

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

HARIRI'S POLITICAL STEP-AWAY: A GREAT BOOST FOR
HEZBOLLAH?

by
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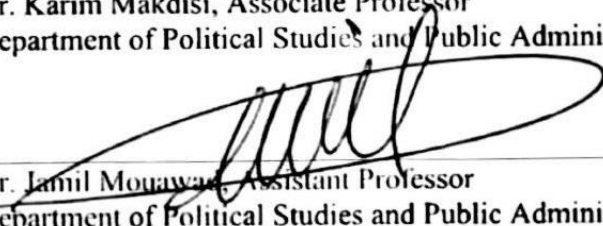
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ABSTRACT OF THE PROJECT OF

Baker Mohamad Halawi for Master of Arts
Major: Public Policy and International Affairs

Title: Hariri's political step-away: A great boost for Hezbollah?

Former Prime Minister Saad Hariri suspended his political role alongside his party "Future Movement" on the 24th of January 2022. The Lebanese leader highlighted his step away from politics as a temporary one during his speech, but a permanent one by many analysts before the decisive elections in May 2022 that will shape Lebanese politics for the next four years.

Lebanese parties tended to view Hariri's step down from politics in three different scopes. The first was his "loyal" allies, who considered this unusual approach a risk that would affect the stability of the country's politics, empowering Iran's proxy in Hezbollah. The second vision highlighted the step as a chance to gain the Future Movement supporters on their political side in the upcoming era; those were past allies of the 50 years old ex-prime minister. Finally, the third group considered the opposition to the entire political elite and viewed Hariri's move as the first in the prospected fall of the remaining Lebanese rulers.

One side had no response to Hariri's step. This is Hezbollah; Until the moment of writing this proposal, no clear statement was issued by any member of the controversial Lebanese party. Observers tend to view Hariri's decision to support the political inflation of Hezbollah in the country since the strongest "Sunni" backed leader is moving away from the field. Another opinion tends to view Hariri's approach as a step back to get back stronger into Lebanese politics in the next wave of Lebanese history.

This project will analyze the relationship between "Future Movement" and "Hezbollah" throughout the past thirty years and the prospect situation after Hariri's latest decision. Also, what will this relation reflect on Lebanese politics for the next four years?

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To my lovely daughter Cylia, that will be born within months.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Introduction to the Topic

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B. Significance of the Project

The project highlights a new topic and its’ projection of the near and far period of Lebanese history. The analyzed players have been the leading contenders in Lebanese politics for the past four decades. The outcome of this project shall be validated within the upcoming five years; the fluctuations might vary taking into consideration the three main periods: First, Hariri’s suspension of political career until the local elections take place; Second, the return of the Hariri into the political background after the end of the 2022 elections; Third, the involvement of the Future Movement with the upcoming political dues, i.e., presidential elections (2022), governments’ formation, and parliamentary elections (2026).

C. Methods

The project will use qualitative analysis of the past 30 years' data on the relation between the Future Movement and Hezbollah. The research will allow a projection possibility of the outcome of the latest decision taken by Saad Hariri in January 2022 over Hezbollah’s inflation of sphere in Lebanese politics for the next short and medium term. In addition, the research will include an analysis of local narratives.

D. Statement of problem/research question

The project aims to draw a projection of Lebanese politics and Hezbollah's growing effect into it after the decision taken by Mr. Saad Hariri to step down from the temporary period of Lebanese politics that includes the parliamentary elections.

Hezbollah dominated the opposing side to Hariri's led alliance -14 march bloc- even after its dissolution in 2016 after the current Lebanese President Michel Aoun's election. Therefore, having Hezbollah's primary opponent suspend participation in local politics (Hariri) might be a chance to enlarge the political dominance of the state's fractured and prominent institutions.

On the other side, Hariri's exiting the parliament can be projected as the chance to lose the "political ties" with the Iranian proxy and the desire to keep relations within "Controlling Dispute" into a clear opponent to the party's practices within and beyond the Lebanese borders.

CHAPTER II HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The key moments to analyze the relationship between Saad Hariri, backed by his Future Movement, and Hezbollah are the following dates: February 2005, May 2008, June 2010, September 2016, November 2017, October 2019, and January 2022.

The wealthy Hariri family has led the Saudi-backed Movement of the Future, a Lebanese Sunni political group, for three decades since billionaire former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri spearheaded the country's post-war reconstruction in the early 1990s. Saad Hariri has been Lebanon's most influential Sunni Muslim politician since 2005. The Hariri family has dominated the Lebanese Sunni political scene for over three decades since the end of the Lebanese civil war in 1990 (TRTWorld, 2022).

Although Saad Hariri has been at the helm of Sunni Lebanon since inheriting his father's political mantle, his political fortunes have weakened recently. The loss of Saudi support has weakened his position. Hariri entered turmoil shortly after the assassinations of his father, the late Prime Minister and business tycoon Rafik Hariri, in February 2005. A three-time prime minister and previous member of parliament, Hariri inherited political leadership from his late father, billionaire Rafik Hariri, the most potent political leader since Lebanon's civil war. One of the most influential politicians in the current Lebanese elite circle, Saad has developed the role gained from his father (BASSEM MROUE and ZEINA KARAM Associated Press, 2022).

The clash between Hariri's Future Movement and Hezbollah began after 2005. During the 2005 Cedar Revolution, when widespread calls for reaffirming Lebanon's complete

independence and sovereignty culminated in the withdrawal of the Syrian army, Hezbollah openly disregarded Lebanon's legitimate authority. In May 2008, however, Hezbollah did just that, attacking Lebanese citizens — the people it claimed to protect — in protest of a Lebanese decision it disagreed with. Lebanese and international opinion considered Hezbollah's activities "legitimate" until they fired on Lebanese civilians. Hezbollah's entry into parliament in 1992 and cabinet in 2005 further suggests that it is a legitimate movement, operating within a political framework under Lebanese law and deviating from the radical ways of the Iranian revolution of the 1980s (Contradictory to the Interests of the Lebanese Government - Factsheet 2, 2019).

Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah lashed out in 2008 at anti-government and anti-corruption demonstrators and attacked the government even though Prime Minister Saad Hariri was their political opponent. The leader of the Future Movement, Saad Hariri, immediately reacted to the outbreak of violence in May 2008, describing them as an untimely form, criticizing Hezbollah's actions as a threat to Lebanon's unity, and calling on Hezbollah Leader Hassan Nasrallah to stop sliding into civil war. Saad Hariri's senior adviser, Hani Hamoud, referred to these events as a "unilateral civil war" in which "Iran took control of Lebanon," first to call on moderate forces to intervene in the Arab world and call on the international community not to stand idly by (Berriault, 2021).

After Syrian troops were forced out of Lebanon following massive widespread protests in Lebanon in March 2005, Hezbollah became more politically engaged and independent at home, expanding Hezbollah's sphere of influence while maintaining its

strategic relationship with the Assad regime. In late 2005, Hezbollah joined Fuad Siniora's government when he took two ministerial posts. In the post-Taif landscape, Lebanese Hezbollah first formally entered politics with the election of 8 deputies in 1992. Then with the appointment of Hezbollah ministers to subsequent Lebanese cabinets—they usually include two ministers—beginning in 2005 following the assassination of Prime Minister Rafik Hariri in February of that year (Williams, 2022).

Hezbollah has been highly critical of the heavily armed role in the fight for Syrian President Bashar al-Assad after igniting the Syrian revolution in 2011. This was ineffective in protecting Sunni interests—even with the full backing of Saudi money, Hezbollah's Shia cadres gained influence and increased their dominance over Lebanon. (Reuters, 2022)

Tensions between Hariri and Hezbollah escalated in 2010 following reports that the United Nations Special Tribunal for Lebanon was investigating the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik al-Hariri in connection with the assassination of the former Prime Minister, which focused its investigations on senior officials" Hezbollah” and will soon file charges. The verdict of recent weeks by the Special Tribunal for Lebanon states that a Hezbollah member is guilty of the February 2005 assassination of Prime Minister Rafik Hariri but does not establish that Hezbollah or Syria ordered the murder. According to Hezbollah officials, his assassination was planned by Mossad to expel the Syrian army from Lebanon. When Hariri was assassinated in February 2005, his allies blamed the Syrian government and its allies in Lebanon, the Iranian-backed Hezbollah (Shanahan, 2020).

Hezbollah ministers and their allies ousted Saad Hariri's government from the Government of "National Accord" in January 2010, making him a lame duck when he met President Barack Obama in Washington. After the collapse of his government in 2010, Hariri left Lebanon for Saudi Arabia. Since the assassination of his father Rafik in February 2005, Hariri has become Lebanon's leading Sunni politician and favorite conversationalist in Western capitals.

After the presidential deal that led to the settlement of the Lebanese political dispute in 2016, electing General Micheal Aoun as the President of the country; Hariri Continued to oppose Hezbollah's possession of weapons, he called Hezbollah's arsenal a bigger regional problem than Lebanon, where he said the goal should be to solve economic problems. Support for Saad Hariri pales in comparison to criticism that he has not done enough to curb the power of Hezbollah, the militant group and powerful Iranian-backed political party, or to deal with the escalating economic crisis in Lebanon. The Shia Muslim Hezbollah has long been a political opponent of Hariri. Still, he has also been involved in several governments he has led as part of Lebanon's complex religious power-sharing system (The Washington Institute, 2022).

In 2017, Hariri was thrown onto an unknown road when he was forced to announce his resignation in a televised statement during a visit to Saudi Arabia's Sunni government, citing Lebanese dominance over Iran-backed Lebanese Hezbollah. (AP News, 2022).

Being the Prime minister during the October 17th demonstrations in 2019, Saad Hariri was the first elite to capture the fireball. He resigned twelve days after the protests after

proposing the government full of suggested reformations three days after demonstrations started. Hezbollah's leader, Hassan Nasrallah, was the first to attend the demonstrations on just the third day, sending out several party members during his speech to remove camps from the Riad El Solh square in downtown Beirut. Hariri's resignation was striking to Hezbollah, who insisted at that time that the "government will not fall."

Former Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri announced in late January 2022 that he is leaving politics for the time being and will not stand as a candidate in the next parliamentary elections. Hariri, a three-time prime minister, also urged his party not to run in the next parliamentary elections, pointing out that his decision was due to several factors, including Iranian influence, hinting at the heavily armed Shiite group Hezbollah. Reacting to his words, the Lebanese Druze political leader- Walid Jumblat, said that his decision "means a free hand for the heavily armed Shiite group Hezbollah and the Iranians." (Hubbard, 2022). Hariri added that he had done everything to prevent a civil war in Lebanon, making explicit references to forming a government that would include the Iranian-backed Lebanese Hezbollah. Given Tehran's growing influence, internal divisions, growing sectarianism, and state dysfunction, Hariri said, now that he is out of politics, he believes "there is no room for positive opportunities in Lebanon."

Like his slain father, Hariri, a dual Lebanese-Saudi businessman, did not enter politics until he accidentally became the new leader of the Sunni community, the leader of the opposition, first against Syria's military in Lebanon. So there is, and then there is opposition to Hezbollah - Iran's growing influence.

Hariri added that he did everything possible to prevent a civil war in Lebanon by making compromises, which hinted at forming a government that included the powerful Hezbollah group. Hariri, who has traditionally been a member of the Iranian-backed Hezbollah opposition camp in Lebanon, has co-existed mainly with the group, forming coalition governments that include Hezbollah. The coalition government brought together almost all major Lebanese parties, including Hezbollah's Lebanese ally.

Many in the West and some in Lebanon hoped that Hariri would return to power after the turmoil of the past two years, but this departure may be extended (France24, 2022). Youssef Diab, a political analyst at the Lebanese University, told Xinhua News Agency that former Prime Minister Saad Hariri's decision to retire from politics would create a vacuum in the Lebanese Sunni political scene. Most Sunnis in Lebanon support Hariri based on three elections held in 2005, 2009 and 2018. However, Hariri leaves a void in the Sunni leadership in a country with a fragile sectarian power-sharing system that hangs in the balance. Thus, his retirement from political life leaves a massive void in the Lebanese political establishment, with no clear Sunni leader behind the scenes (Gavlak, 2022).

Many in the country fear that the withdrawal of moderate Hariri from running could lead to a more significant role for hardline Sunni politicians in Lebanese politics. Many of us have long believed that this year's Lebanese elections were voters' best chance to punish politicians who betrayed them, but much Lebanese fear Hezbollah will replace them. Few would give Saad al-Hariri the highest score for his political vision. Still, it

seems odd that Saudi Arabia would quickly abandon its most potent charter in Lebanon: a massive powerhouse that could counter Hezbollah's Sunni community. Hariri added that he had done everything to prevent a civil war in Lebanon, notably referring to forming a government that would include the Iranian-backed Hezbollah in Lebanon (Williams, 2022).

Hariri, a three-term prime minister and previous member of parliament, inherited political leadership from his late father, billionaire Rafik Hariri, the most powerful man since the end of Lebanon's civil war and one of the most influential politicians. Although he seemed more well-meaning than most of his peers in Beirut's political elite, Hariri eventually is criticized as a member of the circle that brought Lebanon to collapse. During his 16 years in politics, Lebanon has been in turmoil, seeing more killings of Hariri supporters (including politicians, security officials, and journalists), the 2006 war with Israel, the growing influence of Hezbollah large, and the unprecedented financial crisis of 2019.

Harris's actions raised fears that his absence would further strengthen Hezbollah's influence in Lebanon and pave the way for the emergence of Sunni extremism (Saoud, 2022). Relations with Iran-backed Hezbollah Lebanon deteriorated in 2020 when an UN-backed court sentenced a Hezbollah militant member to life in prison for his involvement in the assassination of Rafik Hariri (Hubbard, 2022).

The relationship between Future Movement and Hezbollah leaders is like the history of elite relations throughout history, with one difference. Usually, when elites agree on

processing the politics within the state, everything goes well; that can be illustrated in the presidential elections or government formation. While the fact is clear that once Lebanese leaders disagree on the process of running future politics, clashes emerge. That is precisely what happened in 1958 and 1975 and could have occurred in 2008. The only difference between the current sectarian vulnerability “Future Movement vs. Hezbollah” is that the first is an unarmed party with no military history and a doctrine far away from the civil war mentality. As Hariri said once stepping down from the political arena: “Haririsim” is based on two significant factors: National Peace and the economic welfare of the Lebanese individual; this is contrary to Hezbollah’s belief to wipe out Israel from the map, complementing with the “Waly al Fakih” goals in Iran.

CHAPTER III

LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Hezbollah and the Regional Dimension

Hezbollah was born out of the Shiite Amal Movement in 1982 after the Israeli Invasion of Lebanon 1982. Its existence was related to clear Iranian support, opposing the American siding with Iraq in the first gulf war, when the US provided Baghdad with intelligence data (Al Arabiya, 2020).

Reiterating that Hezbollah has, since the mid-1980s, transformed from an exclusivist Islamic jihadist movement operating inside of Lebanon into a political party with a broader outside of the country within the Lebanese system (Khatib et al., 2015). Along with the old Amal movement, Hezbollah is one of Lebanon's two largest political parties representing Shia Muslims. Moreover, Hezbollah has been a significant part of the March 8 Alliance since March 2005.

The March 8 Alliance is a coalition whose two main parties are Shia Muslims (Hezbollah) and Christians (Free Patriotic Movement), united by a pro-Syrian plan back then. Hezbollah has partly founded thanks to Israel and is primarily a Shia Muslim from southern Lebanon. Unlike many terrorist groups, Hezbollah cares about the well-being of its constituents and has close ties to the Lebanese Shiite community (Khatib, 2022). The presentation of Hezbollah as a terrorist group loses much of its function and obscures why it is so popular among many Lebanese Shiites.

It is a political party, a charitable agency, a quasi-state army, and even part of the Lebanese government. The status of Hezbollah as a legitimate political party, terrorist group, resistance movement, or a combination of these is a moot point. The constitution guarantees representation in government based on religious sect and political parties in power are determined more by religious affiliation than by economic or social policy (Byman, 2016). Political parties, sectarian groups, neighborhoods, families, schools, and other social institutions have created their own, often highly distorted and antagonistic versions of the Lebanese Civil War (Sune, 2011).

Analysts tend to bisect Hezbollah as a political party and social movement, revealing its organizational structure and religious ideals and showing its complexity and contradictions. Part of another thread also links party actions to political Islam and post-Islamism. It references the failure of the welfare state and the increasingly pragmatic role of Islamist groups in the Middle East (Harb, 2021). Hezbollah's entire organization or paramilitary faction has been designated a terrorist organization by several countries, including the European Union. Since 2017, most Arab League member states have established it as a terrorist organization.

Unlike other Lebanese groups currently seeking to play a productive role in the Lebanese political system, Hezbollah is the only militia that refused to disarm after signing the Taif Agreement, which ended the tragic civil war in Lebanon. Instead, Hezbollah continues to pursue the interests of Syria and Iran, manipulating the Lebanese political system to protect its power; in summary: Hezbollah (and its patron

Iran) is imposing its will on Lebanon (COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS,2011).

Hezbollah is playing an internal Lebanese political game. It is working to allay the fears of the Lebanese people about the imposition of Sharia law on the country while building a terrorist and institutional infrastructure in Lebanon in the regional and international arena. The Iranian-backed group calls itself a Shiite resistance movement. It cemented its ideology in a 1985 manifesto that promised to expel Western powers from Lebanon, named for the destruction of the Israeli state, and swore allegiance to Iran's supreme leader. Hezbollah has developed potent political and social weapons to complement its military operations (AJC, 2021). Over three decades, the increased political allegiance of the Lebanese Islamic Party has also turned Hezbollah into the primary representative of the Lebanese Shiites, the second largest of the country's seventeen recognized sects.

The challenge for mainstream Islamist parties in Lebanon is to balance their ideological and logistical commitments to Iran with their political and social commitments to Lebanese Shiites. This paradox will become increasingly difficult in the years to come. For now, however, no matter how the situation in Syria and Yemen develops, the leading Lebanese Islamic party will remain a powerful political player on the Lebanese stage for the foreseeable future (Wilson Center, 2015). The internal security of the Lebanese Shiite community, which Hezbollah claims to represent, and the positions of the parties in the Lebanese political system are closely related to the international arena, and the military intervention in question is the result of the threat of the former to weaken the possibility of the latter.

The organization's goals have not changed since Hezbollah entered the Lebanese political scene in 1992 with a significant victory by securing eight parliamentary seats. Hezbollah's strategy is part of the effort to seize power in Lebanon. The close Shia-Christian alliance is rooted in the claim, which has attracted some Christians, that Sunnis, seen as proxies for Saudi Arabia, are a more significant threat to Lebanon than Hezbollah (Zrúst, 2020). Some particularly misguided FPM(Free Patriotic Movement) members even claim that, despite the relative decline of the Christian population in Lebanon, Hezbollah will help them reverse the rebalancing of Christian-Muslim political power in the 1989 Taif agreement.

B. Hezbollah and the Relation with the State

The Shiite situation in Lebanon acquires a vitality that exceeds the Shiites' ability to contain it or the ability of others to bear it and deal with it. Nevertheless, they declare that their deprivation in the past serves as a sword that is used once needed. Perhaps the marginalization they have historically suffered makes them look for support outside the borders of the countries they belong to; Maybe in Lebanon, it is Shiite searching for power (Fayyad,2022).

Hezbollah is even more curious because of the difficulty of studying it. It illustrates a different path, political but primarily identifying, the path of the Shia community, which today is the main component of Lebanese society (Saade,2016). Iran exploited the minority's concern and has worked to influence it since the outbreak of the revolution and its transformation into a Shiite state under "Wali al-Faqih". Iran uses its Shiites to

create a nervous nucleus around it. To mitigate the impact of its use of its Shiites, it took advantage of a Sunni Arab cause par excellence, that is, the Palestinian cause, so it increased the slogan of the liberation of Palestine to become a tool that is used to raise the charge of Persian in the region.

Bashir Saade(2016) believes that this topic (Hezbollah's relation with the state) is relevant for anyone interested in the uniqueness of Hezbollah, as well as the more general environment that limits the form of such political initiatives. Saade said: I felt that instead of studying what Hezbollah is, "I had to study what Hezbollah is becoming" in the context of relationships with other social and political actors, a clear ideology, a set of doctrines that "know what they are doing", unlike not only other Lebanese political organizations and parties but any other political entity in the Arab world. Security analysts have tried to understand how pan-Islamist ideas have shaped the party's central ideology.

The occupation of Lebanon by Israel in 1982 allowed Iran to play in the new space, using its ideological, Islamic, Shiite position and finances to strengthen its Shiite religious authority, competing with the Najaf authority, which has always been dominant over it. Iran presented to the Shiites of the world and in the Arab world precisely a Shiite model whose goals remained hidden until it began to be exposed with the behavior of "Hezbollah" in Lebanon after the 2006 war and the outbreak of the Arab revolutions, especially in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen.

Hezbollah played a positive role in the nineties of the last century by giving it a resistance model different from what the previous liberation movements experienced. This stage climaxed in the liberation that took place in 2000. Hezbollah's role helped meet the needs of the South's population, where Shiites have a high-density filling essential services and daily gaps with the absence of the state and its failure in security and politics (Fayyad,2022). In the South, marginalization had a bloody character due to the repeated Israeli attacks on the southerners without any protection before the resistance was formed, especially after Israel's occupation of Lebanon and its subsequent concentration in the South. The late civil war stage resulted at the end of the eighties limiting the resistance to the hands of "Hezbollah", and this is another issue.

The US Congress Subcommittee (2010) evaluated Hezbollah as trying to portray itself as a natural part of the Lebanese political system and the protector of Lebanese interests. Hezbollah continues to pursue the interests of the Syria-Iran axis, manipulating the Lebanese political system to protect its power. The organization has used its political influence and military potential to undermine Lebanese state sovereignty by infiltrating every critical sector of Lebanese society through its political wing and creating its parallel institutions.

What happened in the last two decades of the 19th century gave "Hezbollah" national and popular legitimacy in its environment. However, in Lebanese political life in general, political representation is limited to a traditional political elite that comes through dependence on the authority of money and clientelism and on domination of

some families, either through sectarian parties or through the deposition of “feudal” relations.

Fayyad (2022) argues that in the beginning, Hezbollah's behavior was modest due to the circumstances of its inception, the faithful revolutionary discourse it adopted, the idealistic slogans it raised, and the committed behavior it adopted in the 1990s. All this gave the party a veil that seemed different from other political movements, including the Amal Movement, which plunged into the circles of the regime and its clientelist schemes and became an organic part of it. Moreover, Hezbollah brought a different political class from circles that would not have attained power without it.

Hezbollah also worked to provide the conditions for the various types of local social environments to surround him through multiple services and by establishing institutions of every kind: cultural, health, educational, sports, scouting, recreational, and financial, especially military and religious. In addition, the spiritual part worked to emphasize ultimately new practices and traditions in traditional Shiite circles; They overturned customs and traditions, thus letting the Iranian-Persian methods be the Lebanese Shiites' only reference in life and the hereafter. Through its various institutions, the party also employed much workforce, promising compensation paid to the families of the martyrs and victims, benefiting from the support provided by the Lebanese state through its ministries and Iranian funds and illegal trade that has recently been exposed.

The internal and state work of Hezbollah led to the attachment of several generations to its body. Citizens found their interests in the party, which became their source of

livelihood based on the policy of the Lebanese state, which allows representatives of the sects to play the role of mediator between the state and the citizens; this allows the “Hezb”-as called by his people- to be in a position providing services to the people through intermediary sectarian institutions and associations that take a large part of their finances from the budgets of the ministries as aid, both at the level Educational, health, or social.

Herman (2022) argues that Hezbollah has more limited influence in Lebanese state institutions than other parties that have grown fat through political patronage. However, the partnership between Hezbollah and the Lebanese military is not Hezbollah's only point of control and dominance over Lebanon. This shift in the role of Lebanese Hezbollah poses risks to the organization and opportunities to support efforts to strengthen institution-building and reclaim the state, as well as inject more independent and technocratic personalities into Lebanese politics through national elections.

Hezbollah presents to the people subsidies signed by the party; technically making it replace the state and develop sectarian and customer loyalty at the expense of commitment to the state by obliterating its role, which makes public money private money, or sectarian in the minds of the public in its various circles (Fayyad, 2022). The arrival of "Hezbollah" to the executive authority was the final touch for transforming the party's scope, which is to engage in the traditional Lebanese system, taking advantage of negative characteristics to the maximum extent.

That is why the military confrontation between Hezbollah and the Israeli state, which formed the basis of Hezbollah's identity, was subordinated to the political interests of Hezbollah and its regional allies. Hezbollah distinguishes its political/social activities in Lebanon and its military/jihadist actions against Israel (Daher,2017).

C. Lebanese Sunnis and the Arab States, the Story of the Past Century

The Lebanese Sunni community can be distinguished as a Lebanese component living in a state of most significant political confusion in 2022 (Ahmar, 2022). This sector is backed up naturally by Islamic-Arabic powers that range from Egypt, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (and Gulf states), and Syria.

The Sunni political figures cannot yet fill the void of Hariri left by this step back, especially in the absence of Arab, and specifically Gulf states, support for any of them for years starting in 2016. Moreover, all of this is taking place while the country is on the edge of special parliamentary elections after the “October 17th Revolution” and the start of the collapse. The sect’s candidates are diverse and spread over many lists compared to the 2018 elections.

In addition to the state of loss at the level of political leaders, the Sunni concern is excellent about the Taif constitution considering the collapse of the state and its political, economic, monetary, financial, and social system. Taif, established due to Arab efforts in 1989, is the constitution that gave them powers they have consistently called for and struggled for since independence. They got it in the text but lost it in the context operating under the Syrian guardianship that an Arab-Western Umbrella

secured; The experience of Rafik Hariri in governance is the best evidence. Despite his great political size and regional and international support, he could not exercise his full powers as head of the executive authority in the country, and the "troika" shared these powers.

Hezbollah increases the anxiety and confusion of the sect's members at this stage. The organization is the natural first opponent after the decline of the Christian role. In light of the Sunni-Shiite conflict in which Lebanon is one of the most prominent areas, it has surplus power, not only in the military, security, and financial, but also political represented in its domination of the country's political decision with the strength gained through its' arsenal. Here the Sunnis feel they were left out, unlike the Shiites, who were backed up directly by the Iranians in 2006 against Israel and 2007 during the famous internal clashes.

Sunni confusion dates back a hundred years after founding "Greater Lebanon". During the four centuries of rule of the Ottoman Sultanate, which included several nationalities, the Sunnis of the Syrian states were assured of an empire ruled by the "Caliph of the Believers" in which they had power, influence, and privileges. The Arab national awareness that arose at the end of the nineteenth century and crystallized further at the beginning of the twentieth century created the ambition for independence from the Ottoman Empire to establish a single Arab state. However, the agreement of the French and the British (Sykes-Picot) and the Balfour Declaration aborted that ambition before it was born! The agreement made them a minority in the state of the Alawites, Greater

Lebanon, and the state of Jabal al-Druze, and it gave them states inside Syria without a sea outlet. The promise mortgaged their future in Palestine.

In his book “A Reading in the Positions of Sects’ Actors on the State of Greater Lebanon,” published by Kaslik Publications, 2021, historian Antoine Hakim tells that the Sunnis of Lebanon confronted the “Greater Lebanon” project and participated in the Syrian conference in 1920 that rejected the mandate and declared Syria’s unity and independence. In 1926, they refused to participate in preparing the constitution, which established the borders and the Lebanese entity. Later, their opposition weakened and gradually subsided until they concluded the "National Pact" in 1943; they were unsatisfied with the constitutional powers. Moreover, they felt the injustice in "Greater Lebanon", which arose on the ruins of the Mount Lebanon Mutasarrifate (Christian - Druze), after the "Sunni" coastal cities of Beirut, Tripoli and Sidon were annexed to it, in addition to the fertile Bekaa Valley and the Akkar Plain (which is predominantly Sunni).

The Sunnis were always known to be as “State Supporters”; the saying goes back to the first practice of Riad El Solh, the first prime minister under independence, who defended “the cause of Lebanon in Arab forums, specifically the issue of its independence and its special status.” Inside the Arab world (as mentioned by Farid Al-Khazen in his book “The Disintegration of the State in Lebanon 1967-1976”), and the pivotal role of their second leader, Rafik Hariri, in building the Second Republic, they do not deny their fundamental struggle to achieve “second independence” and their

quest today for the third version. They are the owners of the slogan "Lebanon First," an act of deep faith in Lebanon, rather than preserving their Arabic identity.

The 2016 presidential settlement brought Michel Aoun, Hezbollah's number one ally, to Baabda. Then they lost Arab support, specifically Saudi Arabia's, hence the entire gulf. The timeline brought more complicated actions and harm to Lebanese -Arab relations, boycotting Lebanese products and withdrawing ambassadors in 2021.

The current Sunni's confusion is no less than the confusion they experienced after the fall of the 1920s dream, especially since Lebanon, at the beginning of the 1920s, was facing a new foundational stage for its regime, and perhaps its constitution this time will be re-framed too, in the absence of a clear supporting Arabic umbrella. Current circumstances are the same as in the 1958 and 1976 eras; an unfair balance can be identified in Lebanese politics once the Arabic supports fade away from the Sunnis in Lebanon.

D. Harirism in Lebanon: Pillars and Key Moments

“Harirism” is the way of running the politics in Lebanon as created by Hariri -the father, and continued under the son's era. The process is based on two significant factors:

National Peace and Economic welfare.

The pillars for “Harirism” are the following:

1. Excellent relations with the external forces influencing Lebanon, typically the United States, Europe, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and the rest of the Arab world.

2. 14 March alliance and vision of Lebanon
3. Network of economic shares, projects, and companies with significant integration and boost to the Lebanese economy
4. Liberal values in the political and economic fields
5. Opposition to Israel and complex relations with Hezbollah

Hariri, the son, inherited these pillars and managed to attract a portion of the Lebanese society who do not want to stay attached to the rest of the elites who have a history related to wars. However, the turnouts in the region managed to let the son tactically sway away from the ultimate goal of having “Lebanon First” as a strong slogan for a strong state, leading him to fail in his targets and finally stepping off the political life - temporarily.

The pillars of “Harirism” co-exist; hence, the absence of one of the factors might lead to diffusing the meaning and the practice of Hariri’s policies. Saad Hariri felt the loss of one of the main pillars that reflects his external relations, and Lebanon, too, with KSA and, subsequently, the rest of the Arab countries.

In 2005, Saad Hariri accepted to run the political part of what his father left, leaving economics to his elder brother Bahaa and the social umbrella to his stepmom Nazek. After that, the rising leader swept the parliamentary elections in the spring of 2005, dedicating the win to his father's soul.

During the Lebanese-Israeli Conflict in 2006, Hariri was in China on the 12th of July. Speaker Berri emphasized during a phone call that Hariri has to play the role his father

did in 1996, revolving around the decisive capital to calm down the situation in the Southern borders. Hariri gave two major speeches in Cairo and Paris during that war, first to declare that “Lebanon was brought into this war by Syria and Iran” and second to ease the way on Hezbollah by blaming Israel and refusing to let any war charge held by the entire country. Hariri was the critical link, with PM Saniora, between Lebanon and the whole west. The new politician's activity revolved around the border of restoring peace to his country.

After the war ended, a new page was opened in Lebanese politics, which emerged with Hariri facing Hezbollah's leader Nasrallah in speech-to-speech replies. At the beginning of 2008, Beirut's streets experienced minor clashes daily, reflecting the tension between Hariri and Nasrallah. One of the critical speeches highlighting this stage was when Hariri spoke: “Another demonstration will face the demonstrations. Also, the carnivals will be faced by opposing carnivals, and the commencer will hold the responsibility.” The previous speech highlighted high tension between both parties and, consequently, both major entities: Sunnis and Shiites; clashes occurred in May 2008, causing temporary chaos leading to the end of the presidential vacuum on 25 May 2008, signed within an agreement in Doha, Qatar.

After winning the majority in another election, Hariri was designated prime minister in 2009. However, in 2010, his government collapsed due to the resignation of the 8 March ministries, causing another tension with Hezbollah over the government collapse and the first outcome of the Special Tribunal of Lebanon, which pointed the first fingers toward Hezbollah's members in the association of the Late Rafik Hariri. Finally, the

prime minister accepted the democratic turnout and announced himself as a leader of the Lebanese opposition, after which, rhyming with the Syrian revolution at that time, he stayed in Riyadh due to security concerns for the next five years.

In 2016, Lebanon was nearly under the presidential vacuum for the second year. Hariri decided to end the vacuum with a compromise with Hezbollah's favorite candidate Michael Aoun; Hariri noted in his speech before few days of 31st of October: "I know this choice is not favorable to your beliefs, but I have to do it, else we will all fall with the economic outcomes of the presidential vacuum," pointing this speech to key figures in his party before days from electing Michael Aoun. Hariri will have this tone of truce for the following years, rhyming with the presidential settlement rituals between all the Lebanese elites.

A controversial speech in 2017 from Riyadh brought back the tension speeches into the Lebanese curriculum when the Prime Minister announced his resignation from Riyadh, pointing at Iranian influence in the country. However, this speech was disregarded due to many explanations about Hariri's entire state of stay in KSA(Kingdom of Saudi Arabia) during that month.

The relationship between Hariri, the father, and the son, has differed regarding the strong ties between Hariri's family with France and KSA. The murdered Prime Minister had strong relations with the previous French President Jacques Chirac, which resulted in numerous billions embedded into the Lebanese economy through conferences organized by France to boost the Lebanese economy: Paris 1, Paris 2, and even Paris 3

in 2007 after Hariri's assassination. With KSA, Hariri, the father, was the central pillar for the Saudis outside the Kingdom and the political man with ultimate support from the Saudi kings; Hariri's fortune was gained in the Kingdom in the 1980s, and so is the primary political support leading him to form his first cabinet in 1992. Meanwhile, Hariri, the son faced a great relationship with the French; however, it cannot match the ties built between the father and Chirac. On the other side, the ascending of Mohamad Bin Salman into the Saudi leadership in 2015 put an endpoint to Saudi golden relation with the Hariri family. Therefore, analysts tend to view the relationship between Hariri and KSA in 2015 as changed due to dismissing a Saudi request to break his pragmatic relations with Hezbollah after its' embedding in the Yemen war.

After October 17th demonstrations, Hariri pointed all his speeches toward Michael Aoun and his son-in-law Jebran Bassil. The FPM leader was accused by Hariri of ending the chances for any reformations due to enormous demands in the Lebanese government and parliament, leading to collapsing the political and economic systems. Hariri's speech during the 14-February 2021 memorial pointed out a list of candidates the President of the republic gave the designated prime minister at that time; at that time, the Lebanese government did not find a way through between Aoun and Hariri for nine months due to a significant obstacle set by Aoun demanding the "blocking-third" in the desired government. Hariri stepped down afterward, and a new government was formed by Najib Mikati, where Aoun succeeded in having the needed one-third plus one.

E. Lebanese Politics Complexity: Forming Party Alliances or Falling Out

Sectarian parties mitigate the Lebanese political system and welfare system. The political system established at independence in 1943-1943 institutionalized Lebanon's preexisting pattern of political sectarianism (Makdisi 2000). Lebanon is a political system closed by hegemonic political and religious parties operating simultaneously under conditions of competition and complementarity.

The Lebanese Political system is characterized by the existence of corruption, the influence of religion, and the influence of armed groups such as Hezbollah. Thus, the Lebanese political system suffers from a weak legal framework and a political culture based on favoritism, patronage, corruption, and the occasional use of coercive violence. Lebanese politics is also characterized by a sectarian and corrupt structure, constant interference from neighboring states such as Israel, Syria, and Iran, and years of war (SENENIG-DABBOUS, 2015).

Lebanese politicians largely reflect sectarianism, with the most prominent figures representing powerful families and ruling political dynasties. Many of Lebanon's major political parties are militias formed during the civil war, including the Lebanese Army (Led by President Aoun at that era), Amal, Hezbollah, and Marada. The conflict originates in militias, which have gained political legitimacy and economic support in the Lebanese social system along sectarian lines, characterized by divisions according to 18 officially recognized religious groups. The transformation of war participants into civilian politicians also did not change the sectarian leanings of Lebanese political parties in favor of planned political struggles (BTI, 2022).

This shift in the role of Lebanese Hezbollah poses risks to the organization and opportunities to support efforts to strengthen institution-building and reclaim the state, as well as inject more independent and technocratic personalities into Lebanese politics through national elections. Hezbollah's main rival is the March 14 Alliance, an umbrella organization that includes several Lebanese political parties, including Al-Mustaqbal (Future Movement) and the party of Prime Minister Saad Hariri, which has lost a third of its power in Elections in 2018 (Williams, 2022). The assassination of Rafik Hariri, the withdrawal of the Syrians from the Lebanese government, the entry into the government of Hezbollah, and above all, the rivalry in the Christian camp led to the strengthening of new political dynamics, including the alliance between President Michel Aoun and the centers of Christians and Hezbollah.

The Syrian army withdrew in April 2005, but these rival coalitions determined their country's politics for the next few years on March 8 because of their independent armed status with Hezbollah (a political and paramilitary force) and their alliance in Lebanon. 14 and 8 March blocs took the opposite positions always on issues such as relations with Syria. When Lebanon gained independence from Lebanon in 1943, Shiites became an economically and politically marginalized group (Stanford, 2019). Moreover, as we mentioned above, unlike other Lebanese groups currently seeking an active role in the Lebanese political system, Hezbollah is the only militia group that refused to disarm following the signing of the Taif Accords that ended the tragic Lebanese civil war.

Given brutal demographic realities and Lebanon's fractured political system, coalitions and political alliances were the only way for parties to stay in power. With a volatility rating of just 4.69% during the Hezbollah Only political coup in 2011, Lebanon has transitioned from a multi-party system to a two-coalition system (Petallides, 2011). The only way left for the country to move from its current decline to a path of reform is to ensure that the 2022 general election creates a critical mass of reformist figures who will not be intimidated or restricted by significant groups. Unfortunately, the desire for “Change” seems, by far, not happening in these elections due to many factors.

Due to continuous instability, concentration was always conveyed to the contentious political system issues, power-sharing, sectarian quotas, and other endless discussions leading to the postponement of the elections. The school of thought wants to tackle the Lebanese crisis now, not years later, which would be required to build a political apparatus capable of competing with the country's institutional parties (Herman, 2021). The responsibility for enacting and implementing these reforms will rest with the government that emerges from the elections. Lebanese political leaders will likely continue to make any significant changes to minimize damage to themselves and the party interests.

Political party organization evolved by default out of the need to perpetuate and systematize the electoral list system, which is the fundamental legal basis of the multi-party regime in Lebanon. In countries such as Lebanon (Cammet, 2011), where a democratic government is only partially institutionalized, electoral politics is not the

only model of political competition, and parties play a “dual game” in electoral and non-electoral forms of political mobilization (Mainwaring 2003).

The Lebanese system is full of ethnic and political complexity that paralyzes the political and economic lives of the Lebanese once major disagrees on how to run politics in the country. Throughout Lebanese history, the country experienced good financial status due to an agreement between the county’s ethnic leaders, led by an external force umbrella. The case is evident in the 1960s and 1992-2005; in these two periods, the external forces led internal elites to run the country under clear border lines. The first period was an outcome of Egyptian President Abdel Naser's agreement with the Lebanese President at that time – General Fouad Chehab, while the second was an American -Saudi- Syrian agreement that gave the economic power to one of the elites: Rafik Hariri while keeping the security managed by the Syrian. During both periods, Lebanon was under the direct influence of external forces, yet with a marginal agreement of the local tools – ethnic elites.

What can be uniquely identified in this political stage in Lebanon is that one of the powerful Elites stepped down voluntarily -as it appears. Hariri’s step down is similar to that of the current central Shiite Party Leader in Iraq, Muktada Al Sadr, where a non-assassinated or captured leader decided to leave the political playground to be filled by the rest of the parties. The big question here arises what happens to the political balance with such a significant force leaving the field, especially with such complex divisions and hierarchy in the state?

F. The Temporary Stepdown of Hariri – Not that Bad?

Ghassan Hajar (2022) argues that Saad Hariri's reluctance to run in the upcoming parliamentary elections, but somewhat his "temporary" reluctance from political life, is not so bad. Nevertheless, of course, stepping down needs much time to yield its' outcome and side effects. Still, currently one cannot deny the away from repeating statements about the fragmentation of Hariri's audience and the frustration of the Sunni community. The feeling of a declining role has accompanied the story of Prime Minister Saad Hariri in recent years and was not born in January 2022, especially when it comes to unstable relation that has been exploited with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

On the other side, Randa Takeyiddeen (2022) compares the cases where Iran uses its influence in the middle east; for the Iraqi example, it seems the regional power embeds its interest in all aspects of the country. The final Iraqi decision regarding the prime minister's appointment and government members must consider the Iranian wishes to a large extent. The argument made by French President Emmanuel Macron to Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman that Saudi Arabia should support Lebanon and not leave it to Iran's hegemony falls under this danger. The French endeavor with Saudi Arabia has not succeeded so far, as the Kingdom has not yet sent an invitation to Prime Minister Najib Mikati. When Prime Minister Hariri announces that he is leaving politics, there is a great regret that there is no alternative. The moderate Lebanese arena is left to the interest of Iran and its proxy on the ground, "Hezbollah."

Hariri's move sparked widespread controversy among those holding on to his survival, critics searching for solutions to the country's problems, visionary plans, confrontation

with "Hezbollah" and the "Free Patriotic Movement," and other local opponents. Faced with this controversial reality before the announcement, Hariri, who preferred to stay abroad for some time, perhaps to avoid daily pressures and make room for himself to conduct a self-review, made radical decisions. The decision he announced yesterday might result from that review and a reading of the surrounding variables and circumstances (Hajjar,2022).

Rhyming with Hajjar, Fayed (2022) relates the temporary step down of Hariri to his later father's political action in 1998, when the late Hariri decided to step down from the government and went back more robust in the parliamentary elections two years after. Prime Minister Saad Hariri knows that his father, the martyr Rafik Hariri, was a political reference in 1992 without being a member of the parliament. Then, Hariri was a symbol of popular leadership formed by his social and economic initiatives, his project for comprehensive advancement aimed at the whole country. As for the scene, today resembles the year 1998 when forces that contradict their positions on Hariri today colluded with what they were towards his father yesterday and worked to remove him from the prime minister. Still, he returned after two years, crowned with a sweeping political victory. Today, his son chose to leave voluntarily to show the Lebanese what his opponents can offer the country, and then the step will show its value and meaning.

Fayed (2022) does not consider what was stated as a dose of optimism for the political Hariri community. Still, it is not possible to ignore Prime Minister Hariri's choice of the phrase: "suspending" political action, which indicates that a return is possible. Maybe

this scenario will be flourished so that Lebanon cannot be outside the logic of international and Arab legitimacy.

Hajjar(2022) pointed out that clear advantages of Hariri's temporary absence can be classified in multi-political frames; these are:

First, to move away until he may be allowed to rearrange his papers, whether in political work or business work, would return some of his lost stock to the businessman. Secondly, withdrawing from the prosecution and the prime minister's office may allow him to rearrange the inner house of the Future Movement, which is living in organizational chaos. Third, Hariri's withdrawal for new can be considered a chance for new political Sunni faces to emerge, especially in the caza of Beirut, to succeed and reach the parliament. This step rhymes with many attempts to present new representatives after the October 17 uprising, which Hariri will oppose if he runs into elections.

The fourth outcome is that Hariri's withdrawal from the Sunni field may reveal how much he is needed again due to weak competition and the absence of alternatives at the national level. Fifth, the absence of Hariri, the son, the political heir, will expose his brother Bahaa in his immaturity alongside his movement that is not based on a solid project until now.

The sixth advantage might be a lesson from the rest of the elite political leaders. These Pillars were surprised by Hariri's announcement that one of them-Hariri considered an

early-retirement option, which will sometimes be forced on other tribal leads (Hajjar, 2022).

CHAPTER IV CONCLUSION

Hariri, the son, has been viewed with similar visions of economic and political paths as his father before his assassination. Hariri's aim for a free liberal economy compares to other Mideastern hubs such as Dubai. In politics, both Prime Ministers stuck with consensus with the local or the external forces to achieve the goals. Hariri, the father, had a pragmatic stance on the Syrians occupying the country and its local allies using the old tool of money; it was well known for the father that he had a man called "Darwish" that the Syrians used to send weekly agents to have the funds from the Safes of Koraytem Palace, where the father used to live. On the other hand, the son has lost most of his fortune due to the inheritance procedure and broken business with KSA (Saudi Oger Crises). At the same time, he maintained pragmatic relations with the local Lebanese forces, which grew up in power after the Syrian withdrawal in 2005. The political and economic image was reflected from the father to the son, yet the son could not succeed in significant outcomes in the country for many reasons. First, Saad Hariri aimed to have the "Cedre" conference as his primary turnout. The government would have received 22 billion dollars over batches, but reformations were fundamental conditions to roll the liquidity. The son was viewed as the young version of the rest of the Lebanese elites, who are nearly 80 years old on average. Hence, he has a better chance of relating to the youth of the uprising movements, far away from being a sectarian leader.

Hariri's absence gave Hezbollah a great space in the margin of the Lebanese playground. The Party had played the underdog role regarding major political focal points, i.e., the presidential elections and the government formation. The preceding can

be illustrated in the previous presidential settlement in 2016, where the deals were left to the Free Patriotic Movement, Future Movement, Lebanese Forces, and Progressive Social Party, while the Iranian proxy took the side of Michael Aoun from the beginning with no attempt to reach any settlement in the famous two years and a half presidential vacuum. In government formation, Hezbollah always played the underdog role, where the party released their ministers' names in any government at the finish line of government formation. In contrast, always Amal Movement takes the wealthier side of the cake regarding the Shiite side.

Hezbollah has the upper hand in three main political topics; usually, the party outsources its role to allies. These topics are the presidential elections, government formation, and maritime disputes. It is noticeable that the party examines the Lebanese field as a clear ground to illustrate its overwhelmed power in the absence of a great Sunni leader that used to oppose the party and its allies in the past. Currently, the Sunnis are segregated into regional blocs in the parliament; the Christians are separated between two poles led by Gebran Bassil and Samir Gaegae, while the Druze are led by Walid Jumblat, who turned around positively toward Hezbollah recently to maintain a good position in terms of political relations in the past month. It is worth mentioning that the independent faces who emerged from the last elections are observed as a parliamentary minority with nearly 10-15% of the seats, which keeps those members with a small role in the big game.

With Hezbollah's emerging role, leading the country's political climax, the party leader Hassan Nasrallah and his MPs cannot deny approval of future fiscal and political

disturbances that will strike a turned-down country. Hence, the supporters of Hezbollah will figure out that their party is the leading player in the future spectrum that will face the nation. Therefore, the Party has two ways to rule the country with its allies, either by imposing a complex ruling schema -similar to examples in Iran and Iraq or by producing new political settlements between its partners and the rest of the political spectrum, which is more likely to happen given the fact of the Lebanese society ethnic and religious diversity.

Due to the rigged political clash in Lebanese politics lately, Hezbollah can reach the endpoint with no agreement or new possible settlement. Also, given the economic crises, the future political vacuum will affect the entire nation, including Hezbollah's supporters, pushing the party and other voices to demand a new national agreement or a significant upgrade to Taif Agreement that has been monitoring Lebanese politics after the civil war.

Saad Hariri will not revert to Lebanese politics unless a significant change occurs in the ruling schema. A "useless" comeback can be identified once the ex-Prime Minister returns with no outcome resulting in better welfare or a peaceful atmosphere for the Lebanese people, including his supporters. These are the reasons he left politics temporarily, in addition to losing several factors of the "Haririsim" pillars, ranging from the excellent Lebanese relations with the Arab World and the Network of economic shares boosting the Lebanese economy. In the meantime, Hezbollah is the only major Lebanese player with influence and connections across the region. Thus, the party will be more potent in Lebanese politics than ever in the short term.

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