the Americans resume their military support. This prestige was the result of the action taking place in contradiction to the warnings by the secretary-general of Hizbullah, Hassan Nasrallah, to refrain from entering the Palestinian refugee camp.⁸

After the end of the Lebanese civil war in 1990, the Ta'if Accord of 1989 resulted in the abolition and disarmament of all militia.⁹ Only the Islamic Resistance, the militia of the Shiite Hizbullah was allowed to keep its arms and structures, owing to Syrian rule. This measure was in full contradiction to Ta'if both in a literal sense and in the light of the deconfessionalisation of Lebanon initiated by Ta'if. The Shiite Hizbullah militia could be retained only owing to the fact that Damascus considered the armed faction as a trump card in its own fight against the Israeli occupation of the Golan. The act of letting Hizbullah keep its arms was fitted in the resistance against the Israeli occupation of Lebanese territory that was stipulated in the third chapter of Ta'if entitled: "*Liberating Lebanon from the*

⁶ *Israeli Defence Forces*

⁷ *Lebanese Armed Forces*

⁸ David SCHENKER, "Future of U.S. Military Aid to Lebanon", *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Policy Watch* #1407, 3 October 2008.

⁹ International Crisis Group, "The New Lebanese Equation: The Christians' Central Role", *Middle East Report N° 78*, 15 July 2008, p. 30. (Chapter II, 1)

Israeli occupation". Which mentioned that "(...) all steps necessary to liberate all Lebanese territories from the Israeli occupation" had to be taken in the service of state sovereignty, next to the deployment of the Lebanese army in the region at the Israeli border. The opportunism of Syria resulted in the actual undermining of the principal idea of Ta'if, the deconfessionalisation. An idea that translates itself in military terms in the monopoly of force for the national Lebanese government. As a matter of fact, in Ta'if the major assignment given to the reunified army was the defence of Lebanon against Israeli aggression.¹⁰

However, Ta'if represented a turnover for Hizbullah as well, which formerly had chosen Khomeini's ideology as the fundament of its fight against Israel. Ta'if made it possible for the more moderate wing of Hizbullah to gain the upper hand, which resulted in the party taking active part in Lebanese politics. This Lebanisation got a military counterpart in that the Islamic resistance subscribed to a national Lebanese framework. Thenceforth, the Hizbullah militia, following Ta'if, would combat Israel as occupier of Lebanese territory¹¹. This was more than a mere putting in other terms of the actions by the militia, since it limited the Islamic Resistance and made for a more defensive starting point in the fight against Israel than before in Khomeini's wake. From now on, Hizbullah's actions would no longer be organised in the scope of the fight against the 'Zionist entity' to help the Palestinians get their land back, although officially there was no modification, since the charter of Hizbullah remained unchanged.

From 1992 onward, Secretary-general Hassan Nasrallah would take care of a professionalisation of the resistance, which resulted in an ever greater efficiency of the militia's actions against the IDF. In the nineties Hizbullah became the active resistance against the occupation of South Lebanon by Israel, while the Lebanese army was predominantly preoccupied with its own reconstruction under general Emile Lahoud and did not interfere in the fight against the IDF. Ultimately, the severe losses for the IDF in its fight with the Islamic Resistance would result in May 2000 in a retreat from South Lebanon, an election promise made by Ehud Barak.¹² Barak had hoped that a unilateral retreat would be sufficient to undermine the legitimacy of the resistance as liberation force. The Israeli retreat indeed made the armed status of Hizbullah a matter of debate, and, as a consequence, questioned the necessity of a permanent Syrian presence.¹³ However, in the field the Israeli retreat signified a reinforcement of Hizbullah, since it would not be the LAF but the Islamic Resistance to take the place of the IDF and, in doing so, tightened its grip on South Lebanon even more. This could occur despite the resolutions of the UN Security Council – starting with Resolution 1310 – which urged the Lebanese army to broaden its sphere of action to the entire Lebanese territory, based on the idea that the LAF would take the place of Hizbullah in the southern part of the country. However, the Lebanese army did not want to go against Hizbullah.¹⁴ Besides, Hizbullah could still justify its armed status in the service of the liberation of Lebanese territory – albeit in a weakened form – by claiming that the Kfar Shouba Hills

¹⁰International Crisis Group, "The New Lebanese Equation: The Christians' Central Role", *Middle East Report N° 78*, 15 July 2008, p. 30. (Chapter II, 3, a & c)

¹¹ According to Daniel Byman the military activities of Hizbullah were bound to the condition that these would be limited to South Lebanon and the Bekaa Valley. (Daniel BYMAN, *Deadly Connections: States that Sponsor Terrorism*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2005, p.103.)

¹² According to the UN, in doing this, Israel complied with UNSC-resolution 425 of 1978 which summoned Israel, after its first major incursion in Lebanon, to retreat from Lebanon. 425 also signified the start of UNIFIL.

¹³ Nadim HASBANI, "Liban: crise politique sur fond de nouveau partage du pouvoir", *Politique étrangère*, 1:2007, 46-47.

¹⁴ VN-Security Council Resolution 1310 (via <http://www.un.org/Docs/scres/2000/sc2000.htm>) ; Nadim HASBANI, "Liban: crise politique sur fond de nouveau partage du pouvoir", *Politique étrangère*, 1:2007, p.46.

remained occupied by Israel and by considering the occupation of the Shebaa Farms as the occupation of Lebanese territory by Israel.¹⁵ Damascus supported the claim to consider the Shebaa Farms as Lebanese territory, despite the opinion of the UN that this area belonged to Syria.¹⁶ In doing this Damascus intends to reinforce the position of Hizbullah as a resistance group. Moreover, Hizbullah in its discourse after the Israeli retreat from Lebanon especially emphasizes its role as protector of the state against an Israeli invasion and not so much as a liberator of occupied Lebanese territory.¹⁷

The criticism on the armed status of Hizbullah was given obvious international support as well only thanks to UNSC Resolution 1559 of 2 September 2004. This occurred within the scope of permanent Syrian involvement in the domestic Lebanese political kitchen against the will of France and the US. Prior to this, Syria had already fallen out of favour in the West.¹⁸

After the retreat of Syria from Lebanon in April 2005 under Western pressure, Hizbullah was left alone to face the political storm. Through the loss of the Syrian umbrella, Hizbullah, for the first time since the elections of May and June 2005, participated directly to the government of national unity, which allowed it to take place in the front seat for the oncoming debate on its arms.

Moreover, the Party of God managed to reinforce its position in that it made a political cooperation agreement¹⁹ on 6 February 2006 with the Maronite general and former army chief Michel Aoun, who had succeeded gathering the majority of the Christians under his banner during the elections of May-June 2005. Of vital importance to the Lebanese national defence strategy is that the ‘Memorandum of Mutual Understanding’, as the agreement is officially called, defended a political solution for the arms of Hizbullah by integrating this issue in a national dialogue that should, among other things, lead to a new national defence strategy. It was the first time that a national defence strategy was mentioned in a document. The Memorandum states that the circumstances “*that would eliminate the reasons and justifications for keeping the arms of the Resistance*” should be objectively defined. As a matter of fact, the text imposes a non-restrictive minimal condition which allows Hizbullah for sure to retain its weapons. This is made possible through the claim that “*Since Israel occupies the Shebaa Farms²⁰, imprisons Lebanese resistance fighters, and threatens Lebanon, the Lebanese people must assume their responsibilities and share the burden of protecting Lebanon, safeguarding its existence and security, and preserving its independence and sovereignty by: 1 – Liberating the Shebaa Farms from the Israeli occupation. 2 – Liberating Lebanese prisoners from Israeli jails. 3 – Protecting Lebanon from Israeli dangers through a national dialogue leading to the formulation of a national*

¹⁵ “The preamble and excerpts from the 2008 ministerial statement”, *NOW for Lebanon*, 6 August 2008.

¹⁶ Sven JOOSTEN, “De grens tussen Libanon en Israël”, *Paper seminarie Midden-Oosten*, University of Antwerp, Department Political and Social Sciences, academic year 2007-2008, p.15-16 ; William HARRIS, “Bashar al-Assad’s Lebanon Gamble”, *Middle East Quarterly*, summer 2005 ; Alfred B.PRADOS, “Lebanon”, *CRS Report for Congress*, 24 July 2006, p.15.

¹⁷ Yitzhak NAKASH, *Reaching for Power: The Shi'a in the Modern Arab World*, Princeton University Press, Princeton & Oxford, 2006, p.139-140.

¹⁸ UNSC-Resolution 1559 (via http://www.un.org/Docs/sc/unsc_resolutions04.html)

¹⁹ Aoun himself, instead of referring to a political agreement, prefers the term entente between his Free Patriotic Front and Hizbullah. (Frédéric DOMONT, *Général Aoun : Une certaine vision du Liban*, Fayard, 2006, p.110)

²⁰ Officially this is not the case, since on 16 June 2000 the secretary-general of the UN had informed the Security Council that Israel had withdrawn from Lebanon in compliance with resolution 425. (Alfred B.PRADOS, “Lebanon”, *CRS Report for Congress*, 24 July 2006, p.15.)

defense strategy, which the Lebanese agree to and are involved in by assuming its burdens and benefiting from its outcomes.”²¹ According to the Memorandum Hizbullah is allowed to keep its arms as long as Israel occupies the Shebaa Farms, North Ghajar and the Kfar Shouba hills and while there is no written defence strategy. Next to this, the defence strategy as described by the Memorandum seems to open the door for a permanent role for the armed wing of Hizbullah by means of ‘burden sharing’ in the protection of Lebanon against Israel. Aoun explains in his ideological political pamphlet: ‘Général Aoun, Une certaine vision du Liban’ how he saw the operating mode as described by the Memorandum as the best way to overcome the deadlock around the arms of Hizbullah. In accordance with the Maronite view, Aoun favours a strong Lebanese nation. The military autonomy of Hizbullah stands in diametrical opposition to this view and, consequently, an elegant solution had to be found. In ‘Général Aoun, Une certaine vision du Liban’ le général sees the disarmament of Hizbullah confirmed as the ultimate outcome in the Memorandum, since the latter clearly defined the conditions under which Hizbullah was to give up its arms. He considered the National dialogue as a means to make the armed status policy a topic of discussion, and the national defence strategy as a way to bring these arms on a national level and leave an opening for a kind of popular resistance. However, Hizbullah would not allow itself to be bound by the Memorandum and rather presented it as a legitimisation of its armed status. One of the agreements between Aoun and Nasrallah was that the Resistance and Hizbullah as its voice tube would limit their ambitions to the liberation of Lebanese occupied territory and, in real terms, distance themselves from the ideological discourse around the liberation of Palestine.²² Hizbullah indeed softened its language, but would never fully renounce the liberation of Palestine, since this would be taken ill by its national and international supporters. Following the Israeli invasion in Gaza of late 2008 - early 2009 the second in command of Hizbullah, sheikh Naim Qassem, stated that *Hizbullah was committed to the liberation of Palestine "from the river to the sea."*²³ Nevertheless, in real terms the actions of the Islamic Resistance would mainly focus on Lebanese territory occupied by Israel.

Partly owing to the Memorandum of Mutual Understanding between the Aoun Movement and Hizbullah, a national dialogue was started up on 2 March 2006 between the 8 March and 14 March coalitions, which, however, would not reach a breakthrough on the essence: the national defence strategy. The dialogue was broken off by the summer war between the Islamic Resistance and the IDF and was not resumed afterwards due to the politically tense situation.²⁴

The invasion by the Israeli army in the summer war of 2006 to make short of the Islamic Resistance was - how ironic it may be - a godsend, since it reinforced the legitimacy of the organisation as defender of Lebanon. This view only made the stronger through Israel’s claim that its action was directed against Lebanon and not only against the Islamic Resistance.²⁵ Moreover, the Lebanese national forces could not and would not intervene, despite the statement by the Lebanese Defence minister that the Lebanese forces “would resist and defend the country if Israel invaded.”²⁶

²¹ International Crisis Group, “The New Lebanese Equation: The Christians’ Central Role”, *Middle East Report* N° 78, 15 July 2008, p.32-33.

²² Frédéric DOMONT, *Général Aoun : Une certaine vision du Liban*, Fayard, 2006, p.110-111, 114.

²³ Hussein ABDALLAH, “Rival Lebanese politicians rule out talks with Israel”, *The Daily Star*, 24 December 2008.

²⁴ Alfred B.PRADOS, “Lebanon”, *CRS Report for Congress*, 24 July 2006, p.11-12.

²⁵ “Iran’s tool fights America’s stooge - Lebanon; Lebanon”, *The Economist*, Vol. 387, Iss. 8580, 17 May 2008, p.36.

²⁶ Alfred B.PRADOS, “Lebanon”, *CRS Report for Congress*, 24 July 2006, p.16-17. Some critical analysts put forward the question if the Lebanese 14 March government had not hoped, just like some of its western allies, that the IDF would settle

Although Hizbullah had reinforced its political position after the fight, it was the Lebanese army which was able to strengthen its position on the field thanks to the summer war. More specifically UNSC Resolution 1701, which - after American-British procrastination – made the summer war end and allow the LAF to redeploy in South Lebanon after 37 years with 15,000 men.²⁷ The return of the Lebanese army took place with the consent of Hizbullah. As a matter of fact, as member of the government the Party of God had approved the seven items plan of Prime Minister Siniora too and the deployment of the LAF was part of it. 1701 stated that “*there will be no weapons without the consent of the Government of Lebanon and no authority other than that of the Government of Lebanon.*” Since in July 2005 the Lebanese government had agreed in its government declaration that Hizbullah had the right “*to complete the liberation of Lebanese territories*”, Hizbullah, so Amal Saad-Ghorayeb claims, did not consider it as a summons or need to disarm or to leave South Lebanon.²⁸ Hizbullah would, however, act with discretion in South Lebanon: its heavy arms were moved to the area north of the Litani River, outside the Area of Responsibility of UNIFIL and the militia members kept low profile. The summons to a “*full implementation of the relevant provisions of the Taif Accords, and of resolutions 1559 and 1680, that require the disarmament of all armed groups in Lebanon*”²⁹ was simply put aside by the Party of God.

The Lebanese national army was given the opportunity to raise its prestige through the fight against Fatah al-Islam of mid 2007 to early September 2007, in the Palestinian refugee camp of Nahr al-Bared. It was the first large-scale action by the Lebanese national army after the civil war. The action also made for a resumption of the American military support for Lebanon, even to the extent that the LAF came out of the fight stronger, both morally and materially. Despite the euphoria around the vigour of the Lebanese national army, mentions should be made of the fact that, despite the disapproval of Hizbullah of taking action against Palestinian refugee camps, Fatah-al-Islam was a feasible target for the LAF, not only military speaking, but above all, from a sectarian point of view. It was an extremist Sunnite faction that was viewed as a suprasectarian target in the eyes of the various confessionalist factions in Lebanon. Even to the Lebanese Sunnites the intervention was not an issue, since we were dealing with Islamic extremists with whom the Sunnites of the anti-Syrian and pro-Western 14 March camp were all too keen to settle scores in order to reinforce their image with their international bystanders. A second nuance to be made is that the weakness of the Lebanese national army was also made clear. The army disposed of too few resources to provide air support, which made that the camp could be taken by Lebanese infantry and commandos only after months of shelling by artillery, tanks and improvised bombardment helicopters. Besides, the US had come to the aid of the Lebanese army with special ammunition deliveries to keep the battle going.

Consequently, the hype around the renewed vigour of the Lebanese national army was partly punctured by the fact that the LAF failed to intervene at the action by Hizbullah and its allies, which

the issue Hizbullah in their stead. Sources within the Lebanese army, however, contradict this. They claim that the LAF simply did not dispose of the necessary resources to intervene.

²⁷ In 1969 the accords of Cairo were made between the Lebanese army and the Palestinian militia of South Lebanon, upon which the Lebanese army withdrew from the zone which was de facto under Palestinian control. (Nadim HASBANI, “Liban: crise politique sur fond de nouveau partage du pouvoir”, *Politique étrangère*, 1:2007, p.48.)

²⁸ Amal SAAD-GHORAYEB, “Hizbollah’s Outlook in the Current Conflict II”, *Policy Outlook*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, August 2006, p.3.

²⁹ UNSC-Resolution 1701 (via http://www.un.org/Docs/sc/unsc_resolutions06.html)

started on 8 May 2008 with the capture of the Sunnite West Beirut.³⁰ The LAF kept aside from the sectarian battle. Nevertheless, although Hizbullah had demonstrated its force and was able to enforce a political veto through the following Doha Agreement, the party – as well as its ally Aoun – at the same time were politically weakened after the battle, since they had taken up arms against other Lebanese nationals. This was in strong contradiction to their claim that their arms only served to resist Israel and defend Lebanon.³¹

Through the Doha Agreement of 25 May 2008 the national dialogue, and consequently the talks on a national defence strategy, were restarted under the leadership of the new president, former army chief Suleiman.³² One of the policy acts of the newly composed unified government was the writing of a declaration, which was approved by the Lebanese parliament on 13 August 2008 and which allowed for the armed status of Hizbullah.³³ “*In light of the state’s responsibility to protect Lebanon’s sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity according to the constitution, the government emphasizes the following: First: The right of Lebanon’s people, army and Resistance to liberate or recover the Shebaa Farms, the Kfar Shouba Hills and the Lebanese part of Ghajar, and defend Lebanon and its territorial waters in the face of any enemy and by all available and legitimate means. (..)*”³⁴ The text was reached only after three weeks of debate and despite the fierce resistance of Prime Minister al-Siniora, who wanted an immediate transfer of the armed status of Hizbullah to the national dialogue to be started by president Suleiman.³⁵

This national dialogue started off on 16 September 2008. After a three hour meeting a statement was issued in which the participants³⁶ agreed to “start talks on a national defence strategy in order to reach a common vision on this strategy”.³⁷ The national dialogue was immediately hypothecated by the question of Hizbullah to increase the number of participants with some members of the opposition³⁸, naturally all supporters of Hizbullah.³⁹

³⁰ International Crisis Group, “Lebanon: Hizbollah’s Weapons Turn Inward”, *Middle East Briefing N°23*, 15 May 2008, p.3-4.

³¹ Ibid., p. 5-6 ; ‘Iran’s tool fights America’s stooge - Lebanon; Lebanon’, *The Economist*, Vol.387, Iss. 8580, London, p.36 ; David SCHENKER, “Lebanese Crisis Ends: Hizballah Victory or Temporary Truce?”, *PolicyWatch*, #1375, May 21, 2008.

³² International Crisis Group, “The New Lebanese Equation: The Christians’ Central Role”, *Middle East Report N° 78*, 15 July 2008, p.26.

³³ “Hizbullah backed over Shebaa Farms”, *Al-Jazeera.net*, 13 August 2008.

³⁴ “The preamble and excerpts from the 2008 ministerial statement”, *NOW for Lebanon*, 6 augustus 2008.

³⁵ “Lebanon backs Hizbullah’s arms”, *Al-Jazeera.net*, 2 August 2008.

³⁶ The Lebanese ‘parties’ were represented by 14 interlocutors: president of parliament Nabih Berri of the Shiite Amal Party, prime minister Fouad Siniora of the Sunnite Future Movement, head of the Free Patriotic Movement Michel Aoun, head of the Progressive Socialist Party Walid Jumblatt, member of parliament for Loyalty to the Resistance (the 8 March faction) Mohammad Raad (as representative of Nasrallah), head of the Future Movement Saad al-Hariri, head of the Lebanese Forces Samir Geagea, former president and falangist Amin Gemayel, ministers Mohammad Safadi en Elias Skaff, and members of parliament Michel Murr, Butros Harb, Ghassan Tueni, and Hagop Pakradounian. (“Sleiman bans failure at opening of dialogue”, *The Daily Star*, 17 September 2008.)

³⁷ “Sleiman bans failure at opening of dialogue”, *The Daily Star*, 17 September 2008.

³⁸ o.a. Sleiman Franjieh, head of the Marada Movement, Minister of Youth and Sport Talal Arslan and former prime minister Omar Karami. (Hanin GHADDAR, “Obstructing dialogue”, *NOW for Lebanon*, 4 November 2008.)

³⁹ “Sleiman bans failure at opening of dialogue”, *The Daily Star*, 17 September 2008.

The second round of the national dialogue took place on 5 November 2008. This round did not amount to anything due to the persisting question of Hizbullah for more representatives of 8 March in the national dialogue, which was rejected by 14 March. At this session Michel Aoun presented his view on a national defence strategy: a popular resistance across the whole of Lebanon, which would entail a militarization of the entire Lebanese society. Naturally, this view is totally unacceptable to 14 March, since it would officially undermine the exclusive right of the national government to use force.⁴⁰ After a debate of three and a half hours president Suleiman decided to adjourn the meeting to 22 December 2008.⁴¹ This following National Dialogue session did not result in any progress either on the issue of a national defence strategy. Both Boutros Harb, a member of the 14 March-alliance, as Samir Geagea, suggested a plan of their own. Both put the Ta'if-Accord in front, with Defence under the exclusive authority of the state. Geagea proposed a defence system based on the Swiss model.⁴² This would, just like Aoun's, be a popular resistance model, albeit one under state control.⁴³ An agreement was not reached. Instead it was decided – very typically – to create a committee of experts to study all the proposed defence strategies in order to arrive at a common denominator.⁴⁴

The National Dialogue of 22 January 2009, where the committee of experts was to be composed, was postponed until 26 January for technical reasons.⁴⁵ These reasons, however, proved to be less technical than anticipated, since on 26 January the talks were postponed until 2 March 2009.⁴⁶ The outlook for a rapid breakthrough is grim, the National Dialogue will probably be postponed until after the elections of June 2009.

⁴⁰ Hanin GHADDAR, "A community of resistance", *NOW for Lebanon*, 13 November 2008.

⁴¹ "Lebanese dialogue to resume in December", *The Daily Star*, 6 November 2008.

⁴² "Geagea Submits Swiss-Type Strategy; Dialogue Adjourned", *moqavemat.ir*, 23 December 2008 ; Hanin GHADDAR, "National offensive", *NOW for Lebanon*, 22 December 2008.

⁴³ Hussein ABDALLAH, "Rival Lebanese parties resume dialogue on national defense strategy today", *The Daily Star*, 22 December 2008.

⁴⁴ "Geagea Submits Swiss-Type Strategy; Dialogue Adjourned", *moqavemat.ir*, 23 December 2008 ; Hanin GHADDAR, "National offensive", *NOW for Lebanon*, 22 December 2008.

⁴⁵ "National Dialogue postponed", *Naharnet.com*, 21 January 2009 ; "Dialogue session possibly last before elections", *NOW for Lebanon*, 26 January 2009.

⁴⁶ "Lebanon dialogue talks adjourned till March 2", *yalibnan.com*, 26 January 2009 ; "Lebanon Rivals Adjourn Tricky Defense Talks", *Lebanonnews.net*, 28 January 2009.

3. THE ROAD TO A NATIONAL DEFENCE STRATEGY: A POLITICO-MILITARY ANALYSIS

Once again I would like to refer to the previously used Belgian point of departure as an introduction to this chapter. The shift in Belgian defence strategy after the Cold War clearly emphasised in real terms the commitment of Belgian defence in crisis response operations. This political turnover brought about an adaptation – be it with the common delay typical of an organisation in transition – of the training and material of the military forces. Similarly, this change resulted in the severely questioning or even annulment of projects that were conceived in the old strategy, such as the Agusta anti-tank helicopters and the purchase of the Leopard II-tank as the successor of the Leopard I respectively. From a Belgian point of view it is illogical or, to say the least, bad governance to acquire material that would not fit in with the national defence strategy.

As will be discussed later, this way of thinking is again hard to translate to the Lebanese defence framework, since the banner of 'national defence strategy' covers an entirely different content altogether. In the case of Lebanon the making of a national defence strategy should by all means include the defence strategy of the Islamic Resistance as well as that of the Lebanese national army. As a matter of fact, the creation of, or even stronger, the intention to and the negotiating itself by all Lebanese political leaders of a written national defence strategy should be viewed as a first step toward bringing the Islamic Resistance under Lebanese state control. This step is a continuation of the initial integration of Hizbullah as a political party in Lebanese politics. As mentioned above, I have already referred to the military Lebanisation of Hizbullah. But this was only a Lebanisation of the frame of reference: the Islamic Resistance would from now on no longer be deployed on the basis of an ideological frame of reference, however, but in the pursuit of the political libanisation of Hizbullah, in a national Lebanese framework. The military Lebanisation was incomplete, due to the fact that the control over the militia itself did not pass to the Lebanese national government as a whole. The orders of the Islamic Resistance did not cease to be given by Hizbullah exclusively.

As will be demonstrated clearly, the only answer to the creation of a national defence strategy would be political. This does not, however, diminish the validity of an empowerment of the capacity of the LAF as one of the few possibilities to bring about a relatively swift breakthrough in this political issue.

In this chapter we will first describe the present system of military protection of Lebanon as it was made public and developed after the summer war of 2006 between Hizbullah and Israel. Then we will discuss the various possibilities to arrive at a national defence strategy from the politico-military spectrum. First, it will be made clear why the military option is not an option. Then the possibilities of a purely political solution will be discussed. Finally, from a political point of view, the emphasis will be put on the possibilities and limitations of a rearmament and development of the capacities of the Lebanese national army.

a. The military protection of Lebanon

In countries which dispose of a national army that puts the monopoly of state force in real terms, the national defence strategy almost entirely coincides with the strategy of the national army. In Lebanon the main part of the principal mission of national defence, the protection of the sovereignty of the state, is executed by the armed wing of Hizbullah.

i. The Islamic Resistance

The Lebanese army describes on its website "Facing the Israeli occupation and its perpetual aggression in South Lebanon and West Bekaa"⁴⁷ as its major mission. However, the second part of this mission reveals that the LAF has settled itself officially in a subordinate position vis-à-vis the Islamic Resistance: "and supporting the steadfastness of Lebanese citizens to ensure the complete withdrawal of the Israeli forces to internationally recognized borders."⁴⁸

Opponents of Hizbullah put forward the claim that the Islamic Resistance would mainly be an instrument of political pressure at the national political level. On the international arena it is obvious that the militia is one of the instruments of Iran and Syria to exert pressure on this level. Nevertheless, the reality in the field is undeniable. The vast investments by the Islamic Resistance in a network of military strongholds as well as the build-up of a military deterrence capacity - both in equipment and staff -, are - as will be discussed below - obviously directed against an Israeli incursion in South Lebanon. Furthermore, the actions by the Islamic Resistance against the IDF after the Israeli retreat of May 2000 were aimed at the area occupied by the IDF, which, in the opinion of Hizbullah, was part of the territory of Lebanon. The small-scale cross-border actions by the Resistance were meant to capture Israeli soldiers to trade them off against Lebanese prisoners in Israeli cells. One of those actions was seized by Israel as an excuse to deal with Hizbullah "once and for all" in the summer war of 2006. The political opponents of Hizbullah chose the take-over of West Beirut in May 2008 by the Islamic Resistance to denounce the Resistance as a sectarian militia that only defended the political interests of Hizbullah. The action indeed did not shed a favourable light on the national character of the Resistance; however, this occurred after the 14 March majority had attempted to proscribe an essential part of the network of military strongholds of the Resistance, i.e. the communication infrastructure. The argument mentioned above does not hold a political view, but is based on the facts in the field, which are unofficially recognized by the Lebanese army. Sources within the Lebanese army confirm that the Resistance is an essential part of the military protection of Lebanon and, in that capacity, recognised, respected and supported by the LAF.

In view of the major mission of Defence, 'the safeguarding of the sovereignty of the state against an incursion of the enemy', would allow for the claim that the Islamic Resistance only takes upon itself a very limited part of this, that is, the liberation of the territory in South Lebanon occupied by

⁴⁷ Mission of the Lebanese army (via <http://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/English/Mission.asp>)

⁴⁸ Mission of the Lebanese army (via <http://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/English/Mission.asp>)

Israel and the protection of Lebanon against an Israeli ground assault. As a matter of fact, this threat is, within Lebanon, considered as the most important and the most likely one.

The tactics of the Resistance have been linked very strongly with the terrain in South Lebanon⁴⁹ and the militia does not have the capacities to put up a fight efficiently outside these areas against a strong opponent such as the IDF. The Resistance only manages to neutralize the technological unbalance during an Israeli ground assault - with the virtually total air supremacy of Israel – through the maximal use of strongholds and hidden positions in the field⁵⁰, as became apparent in the summer war of 2006. The Resistance has adopted a tactic that is a combination of the conventional safeguarding of as much ground as possible and the launching of guerrilla assaults in areas under enemy control. In a first phase an attempt is made to break off the advance of the enemy in a conventional way, in holding the ground by means of well prepared positions. At the very same time attempts are made to give a severe blow to the assault forces while, through a retaliatory capacity in the shape of missiles, to increase the costs with the civil population of the other side. The high toll of casualties, both at the front and in the hinterland, as well as the damage to military and civil infrastructure, is aimed at undermining the will to continue fighting. Holding the ground is important as well to allow for a maximum use of the retaliatory capacity through missiles. This tactic is practiced through the use of well prepared positions for both personnel and missiles, which are guarded by local reserve militias who dispose of an excellent terrain knowledge. They are supported by mobile, professional Resistance fighters who are trained in the use of more sophisticated arm systems such as antitank weapons, mortars and techniques such as sniping and who operate the missiles. To increase the cost for the IDF Hizbullah has done everything in its power to acquire a vast quantity of modern antitank arms. In case the enemy manages to occupy terrain, the same well prepared and hidden positions and supplies, in a second phase, could be used as bases for guerrilla assaults behind the frontline to disrupt the supply of the frontline.⁵¹

A major element for the Islamic Resistance was the ability to retain at all times the mutual contact between the various echelons in the field and the leadership in Beirut in the summer war of 2006 by means of the extensive communication network of Hizbullah, which could resist jamming and interception by the IDF. Hassan Nasrallah called it an essential part of the arsenal of the Islamic Resistance.⁵²

⁴⁹ Although assisted by command-, training and logistic infrastructure in the Bekaa valley and South Beirut. According to Nadim Hasbani of Crisis Group International there is not only the strong link between the terrain in South Lebanon and the Resistance but also between the Shiites in South Lebanon and the purpose of the Resistance: fighting Israel. Similar to Israel there is a strong social militarisation, the fight against Israel is in the genes of the Shiites of South Lebanon, since they have never known anything else and are raised in combat, the various Israeli invasions and the suffering that comes with it. The Hizbullah-organisation considers this as a problem for the national character of the Resistance and tries also to involve other religious groups, however, these are only reserve battalions. (“Hizbullah plans for war”, *Jane’s Terrorism and security monitor*, 16 May 2008.)

⁵⁰ From the retreat of Israel from South Lebanon in May 2000 until the summer war of 2006 the Islamic Resistance had built an extensive network of bunkers, observation posts, artillery positions and arm depots. These were/are situated at 3 or 4 km from the *Blue Line*. (Nicholas BLANFORD, “Call to arms - Hizbullah’s efforts to renew weapons supplies”, *Jane’s Intelligence Review*, 1 May 2007 ; “Deconstructing Hizbullah’s surprise military prowess”, *Jane’s intelligence review*, 1 November 2006.)

⁵¹ Stephen BIDDLE & Jeffrey A. FRIEDMAN, *The 2006 Lebanon campaign and the future of warfare*, Strategic Studies Institute, Carlisle, September 2008, p.51-52 ; Elias HANNA, “Lessons learned from the recent war in Lebanon”, *Military Review*, September-October 2007 ; Deconstructing Hizbullah’s surprise military prowess”, *Jane’s intelligence review*, 1 November 2006.

⁵² Deconstructing Hizbullah’s surprise military prowess”, *Jane’s intelligence review*, 1 November 2006 ; “Hizbullah plans for war”, *Jane’s Terrorism and security monitor*, 16 May 2008. The vital character of the communication system became all too apparent when Hizbullah made an armed retaliation following the declaration of the Lebanese 14 March government in May 2008 to make this system illegal.

ii. The Lebanese Armed Forces

The fact that the Resistance – be it unofficially - takes care of the predominantly Shiite South Lebanon only, makes the protection of the entire Lebanese airspace, the territorial sea, the land border with Syria and North and Central Lebanon the exclusive competence of the Lebanese national army. The threats to the LAF are less direct than a possible Israeli action in South Lebanon. Nevertheless, these should not be minimized, and, as will become apparent later, the Lebanese national army is not sufficiently capable of safeguarding Lebanese sovereignty in these areas. These threats include a possible Syrian action, the traffic of arms through the Syrian Lebanese border, smuggling through the sea border, an assault against the possible exploitation of gas within Lebanese territorial waters, Israeli flights over Lebanese airspace, a possible Israeli invasion that breaks through the defences of the Resistance,...

The latest major support for the Lebanese army was seen in 1982-1983 when the US backed president Gemayel during the smouldering civil war with American army material, among which hundreds of M-113's, technology from the sixties, which are still in use by the Lebanese army. Between 1990 and 2005, there was, in the opinion of Nadim Hasbani, an unofficial arms embargo against Lebanon, due to the fear that arms might fall in the hands of Syria, which at the time was the dominant force in Lebanon. The fact of the LAF not intervening during the Israeli invasion in the summer of 2006 is, in the opinion of analysts and sources within Lebanese defence, not so much the result of a lack of will or a choice not to intervene as the actual lack of means to undertake anything at all. The Islamic Resistance, on the contrary, had prepared itself for years and as such had at least the moral support of the official Lebanese army.

To begin with, the poor state of the protection of the airspace is painfully made clear by the daily airspace violations of the Israeli jets and UAV⁵³'s⁵⁴, illustrating that a valid air defence capacity on the ground to match the F-15's and F-16's of the Israeli air force is totally lacking⁵⁵, while the Lebanese air force (1000 men) does not dispose of a valid interception capacity either. At present the Lebanese army disposes of 8 operational anti-tank helicopters, next to some twenty operational transport helis for which the US delivered spare parts in December 2008.⁵⁶ It has 6 Hawker Hunters, British jets from the fifties,

⁵³ Unmanned Aerial Vehicle

⁵⁴ To give an example: in the period April-May 2008 UNIFIL registered an average of some 20 violations a day of the Lebanese airspace, including 72 violations by UAVs for one single day. (Nicholas BLANFORD, "UN Resolution 1701: A view from Lebanon", *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, Policy Watch #1414, 21 October 2008.)

⁵⁵ Nicholas BLANFORD, "A leap of faith for Lebanon's security", *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 8 November 2006. Hizbullah would dispose of a limited air defence capacity (Russian SA-18 (manpack)) against Israeli fighter planes, but did not use it during the war in 2006. (Will HARTLEY, *Jane's World insurgency and Terrorism: Issue Twenty-eight*, Jane's Information Group Limited, Coulsdon, 2008, p.748) Analysts, however, assume that in case of a new Israeli invasion in Lebanon one of the first actions by Hizbullah would be the taking down of an Israeli jet, in order to make a symbolical questioning of Israeli air supremacy with the population of Israel.

⁵⁶ Nicholas KIMBRELL & Fidelius SCHMID, "Murr: Lebanese Army incapable of absorbing Hizbullah's assets", *The Daily Star*, 24 December 2008 ; Nicholas KIMBRELL, "Would multiple arms suppliers be blessing or curse for LAF?", *The Daily Star*, 5 December 2008.

which, however, are not airborne.⁵⁷ The Lebanese air force does not have an interception capability, and hence, only the few anti-tank helis do not constitute a plausible deterrence force either, since they are only old French Gazelles of which the apparatus for the anti-tank missiles has been stripped prior to their being delivered to Lebanon by the United Arab Emirates.⁵⁸ To carry out its mission, namely, the protection of Lebanese air space, what in real terms would be dissuade violations of its air space by Israeli jets and UAVs, the Lebanese air force needs modern fighter planes and helicopters. These could also be deployed in support of ground forces.

The small Lebanese naval force of 1100 men cannot protect its territorial waters, since it only disposes of river and coastal vessels.⁵⁹ This is one of the reasons why the Lebanese army could not oppose the Israeli sea blockade during and after the summer war of 2006. The official purpose of this blockade was to impose an arms embargo, however, instead it disrupted the Lebanese economy and was lifted only after the deployment of the *Unifil Marine Task Force* in October 2006 and actually took over the arms embargo mission of the Israelis.⁶⁰ The Lebanese navy was given 10 fast patrol boats in 2007 and 2008 by the United Arab Emirates as well as 3 vessels from Germany which had previously served with the naval police of Bremen, however, these can't be deployed at high sea either under all weather conditions.⁶¹ Obviously, the Lebanese navy is in need of seaworthy vessels to be able to secure the monitoring of its territorial waters and to counteract possible arms traffic. With the discovery of gas supplies in the northern territorial sea of Israel and the following prospect of gas supplies in front of the Lebanese coast, a well-equipped, and by consequence, a seaworthy Lebanese navy proves to be a necessary protective measure.⁶²

The Lebanese land forces consist of 56000 men and disposes of mainly obsolete American equipment it got in the eighties and obsolete Soviet material⁶³ from the era of Syrian supremacy. In total 310 main battle tanks (T54/T55, M-48A1/A5), 1275 armoured personnel carriers of which 90% M-113s, no self propelled artillery, a negligible air defence and antitank capacity and 8 Iranian UAVs.⁶⁴ Bearing in mind that they dispose of no air defence or Close Air Support, it is obvious that the Lebanese land forces dispose of insufficient military capacity to ensure the necessary deterrence against a possible aggression from its neighbours. Early December 2009 the US supplied 285 Humvees, 200

⁵⁷ The International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 2008*, Routledge, London, 2008, p.252.

⁵⁸ "Lebanon's army wants more U.S. military aid", *Ya Libnan*, 14 August 2007.

⁵⁹ The International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 2008*, Routledge, London, 2008, p.252.

⁶⁰ Andrew WANDER, "Lebanon needs better boats to patrol waters on its own - UN naval chief", *The Daily Star*, 7 November 2008.

⁶¹ Timur GOKSEL, Hans Bastian HAUCK, Karim MAKDISI & Stuart REIGELUTH, "Germany's Contribution to Lebanese Sovereignty", *DGAPstandpunkt*, N°1, January 2008 ; Thomas NEWDICK, "German Reconstruction Aid Boosts Lebanon's Fleet", *DefenseNews.com*, 20 June 2008.

⁶² Andrew WANDER, "Lebanon needs better boats to patrol waters on its own - UN naval chief", *The Daily Star*, 7 November 2008, p.251-252.

⁶³ 200 T-54/T-55's. After the Yom Kippur war Syria entered the Soviet camp entirely.

⁶⁴ The International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 2008*, Routledge, London, 2008, p.251 ; Nicholas BLANFORD, "A leap of faith for Lebanon's security", *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 8 November 2006.

trucks and more than 40 M-198 155mm-artillery pieces and ambulances.⁶⁵ Nevertheless, these deliveries did not constitute a real (technological) added value to the Lebanese national army.

Much to the regret of those who would like to see the contrary, the Islamic Resistance has a solid point to justify its arms when it claims to be the only party capable of defending Lebanon against Israel.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Nicholas KIMBRELL & Fidelius SCHMID, "Murr: Lebanese Army incapable of absorbing Hizbullah's assets", *The Daily Star*, 24 December 2008 ; Nicholas KIMBRELL, "Would multiple arms suppliers be blessing or curse for LAF?", *The Daily Star*, 5 December 2008.

⁶⁶ Robert F. WORTH & Eric LIPTON, "U.S. Resupplies Lebanon Military to Stabilize Ally", *New York Times.com*, 26 October 2008.

b. An analysis of the politico-military spectrum to arrive at a national defence strategy

In a first section of this chapter we will very quickly dispense with the military option to arrive at one national defence strategy, since the latter proves a particularly problematic option. Indeed, only a political solution offers a perspective to arrive at a real national defence strategy, and as such the integration of the armed wing of Hizbullah within the Lebanese government.

i. The military option

The military solution to bring the Resistance under state control would actually mean a military defeat of the Resistance by the Lebanese army. This is not an option and never will be, for two reasons; for one, the power of the Resistance in South Lebanon and secondly, the suprasectarian ‘neutral’ character of the LAF.

For the moment, the armament of the Resistance is superior to that of the Lebanese national army, as illustrated by the ground-ground rockets, anti-tank weapons and to some sources the ground-air-missiles. But the real strength of the Resistance lies in the link with the terrain and the Shiite population in South Lebanon. The warriors of the Resistance fight for their families and home and this is especially true for the village guards, the reserve troops. Consequently, they are well-motivated. Moreover, they know the environment best, since it is their own. The military advantage and consequently the strength that the Resistance derives from their knowledge of the terrain is fortified by the careful preparation and expansion of strongholds which are aimed at countering an Israeli incursion but may just as well be used as military bulwarks.

How well-armed the Lebanese national army may be in time, it is almost impossible to build up an equivalent, not to say a better, military capacity as the Resistance, in South Lebanon. When the IDF cannot eliminate the Resistance, a reinforced Lebanese national army will not succeed either. Therefore, it is safe to assume that the military support from the US for the Lebanese national army does not so much directly undermine the military position of the Resistance, but only increases the credibility of the national army and as such strengthens the position of their supporters in the Lebanese government, the 14 March fraction vis-à-vis the Hizbullah-Aoun fraction. We will discuss this in more detail below.

There is, however, one even more forceful argument which puts our thinking exercise even more into perspective: the confessionalism in Lebanon. The national army stands above this and presents itself as suprasectarian and neutral. This would be necessary to operate in the sensitive Lebanese religious political context. The population likewise generally recognises the national army as the only functional really national and suprasectarian institute. Although some analysts question this, military sources support this claim. This would make it actually possible for the army to intervene with moral supremacy against the Lebanese *ta’ifiyya* and as such deal with the Shiite Islamic Resistance. However, in real terms, the opposite is true and the suprasectarian character of the Lebanese army actually restricts its utility to deal with domestic problems. There is, as a matter of fact, the constant fear that in a situation with an extreme sectarian tension, the sectarian identity of the civilian in the military men or women will nevertheless get the upper hand on the suprasectarian military identity in which the civilians who were turned into military men or women, have been indoctrinated. With a total of 35% Shiites in the Lebanese national army, this could well lead to a disintegration of the army should direct actions be ordered against their Shiite brethren of the Islamic Resistance. As a matter of fact, during the Lebanese civil war, the Lebanese national army fell apart along sectarian fissures.

As such we have made one point clear. The Islamic Resistance can only be put under state control through a political agreement.

ii. The purely political solution

As made clear by our discussion above, only a political process will offer a possibility to bring the Islamic Resistance under the control of the Lebanese national government, meaning that Hizbullah will only render its arms – or to put it differently, its military power –in exchange of more political power. At present, Hizbullah is politically speaking perfectly satisfied, since they acquired a minority veto in the government⁶⁷ owing to the Doha Agreement in May 2008, which enables them to check sectarian sensitive themes such as the armament of the Islamic Resistance. In this respect, Nadim Hasbani notes that the al-Siniora government obstinately refused to meet this demand of Hizbullah, which sounded stronger after the summer war of 2006. The summer war had given the Party of God the prestige that it wanted to see translated in political power. He considers this refusal as an underlying cause of the show of force in May 2008, which made the 14 March majority eventually give in to the minority veto. In the opinion of Nadim Hasbani the Siniora government as such bargained away a nice political trump card to push Hizbullah toward concessions on national defence strategy. Therefore, political *incentives* from Lebanon itself prove extremely difficult, unless the political system itself would be affected. As mentioned in my work on Lebanese confessionalism⁶⁸, there is both a qualitative and relative quantitative subordination at the national political level of the Shiites vis-à-vis the two other major religious communities: the Sunnites and the Christians. Qualitatively speaking a political incentive could be the creation of extra positions for Shiites within the present system of *ta’ifiyya*. Quantitatively speaking, that is, demographically, an *incentive* might be the introduction of a more proportional system of political representation, which would automatically give the Shiites more political power, the ultimate goal of which would be a deconfessionalisation of Lebanon.⁶⁹ Especially the scenario of deconfessionalisation would at present be no more than a noble cause for most Lebanese, although the Ta’if agreement marked this as the solution in the long term for a stable Lebanon.

At present no major breakthrough is to be expected before the National Dialogue in Lebanon. The parliamentary elections of June 2009 are near, what makes that Lebanon is entering a pre-electoral climate in which, most likely, the urge with the political parties to set themselves apart vis-à-vis their religious constituency will be fueled. Major suprasectarian initiatives, such as a breakthrough in national defence strategy, seem out of the question. The formation of a new cabinet will make it clear to what

⁶⁷ Through the Ta’if-agreement of 1989 which ended the Lebanese civil war, the system of ‘collegiate government’ was installed. From now on there would have to be a two third majority within the government for fundamental issues such as the reconsideration of the administrative division of the country, the electoral law and the law on personal status. Beside a two third majority there had to be an agreement in real terms among these groups when taking cabinet decisions, although the Ta’if-agreement never phrased it quite as explicitly.

⁶⁸ Pieter-Jan PARREIN, *Het Libanese confessionalisme: van christelijke dominantie naar een sektarische tweestrijd tussen soennieten en sjiieten*, Veiligheid en Strategie N°, Brussel, October 2008.

⁶⁹ In my paper on confessionalism I develop the thought of how such a deconfessionalisation could be installed in such a way as to make it acceptable to Sunnites, Shiites and Maronites alike and what could be the possible advantages and drawbacks.

extent the Lebanese government will be ready to achieve a politically stable Lebanon. A continuation of the National Dialogue would only be possible in case the principle of a national united government remains unaffected. Hassan Nasrallah already stated that, should he win the elections, he will not touch this principle, which is at once a covert ‘compelling’ call to the Sunnites to not deviate from this political achievement.⁷⁰ It would definitely give a positive signal if after the elections the minority veto for the opposition would remain in the united government as a reassuring political emergency brake.⁷¹ Some analysts consider this minority veto serving the Shiites as a new achievement to make up for the unbalance between their demographic strength and the number of Seats they get in accordance with the unofficial sectarian division of the cabinet seats.⁷² In this scenario, the 2009 elections would only decide who would take the lead in the National Dialogue after the vote; 8 March or 14 March. Everything points to a neck and neck race for the elections between both factions, in which the Christian voters will be the deciding factor. Major political turnovers would be highly unlikely due to the religious political ties between voter and elected representative in Lebanese confessionalism. On top of this, the already considerable political immobility within Lebanese confessionalism has been strengthened after Doha through the introduction of the minority veto for the opposition within the Lebanese government.

Lebanon is closely intertwined with international politics in the Middle East. Many analysts consider it a proxy-battlefield, a kind of hot front in the cold war between the United States and Iran. This would be the result of the international ties between the various communities, the most outspoken division being the one between the 8 and 14 March fraction. Consequently, changes at an international level are likely to bring about a change in Lebanese politics as well. In this area hope for change was raised by the inauguration of president Obama on 20 January 2009. At an international level he is a strong advocate of an open dialogue with both friend and foe. In this respect he reaches his hand to Iran and Syria and, to the regrets of those who would like to have things differently: it is the US who currently still holds the key to solving the problems in the Middle East. Iran, Syria and the US alike are, besides Saudi Arabia and Qatar, the major protagonists within Lebanon; however, for the time being, they only serve their own sectarian partisans.⁷³ Much is expected of the elections in Iran of 12 June 2009 which may result in a more moderate interlocutor for the international community. Regional detente is essential to Lebanon; however, this will have to wait until the summer of 2009.

The above brief analysis leads us to the conclusion that at present there would be, politically speaking, no immediate solution to win Hizbullah over and reconsider its armed status. Nevertheless, as we all know, the wind may turn quickly in politics.

⁷⁰ “Lebanon’s election law: The more things change, the more they stay the same”, *The Daily Star*, 30 September 2008.

⁷¹ In case Hizbullah becomes an opposition party once more, the majority will not have many choices anymore. Hizbullah is not planning to let go its acquired veto right in Lebanese politics.

⁷² To this we should add the remark that this unofficial adaptation is there to avoid having to touch Ta’if. Modifications to the agreement which ended the civil war are difficult, lest a further collapse of the consensus brought about by Ta’if and a new escalation of the tensions among religious groups would occur.

⁷³ For an analysis, see : Pieter-Jan PARREIN, *Het Libanese confessionalisme: van christelijke dominantie naar een sektarische tweestrijd tussen soennieten en sjiieten*, Veiligheid en Strategie N°, Brussels, October 2008.

iii. The reinforcement of the Lebanese national army and the national defence strategy

In our discussion above we focused on the necessary political character of the national defence strategy. However, the fact that Hizbullah does not require anything and the 14 March side has nothing to offer, complicates this political process. This was clearly seen in the historical survey at the beginning of our paper, which makes it absolutely clear that the national dialogue moves slowly and progress is scarce.

Does the above mean that we should await patiently the result of the elections in Lebanon and Iran of this summer and hope for moderate and vigorous leaders? Not quite, although the ultimate solution may well prove to be a political one, some military steps may be taken and a rapprochement between the LAF and the Islamic Resistance should be undertaken. A direct and open rapprochement between both military powers is politically impossible. But from the Lebanese national army steps could be taken to facilitate a future political solution. The Lebanese national army would become all the more credible provided it was more capable of executing its mission to protect Lebanese sovereignty. It is exactly this lack of credible deterrence which - justly so - is criticised by Hizbullah and which helps to legitimise its militia, the Islamic Resistance. In case the LAF would succeed in providing a credible defence of its (unofficial) part of the sovereignty of Lebanon, the threshold for a common (political) national defence strategy between the LAF and the Islamic Resistance could be lowered.

The Resistance has proved its merit since long, first by forcing the IDF to retreat from South Lebanon in 2000 and again in the summer war of 2006. The LAF is, contrary to the Resistance, an army with a conventional character and wishes to remain so in the future. The preservation of the conventional character of the LAF points to the fact that it does not want to focus on the IDF exclusively in adapting its strategy and tactics to an enemy superior in capacity. The balance between the LAF and the IDF is clearly asymmetrical, but the build-up of a symmetric conventional military capacity is impossible for the Lebanese army since this would mean that the LAF should have the equal means of its major enemy: Israel.⁷⁴ The Jewish state disposes of the latest American military technology and has a large military industry of its own. Besides, the Israeli society is strongly militarised, in the case of full mobilisation at least 12% of the Jewish population is used, that is, a standing army of 176,500 men and a reserve army of 565,000.⁷⁵ The Israeli defence budget amounts to 9.45 billion dollar and an additional 2.34 billion dollar⁷⁶ direct American financial military support⁷⁷. The budget of the Lebanese army, 631 million dollar, is next to nothing in comparison. However, Lebanon gets between 30 and 40 million dollar a year from the US in support of its army⁷⁸ and in 2007 it received a once-only 220 million dollar

⁷⁴ Some statistics to illustrate the Israeli supremacy: strategic forces with more than 200 nuclear warheads, 3501 main battle tanks including some 1500 Merkavas, 5432 pieces of artillery including 620 self-propelled and 224 MRLs, 3 submarines, 3 frigates, 363 fighter planes F16, F15 and Sky Hawk, 94 Apaches and Cobras, UAVs, missiles,... (The International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 2008*, Routledge, London, 2008, p.246-248)

⁷⁵ Of the Israeli citizens of Arabian descent (23,6% of the 7,1 million Israeli) (<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/is.html>) only the Druses both serve in the army and enlist in the IDF.

⁷⁶ Statistics for 2007 (The International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 2008*, Routledge, London, 2008, p.246-248)

⁷⁷ apart from the technological

⁷⁸ Casey L. ADDIS, "Lebanon: Background and U.S. Relations", *Congressional Research service*, 16 December 2008. Originally, for 2007 only 4.8 million dollar of military support had been scheduled for Lebanon by the American Congress. (Alfred B. PRADOS, "Lebanon", *CRS Report for Congress*, 24 July 2006, p.21.)

additional military support from the US. The Lebanese army only counts 'a mere' 56,000 men and military service was suspended in 2007.⁷⁹ On top of this, the general policy in Lebanon after Ta'if is one of demilitarisation of society, since the introduction to as well as the development of the civil war have demonstrated what the result of a militarised society may be.

In a nutshell, the Lebanese army obviously will never be able to provide a symmetrical conventional deterrence against the IDF. What would be within the means of Lebanon, however, is the modest aim to achieve the protection of national sovereignty with adequate means to deter smaller actions by the IDF such as the daily airspace violations with jets and the possible violations of its land and sea borders. At the same time, a more effective Lebanese army would contribute to remedy the unbalanced relationships between Lebanon and Syria, to prevent or deal more forcibly with domestic communal disturbances, as well as to counteract the threat posed by Palestinian and Islamic extremist armed factions.

Should the latter be achieved, the threshold for a national integration of the armed capacity of Hizbullah would be reduced considerably. From this point of view it would be obvious for the Lebanese army to first reinforce itself to be able to execute its share of the military protection of Lebanon in real terms and vigorously. To this end it should acquire the necessary resources as soon as possible.

Some analysts hold a different view altogether. They claim that the establishment of a national defence strategy, including a clear definition of the general mission, translated in a coherent military doctrine, is a necessary condition, to acquire, in a second phase, the necessary reinforcements in means and tactics to secure the monopoly of violence for the Lebanese state.⁸⁰ In my opinion, they come to this line of reasoning because they do not have a clear view of the connection between the term 'national defense strategy' and the Lebanese political framework. As such they lose sight of the essence of the national defense strategy, i.e. the question how the national integration of the Islamic Resistance can be achieved. In their analyses they also ignore the limitations of the Islamic Resistance, mainly the confinement of the terrain, as described above.

The major impediment to the reconstruction of the Lebanese national army is the limited Lebanese defence budget of 631 million dollar, of which a considerable part is spent on the wages of the military, which leaves hardly anything to invest in new equipment. In 2007 this budget received a once-only contribution of 220 million dollar American military support.⁸¹ The limited budget has made the Lebanese army dependent on donor countries should it wish to acquire more modern and effective military means. The possible risk of such a train of action would be that Lebanon might find itself in a client position vis-à-vis international powers which are willing to donate arms to the country or sell them at a reduced or symbolical price. The subtitle of this paper refers to the reciprocal influence between defence and politics, which especially goes for international politics. The supply of sophisticated military equipment automatically creates a tie in the international political arena. This would be the result of the fact that the nation which supplies the technology always has to give its approval to put it at the disposal of potential buyers. This approval will only be given to an ally, or, in case there would not be any close ties, to a possible future ally.

⁷⁹ The International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 2008*, Routledge, London, 2008, p.251.

⁸⁰ Daniel NEWELL, "The future of the Lebanese Armed Forces", *NOW for Lebanon*, 31 October 2008.

⁸¹ The International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 2008*, Routledge, London, 2008, p.251.

The American military support, which was reinstated in 2006 after the summer war between Hizbullah and Israel, is seen by allies of 8 March and some analysts as backing the position of the 14 March majority vis-à-vis Hizbullah. Robert F. Worth and Eric Lipton describe the intention of the American support for the LAF as follows: "to build an armed force that could help stabilise Lebanon's fractured state, fight a rising terrorist threat and provide a legitimate alternative to the Shiite militant group Hizbullah." During the Syrian dominance of Lebanon until 2005 the intention was to keep the Lebanese national army weak, to allow the Islamic Resistance, which was controlled and militarily supported by Iran and Syria, to strengthen its position in Lebanon.⁸² A similar strategy –predominantly adopted by the US – now does the opposite in trying to strengthen the position of the national Lebanese army in order to weaken that of the Islamic Resistance and, in line with this policy, enfeeble Hizbullah, Iran and Syria. The joint American-Lebanese military committee that was created as part of the renewed military cooperation in October 2008, is a fine illustration of the use of military support to tighten political ties, defence diplomacy at its best.⁸³

However, there are plenty of competitors around. The new Russia as well has adopted a more assertive international policy (vis-à-vis the US) and is, among other things, looking for new supply ports and allies in the Mediterranean Sea. In this light should be viewed the Russian offer, mid December 2008, to supply for free 10 MiG- 29 fighter planes of the type *fighter-bomber* to the Lebanese air force – to be discussed later – as well as the offer by the Russian Ministry of Defence to supply arms to the Lebanese land forces.⁸⁴ For the time being the Lebanese government manages to maintain a neutral position between Russians and Americans, however, it is obvious that together with the arms deliveries the ancient international politics based on spheres of influence re-emerge.

The game of spheres of influence is even more hampered for the Americans by their preferential ties with Israel. The VS is an ally and military donor of Lebanon, but at the same time it guarantees the protection of the archenemy of Lebanon, Israel.⁸⁵ This makes the VS especially cautious in providing the Lebanese government with military technology which might affect the technological superiority of Israel. This includes air defence systems, means of communication⁸⁶, data acquisition devices as well as modern fighter planes⁸⁷ and -helicopters. The American government is afraid that

⁸² Robert F. WORTH & Eric LIPTON, "U.S. Resupplies Lebanon Military to Stabilize Ally", *New York Times.com*, 26 October 2008.

⁸³ Zeina KARAM, "Lebanon, US set up joint military commission", *USA Today.com*, 6 October 2008.

⁸⁴ "More praise for Russia's promise of 'free' MiGs", *The Daily star*, 18 December 2008.

⁸⁵ Since 2006 the US have given Lebanon 410 million dollar in military support, especially light equipment. The annual military support to Israel amounts to 2.4 billion dollar. ("Leopard tanks to join Lebanon's fleet", *moqavemat.ir*, 25 December 2008.) Our calculations tell us that the US has given some 310 million dollar to support Lebanon since 2006. (Casey L. ADDIS, "Lebanon: Background and U.S. Relations", *Congressional Research service*, 16 December 2008.)

⁸⁶ Apparently, the (unprotected) civilian cell phone is the current means of communication of the Lebanese army or at least the most commonly used. ("Lebanon's army wants more U.S. military aid", *Ya Libnan*, 14 August 2007.)

⁸⁷ In November 2007 Defense News made public that the US were planning to give old training planes of the type Skywarrior attack bomber to the Lebanese air force. Such planes were produced in the late fifties. ("US donates Lebanon Three Old Trainer Bombers", *naharnet.com*, 12 November 2007) In the years prior to the 'generous' donation from Russia the de LAF attempted to acquire American F-5-fighter planes from Jordan and Saudi Arabia. Both countries were willing to do this and to sell these good but somehow obsolete planes at a fair price. However, since we were dealing with American technology, prior approval from Washington was necessary. It was not given since the Middle East policy unequivocally favoured the security of Israel.(Riad KAHWAJI, "Lebanon army trying to rearm and modernize itself", *Ya Libnan*, 3 December 2007)

such arms might fall into the hands of Hizbullah.⁸⁸ In this respect, the Lebanese government had, as early as 2006, asked for 800 million dollar in advanced arms to the US to reinforce its army, which it never acquired.⁸⁹

The downside of this American policy, which has likewise been adopted by France and Great Britain, is that it confirms the view of Hizbullah that the national army is not capable of securing the defence of Lebanon. As a matter of fact, a unified national defence would have to face the problem that it would lose the support of Western military donors should the LAF take action against the IDF. The military independence of the Resistance makes sure that actions against Israel are possible without the Lebanese government being criticised, at least by the West.⁹⁰ While the LAF got only low tech-support from the US, Hizbullah was able to reinforce itself without much effort after the summer war of 2006 with, so they say, more and better missiles, anti-tank equipment and air defence systems.⁹¹

A second downside to this American-European policy would be that it may well favour more willing suppliers such as Russia and even Iran. Russia sees no harm in selling sensitive technology to the neighbours of Israel. This is illustrated by its supplying MiGs to Lebanon but also to the fact of providing Syria with an air defence system, again in the light of its renewed international political self-awareness, and more in particular, to gain access to Syrian ports. In this respect, there is once again the Western fear that this technology might fall into the hands of the Islamic Resistance.⁹² Iran has made an offer of military support, which it repeated during president Suleiman visit late November 2008. However, Suleiman's trip to Iran must mainly be viewed as a political manoeuvre of the Lebanese president to show his Shiite compatriots that all international 'partners' are being consulted.⁹³

A policy of diversified arms suppliers can provide a balancing and hence neutralisation of political dependence. However, from a military point of view too much diversification would not be beneficial either, since it could affect the compatibility of arms systems. Nevertheless, sources within the Lebanese army claim that at this stage the LAF favours the option of reinforcement while downplaying the importance of compatibility.

In my opinion it would be, at an initial stage, vital to the Lebanese army to acquire the necessary resources to accomplish the missions which are not covered by the Islamic Resistance. This approach not only takes into account political considerations to avoid an aggressive position toward its

⁸⁸ Robert F. WORTH & Eric LIPTON, "U.S. Resupplies Lebanon Military to Stabilize Ally", *New York Times.com*, 26 October 2008.

⁸⁹ Hussein ABDALLAH, "Washington and Beirut set up joint military panel", *The Daily Star*, 7 October 2008 ; "US backing behind Lebanon's army", *Al-Jazeera.net*, 12 July 2007 ; Bilal Y SAAB, "Rethinking Hizbullah's disarmament", *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 15, Iss.3, fall 2008.

⁹⁰ Amal SAAD-GHORAYEB, "Hizbollah's Outlook in the Current Conflict II", *Policy Outlook*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, August 2006, p.4-5. An objection against this theoretical consideration would be that during the summer war Lebanon was the enemy of the IDF and not only the Islamic Resistance, since Hizbullah was part of the government.

⁹¹ Nicholas BLANFORD, "Call to arms - Hizbullah's efforts to renew weapons supplies", *Jane's Intelligence Review*, 1 May 2007.

⁹² Nicholas BLANFORD, "A leap of faith for Lebanon's security", *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 8 November 2006.

⁹³ Islamic Republic News Agency, "Iran ready to equip Lebanese military with advanced aerial defence", *GlobalSecurity.org*, 4 November 2006; Brenda GAZZAR, "Report: Iran to propose military aid to Lebanon", *mideast.jpost.com*, 24 November 2008; "Lebanon asks Iran to supply its army with midsize weapons", *Haaretz*, 26 November 2008.

interlocutor Hizbullah, but also favours a sound spending of the limited financial resources or offers of military support. It would serve no purpose to duplicate the capacities of Hizbullah. It would be a far better choice to remain complementary and specialise in the areas of national defence which are left aside by the Resistance. Actually, at an initial stage, this would boil down to a *de facto* unilateral creation of a national defence strategy which takes into account the capacities of Hizbullah. Naturally, this would not diminish in any way the fact that the national government holds no real power over the Resistance and, to a certain extent, even has to rely on the *goodwill* of the Resistance to close the national defence gap. In real terms, however, we notice that the Resistance is willing and ready to accomplish its mission, and besides, choices have to be made in view of the limited resources at its disposal.

Obviously, this does not represent a commonly shared point of view in Lebanon. In this respect the Minister of Defence, Elias Murr, made the request to the American government to acquire an air defence system to be capable of providing a deterrence capacity of his own in South Lebanon, which in the opinion of the Minister would be an alternative for the deterrence by Hizbullah.⁹⁴ As mentioned above, the military support by the American government is, mainly, meant as a political backing of the 14 March side.

Against the debate on the reinforcement of the Lebanese army by certain means to the extent of allowing the LAF to surpass the Resistance I would, once again, bring the objection of the 'limitation' of the Resistance. This argument would make the whole debate entirely superfluous. The (self-accepted) mission of the Islamic Resistance is the liberation of the Lebanese territory occupied by Israel and the defence against an Israeli invasion. To accomplish this mission, the Resistance, out of sheer necessity, uses 'Shiite' terrain and the Shiite population, since conventional resources and warfare are no match for the Israeli technological supremacy. The resources it uses are functional to this mission and the more suited and effective they are, the better the mission can be accomplished. The exclusive resources which distinguish the Resistance from the national Lebanese army are the hidden strongholds it has built up, its own communication network which is resistant to Israeli jamming, civil guards and surface-to-surface-missiles. These tactics would be the most effective and could not be replaced by a reinforcement of the conventional army since the Israeli army shall remain superior in any case.⁹⁵ To answer an Israeli invasion with only the resources of the Lebanese national army would, even in a reinforced version, not bring about the same results. A conventional protection of the southern Lebanese border instead of the tactics based on the terrain and on retaliation of the Islamic Resistance, would be, militarily speaking, an unsound option.⁹⁶ Duplicating or even surpassing the Resistance would mean to the LAF the necessity to build up its own network of fortifications in South Lebanon while strengthening the ties between the Shiite population and the Lebanese government in a way to match or improve the numerous social facilities provided to the population by the Party of God. As a matter of fact, the support of the population would be crucial to the defence of South Lebanon, as discussed

⁹⁴ Robert F. WORTH & Eric LIPTON, "U.S. Resupplies Lebanon Military to Stabilize Ally", *New York Times.com*, 26 October 2008 ; Nicholas BLANFORD, "A leap of faith for Lebanon's security", *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 8 November 2006.

⁹⁵ Since the approach of the Resistance is the one best suited to protect Lebanon against an Israeli invasion, the way to integrate the Islamic Resistance within the Lebanese state would be the preservation of the current structure, to which, however, would be added government control.

⁹⁶ Nevertheless, consideration should be given to the use of unguided missiles against cities as a retaliatory measure. This would constitute a violation of the principle of discrimination in humanitarian law, since it would be impossible to make a distinction between civilians and military targets in cities using unguided missiles. The IDF solves this issue in that it warns civilians a quarter of an hour prior to an attack that is likely to hit civilian targets.

above. However, the Lebanese national government even now hardly manages to release funds for the Shiite population, contrary to Hizbullah.

Whether it would be political rhetoric or sincere visionary politics, the secretary-general of Hizbullah, Hassan Nasrallah supports the creation of a strong army. "Equipping the Lebanese army is a priority, and discussion of a national defense strategy should be completed,"⁹⁷

iv. The planned reinforcements for the defence of Lebanon

To conclude this paper I would like to shed some light on the future or ongoing reinforcements in support of the Lebanese defence. In this respect I would like to consider the reinforcement by both the LAF and the Resistance, since, as discussed above, they each have taken upon themselves – at present mainly separately - part of the Lebanese defence efforts.

1. The Lebanese army

The reinforcement of the Lebanese air force is imminent with the Russian donation of 10 MiG-29s, however, the exact date of arrival is not known yet. Analysts believe that the fighter bombers may have a dissuading effect on the Israeli violations of Lebanese airspace.⁹⁸ However, as mentioned above, the Lebanese air force retains its asymmetrical balance vis-à-vis its Israeli counterpart. The 10 Russian jets can only deter or put a stop to some small-scale Israeli air operations. On the part of America there are considerations to supply the Lebanese army with Cobra attack helicopters⁹⁹ in 2009.¹⁰⁰ In the opinion of Nahr al-Bared, the deployment of the current virtually civilian helicopters which are used by the Lebanese army, even appears to be problematic in the face of domestic problems. Nevertheless, the American offer preceded the offer by Russia to supply MiGs. The Cobras were the answer of Washington to the Lebanese request for a means to provide Close Air Support. The attack helicopters proved ideal in the eyes of the US, since they were compatible with this goal and simultaneously would not pose a threat to Israel. Early December 2008 the American Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Near East and South Asian Affairs Chris Staub still announced that the United States would supply UAVs as well.¹⁰¹ As mentioned above, Russia is politically speaking not reluctant to

⁹⁷ "There is no connection between Russian jets and the defense strategy", *moqavemat.ir*, 24 december 2008 ; Hanin GHADDAR, "National offensive", *NOW for Lebanon*, 22 December 2008 ; "Hizbullah chief calls for defense strategy, elections on time", *Peopledaily.com.cn*, 12 November 2008.

⁹⁸ "More praise for Russia's promise of 'free' MiGs", *The Daily star*, 18 December 2008.

⁹⁹ Initially used in Vietnam, the predecessor of the Apache.

¹⁰⁰ David SCHENKER, "Future of U.S. Military Aid to Lebanon", *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, Policy Watch #1407, 3 October 2008.

¹⁰¹ "Would multiple arms suppliers be blessing or curse for LAF?", *The Daily Star*, 5 December 2008.

supply air defence systems in the region. However, Iran too showed its readiness to supply Lebanon with an air defence system. Until now the Lebanese government has not pursued the matter.¹⁰²

Belgium played an important part as well, not only from the beginning in August 2006, in UNIFIL, but made a major contribution to the reinforcement of the Lebanese land forces. On 31 August 2006 the Belgian Minister of Defence, André Flahaut, proposed to his Lebanese colleague, Elias Murr, to deliver vehicles for one artillery and two infantry battalions, in the framework of UN-resolution 1701.¹⁰³ In September 2007 an agreement was made, which was confirmed in December 2007, to the supply by Belgium of 43 Leopard-1-A5-tanks, 16 AIFV¹⁰⁴s, 12 M-113¹⁰⁵s, change parts and ammunition at the price of 4.5 million euro¹⁰⁶. The Lebanese government would pay this in Saudi currency¹⁰⁷ meant to crush the rebellion in Nahr al-Bared. The supplies were scheduled for 2008.¹⁰⁸ However, to this day the delivery has not been completed. The sale has to be approved by the countries where the equipment comes from. The US have to give a license for the M-113's and the AIFVs, Germany for the Leopard tanks. For the moment there is only an approval for the M-113's, the approval for the AIFVs seems to be only a matter of time. The German approval for the Leopard tanks is still unclear. The Lebanese government has opted for the delivery of the equipment in one shipping, this to reduce the transport costs. Therefore, till now the delivery couldn't proceed, despite the fact that Belgian defence, under the new Minister Pieter De Crem, still supports the sale.¹⁰⁹

Allegedly, Germany would also have been a candidate to supply 50 Leopard-1-tanks. Late December 2008 this hypothesis was made public in the international media, at the same time there were rumours to the contrary.¹¹⁰ As mentioned before, the Gaza conflict is the basis of a tightening of the German position on delivering military material to the region.

¹⁰² Islamic Republic News Agency, "Iran ready to equip Lebanese military with advanced aerial defence", *Globalsecurity.org*, 4 November 2006 ; Islamic Republic News Agency, "Iran ready to equip Lebanese military with advanced aerial defence", *Globalsecurity.org*, 4 November 2006 ; Brenda GAZZAR, "Report: Iran to propose military aid to Lebanon", *mideast.jpost.com*, 24 November 2008 ; "Lebanon asks Iran to supply its army with midsize weapons", *Haaretz*, 26 November 2008.

¹⁰³ Contact by phone with and email of Colonel Pascal Vandenberge of Belgian Defense, 27 February 2009.

¹⁰⁴ *Armoured Infantry Fighting Vehicle*, with a 25mm canon.

¹⁰⁵ *Armoured Infantry Transport Vehicle*

¹⁰⁶ Contact by phone with Colonel Pascal Vandenberge of Belgian Defense, 25 February 2009. Email adjudant Jean-Pierre Batsleer of Belgian Defense, 25 February 2009 ; Contact by phone with and email of Colonel Pascal Vandenberge of Belgian Defense, 27 February 2009.

¹⁰⁷ Saudi Arabia is the pillar of strength of the al-Hariri-family and as such of the Future Movement under Saad al-Hariri. This is the major political faction within the 14 March bloc. Rafiq al-Hariri had the double Saudi-Lebanese nationality and had built up his business empire in Saudi Arabia.

¹⁰⁸ Riad KAHWAJI, "Lebanon army trying to rearm and modernize itself", *Ya Libnan*, 3 December 2007 ; "Le Liban achète 71 blindés à la Belgique, dont 43 chars Leopard", *MSN*, 31 December 2007.

¹⁰⁹ Phone contact with Colonel Pascal Vandenberge of Belgian Defense, 25 February 2009 ; Contact by phone with and email of Colonel Pascal Vandenberge of Belgian Defense, 27 February 2009.

¹¹⁰ "Leopard tanks to join Lebanon's fleet", *moqavemat.ir*, 25 December 2008 ; Nicholas KIMBRELL & Fidelius SCHMID, "Murr: Lebanese Army incapable of absorbing Hizbullah's assets", *The Daily Star*, 24 December 2008.

In November 2008 the US Deputy Secretary of State David Welch announced that the US would supply Lebanon M60-tanks¹¹¹ in the spring of 2009.¹¹² This was a cause for concern in Israel, the more so since the IDF itself uses 700 M-60, although in a version improved by Israel.¹¹³ Moreover, the M-60 with their 105mm-canon are no match for the Israeli Merkavas which are armed with a 120mm. In the series of “tank rumours” one could mention the possible supply of Russian tanks, such as the recent T-90s or T-80s.

For the time being the United States remains the principal arms supplier of the Lebanese army. Early December already 285 Humvees, 200 trucks, 40 M-198 155mm-artillery pieces, ambulances, anti-tank weapon to be fired from the shoulder had been supplied as well as millions of rounds of ammunition. In March 2009 another 312 Humvees would be added.¹¹⁴

For the Lebanese Navy the prospect of reinforcements is non-existent. Admiral Ali El-Moallem of the Lebanese Navy states that Lebanon needs larger vessels of at least 50 to 60 meters which are able to deal with the various sea conditions and stay at sea for at least 48 hours. However, he is well aware of the fact that the Lebanese government lacks the necessary resources to buy them.¹¹⁵

2. The Islamic Resistance

The summer war of 2006 with the IDF severely exhausted the Islamic Resistance in staff and resources, despite the fact that it was depicted as a divine victory. Moreover, the freedom of movement of the militia in South Lebanon has been extensively curtailed, mainly due to the presence of the UNIFIL-forces which monitored the sector – with the fortified defence line of the Resistance – together with the LAF.

Nevertheless, the militia of the Party of God managed to recover quickly owing to direct support from Iran and Syria. One year after the war with Israel Hassan Nasrallah claimed that the militia already disposed of more than 20,000 missiles.¹¹⁶ In May 2008 Jane's made public that the Resistance allegedly had received additional even more effective armament from Iran and Syria such as artillery missiles with a longer range and improved guided antitank-missiles.¹¹⁷ The Islamic Resistance lost a

¹¹¹ An American main battle tank of the early sixties with a 105mm canon.

¹¹² Brenda GAZZAR, “Report: Iran to propose military aid to Lebanon”, *mideast.jpost.com*, 24 November 2008 ; Hussein ABDALLAH, “Rival Lebanese parties resume dialogue on national defense strategy today”, *The Daily Star*, 22 December 2008.

¹¹³ Yaakov KATZ, “Jerusalem worried US will sell tanks to Lebanon”, *The Jerusalem Post.com*, 23 November 2008.

¹¹⁴ Nicholas KIMBRELL & Fidelius SCHMID, “Murr: Lebanese Army incapable of absorbing Hizbullah’s assets”, *The Daily Star*, 24 December 2008 ; Nicholas KIMBRELL, “Would multiple arms suppliers be blessing or curse for LAF?”, *The Daily Star*, 5 December 2008.

¹¹⁵ Ali EL-MOALLEM, “Unifil MTF and the Lebanese Navy cooperation and contribution to PSO” tat the 7° Regional Seapower Symposium, 14-17 October 2008.

¹¹⁶ Joseph ALAGHA, “The Israeli-Hizbullah 34-day war: causes and consequences”, *Arab Studies Quarterly*, Vol.30, Iss.2, spring 2008 ; Rula AMIN, “Hizbullah: Stronger than ever?”, *Al-Jazeera.net*, 11 July 2007.

¹¹⁷ “Hizbullah plans for war”, *Jane’s Terrorism and security monitor*, Issue 008/005, 16 May 2008.

substantial number of its manpower in the battle with the IDF, however, its 'victory' at the same time provided a solid ground for recruiting new members. There are plenty of new Shiite recruits being trained in the Bekaa Valley, just like before, with the novelty, however, that Sunnite, Drusian and Christian reserve units were trained as well.¹¹⁸ All this is related to the construction of a second defence line by the Islamic Resistance – see below – that also comprised areas of these religious groups. Since local militias are an important part of the tactics of the Resistance it would be all too logical to train Sunnite, Christian or Drusian warriors in non-Shiite territories. The communal gap proved to be mended soon by means of investments of Hizbullah in these territories.

As mentioned above, the Resistance is fully occupied in constructing a second defence line north of the Litani River and consequently north of the zone in South Lebanon under the control of UNIFIL. UNIFIL-forces have noticed the activities of the Resistance north of the Litani, however, are not able to intervene – even should they wish to do so – due to the restrictions of their mandate.¹¹⁹ By and large, the new defence line would run from the area east of the Sunnite coastal town of Saida through the areas south of Nabatiye, but north of the Litani, and in between Jezzine and the Litani, to the south of the Western Bekaa region. To this end, Hizbullah buys land from Christians, Sunnites and Druses, which gives some villages a more marked Shiite character.¹²⁰

Does this mean that the Resistance has given up on its defence line in UNIFIL-territory? In the opinion of sources at UNIFIL and Jane's not. Despite the fact that the Resistance keeps an extremely low profile in the area under the control of the UNIFIL in South Lebanon, the UN-force assumes that the militia is rebuilding its defence line against Israel, among other things, through the installation of new arms supplies. There are still hidden positions of the Resistance being discovered in the area, which leads one to suspect that there are still numerous strongholds of the Resistance to be found.¹²¹ Besides, our own sources confirm that Hizbullah takes advantage of the reconstruction of houses after the summer war with Israel to add a fortified room to some of them to be used as a bunker in a possible new conflict with Israel. Both Jane's and our own sources confirm that the LAF turn a blind eye to these activities. UNIFIL itself does not really deal with this issue since Resolution 1701 of the UN-Security Council binds UNIFIL to the will of the Lebanese army to act. As a matter of fact, 1701 ordered UNIFIL to support the LAF only in its deployment and to take care of "the establishment between the Blue Line and the Litani River of an area free of any armed personnel, assets and weapons other than those of the Government of Lebanon and of UNIFIL".¹²²

The brief discussion above demonstrates that neither the Lebanese army nor the Resistance sit idle and, on the contrary, at all times attempt to acquire new military capacity.

¹¹⁸ Joseph ALAGHA, "The Israeli-Hizbullah 34-day war: causes and consequences", *Arab Studies Quarterly*, Vol.30, Iss.2, spring 2008 ; Rula AMIN, "Hizbullah: Stronger than ever?", *Al-Jazeera.net*, 11 juli 2007. "Hizbullah plans for war", *Jane's Terrorism and security monitor*, Issue 008/005, 16 May 2008. see *Map 1: Lebanon met UNIFIL en UNDOF* in annex to this paper.

¹¹⁹ Nicholas BLANFORD, "Call to arms - Hizbullah's efforts to renew weapons supplies", *Jane's Intelligence Review*, 1 May 2007.

¹²⁰ *Map 1: Lebanon with UNIFIL and UNDOF* in annex tot this work. "Hizbullah plans for war", *Jane's Terrorism and security monitor*, Issue 008/005, 16 May 2008. Nicholas BLANFORD, "Call to arms - Hizbullah's efforts to renew weapons supplies", *Jane's Intelligence Review*, 1 May 2007.

¹²¹ "Hizbullah plans for war", *Jane's Terrorism and security monitor*, Issue 008/005, 16 May 2008.

¹²² VNVR-resolution 1701 (via http://www.un.org/Docs/sc/unsc_resolutions06.html)

4. CONCLUSION

Obviously, there is no compulsory military road to bring the Islamic Resistance under the control of the Lebanese government. The political way to achieve this control through a National Dialogue is the only path likely to lead to a solution without letting Lebanon slide into sectarian violence once more. However, a political solution from an exclusively national level will be difficult since Lebanese confessionalism causes political immobilism. The different balances between religious-political groups within the state and more specifically the government make major political breakthroughs problematic. The connections between these religious-political groups and their international supporters do provide an option for a possible breakthrough. An improvement of the international relations, especially those between the United States and Iran, could bring about a change of the positions within national politics by making use of these connections.

On the military plane we have thoroughly analysed how the threshold between the Lebanese national army and the Islamic Resistance can be reduced to facilitate a future political solution within the National Dialogue. A strengthening of the Lebanese national army to better insure its part of the Lebanese sovereignty, in a credible way, is an absolute necessity. A reinforcement of the LAF with a view to undermining the Islamic Resistance is not beneficial to the already very weak mutual trust between the 8 and 14 March blocks and also besides the question. A national defence strategy and a genuine national integration of the Resistance are only possible in a political climate of detention and trust between the various religious communities, a climate in which there is sufficient trust in the Lebanese state to be entrusted with the exclusive use of force.

On 23 January 2009, the Lebanese army chief, general Kahwaji said: "the army is fully prepared to confront Israeli aggression on Lebanon".¹²³ So the motivation and good attitude are already there, now all we need are the means as well as a united national defence strategy.

¹²³ "Gen. Qahwaji: Army Ready to Confront Israeli aggression", *Naharnet.com*, 23 January 2009.

MAPS

Map 1: Lebanon with UNIFIL and UNDOF¹²⁴



¹²⁴ http://www.un.org/Depts/Cartographic/map/profile/lebanon_reference.pdf

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