AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

AFTER SATURDAY, SUNDAY: EVALUATING THE MARONITE-ISRAELI RELATIONSHIP (1920-1982)

by
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AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Jessica Renée Nelson for Master of Arts
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As a result of centuries of struggles and subjugation (or the threat of subjugation), some communities developed regional alliances in order to fend off encroaching powers, maintain their dominance, and above all, to ensure their own survival. The Maronite Christians of Lebanon and the Jews of Israel, both of which are the focus of this thesis, are the quintessential modern-day example of such a mentality, and an equally important example of such an alliance. Many authors highlight the 'natural' aspect of the Maronite-Israeli alliance. However, as history has demonstrated, neither side was a reliable partner in times of crisis – nor did they really face a common enemy – and this 'natural' alliance no longer exists today.

I argue that the Israeli-Maronite relationship was not as organic as many have suggested, but was instead a culmination of mutual false perceptions due to an imagined link in nationalisms, a heightened sense of moral obligation to the Christian community in peril, and the willingness of both sides to manipulate the other into serving their respective security objectives. As a result, Israel was drawn into a long, unpopular occupation with an embarrassing retreat, and the Christian community was significantly weakened militarily and politically.

By analyzing the evolution of the relationship through the actions and rhetoric of key figures in both the Maronite community and Israeli government, deconstructing Maronite and Zionist nationalisms, and comparing and contrasting their perceptions of each other as allies, I would like to delve into the consequences of natural alliances as they pertain to Lebanon and Israel, though this may have wider ramifications for the general topic of minority alliances.

CONTENTS

To my father,
whose words of encouragement in the pursuit of excellence still linger on.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

A. Main Objectives

In the eyes of many, the Arab-Israeli conflict is a product of the primal, religious tendencies that are so often associated with the Middle East. This showdown, which is generally portrayed as Muslim versus Jew, has dramatically affected the way regional actors perceive national security and the regional balance of power: military might and powerful allies, rather than diplomacy and negotiation, are more often than not the keys to success in this contested region of the world. This not only applies to state actors, but to non-state actors as well. In fact, one aspect of this power-balancing charade that is often overlooked is the impact that minorities can have in these volatile situations, especially when they work together.

This study looks at the concept of minority alliances within the context of minority nationalism, among other factors. Minorities and minority nationalist movements can be found in just about every country on this planet, but minority alliances are few and far between. In fact, literature on the topic is surprisingly sparse and is limited to only a handful of cases. The case that I will analyze is the relationship between Lebanese Maronite Christians and Palestinian (later, Israeli) Jews, and how minority nationalism was a major factor in their coming together. The Maronite-Jewish relationship was founded on what both believed were common and 'natural' grounds – in other words, they perceived their relationship as a mutually beneficial partnership based on common goals, history, and

culture. Throughout this study, I will demonstrate that this relationship was neither 'natural' nor beneficial. The Maronite-Jewish relationship is a unique one, for it is a pioneer in the field of minority alliances. By analyzing and evaluating its successes, failures, benefits, and faults, one can gain a better understanding not only of Maronite and Israeli psyche in particular, but also minority alliances in general.

B. Research Question

The objective of this thesis is twofold: first, to understand how and why certain minorities interact with each other in adverse circumstances and how, together, they react to forces that challenge or threaten their survival; and second, to see whether such an alliance helps or hinders their objectives and security interests. My study focuses on an area that has a long history of continuous conquest and which, today, is notoriously rife with ethnic and religious conflict: the Middle East, and particularly the Levant. As the birthplace of all three major, monotheistic religions, the Middle East is an incredibly ethnically and religiously heterogeneous region marked by communal struggles, divisions, and violence.

As a result of centuries of struggles and subjugation (or the threat of subjugation), some communities developed regional alliances in order to fend off encroaching powers, maintain their dominance, and above all, to ensure their own survival. The Maronite Christians of Lebanon and the Jews of Israel, both of which are the focus of this thesis, are the quintessential modern-day example of such a mentality, and an equally important example of such an alliance. Many authors highlight the 'natural' aspect of the Maronite-Israeli alliance. In this regard, the term 'natural' refers to the fact that Maronite Christians

and the Jews in Israel took the alliance for granted; after all, Jews and Christians share regional minority status and they face the same "Muslim enemy"[1] in the Arab world. However, as history has demonstrated, neither side was a reliable partner in times of crisis – nor did they really face a common enemy – and this 'natural' alliance no longer exists today. Does it follow, then, that the relationship was not natural per se, but merely one of convenience? Can we even consider minority alliances to be natural? Can Maronitism and Zionism – two forms of nationalism which share similar characteristics – provide a political base and justification for assuming that an alliance between them was feasible, or even desirable? I seek to explore the cause and ramifications of the Maronite-Israeli alliance, especially as it relates to its 'natural' occurrence.

I argue that the Israeli-Maronite relationship was not as organic as many have suggested, but was instead a culmination of mutual false perceptions due to an imagined link in nationalisms, a heightened sense of moral obligation to the Christian community in peril, and the willingness of both sides to manipulate the other into serving their respective security objectives. As a result, Israel was drawn into a long, unpopular occupation with an embarrassing retreat, and the Christian community was significantly weakened militarily and politically. It would seem that, rather than protecting a state or community, such 'natural' alliances jeopardize national security interests because moral and other irrational, imagined obligations interfere with military and foreign policies. By analyzing the evolution of the relationship through the actions and rhetoric of key figures in both the Maronite community and Israeli government, deconstructing Maronite and Zionist

[1] Khashan, Hilal. "The Evolution of Israeli-Lebanese Relations: From Implicit Peace to Explicit Conflict." *Israel Affairs* 15.4 (2009): 321.

nationalisms, and comparing and contrasting their perceptions of each other as allies, I would like to delve into the consequences of natural alliances as they pertain to Lebanon and Israel, though this may have wider ramifications for the general topic of minority alliances.

C. A Review of the Literature

1. Literature on the Minority Experience

As I immediately state in the next chapter, the amount of literature on minorities is vast, and I had to conduct my research very selectively. Given the wide range of sources available on minorities and nationalism, I narrowed my search to two main topics: first, I focused on works that addressed the role of minorities in history under various multi-national empires, paying particular attention to the ones that concerned Christians and Jews as religious minorities. Second, I selected works that addressed the intersection of nationalism, minorities, and religion, since all three of these themes are central to my thesis argument.

No standard definition of minorities exists today – except, perhaps, an ambiguous one proposed by the United Nations – but the role of minorities in their respective societies has evolved considerably. Bat Ye'or (1985) does a comprehensive study of Christians and Jews (collectively known as *dhimmi*) under the Islamic Empire addresses one of the earliest documented examples of minority-majority relations. While he admits that minorities did not always enjoy the same privileges as their Muslim counterparts, Ye'or emphasizes that

they were allowed to practice their faith and Muslim armies even protected them during war. Botiveau (1998) might consider Ye'or to be an apologist; he says that Muslim society often fell short of its most basic promises to religious minorities, and that the *dhimmi* were generally exploited, ridiculed, and sometimes even persecuted for their religious differences. In between these authors is Pacini (1998), who concedes that injustices did occur, but because Islam projected itself as a "universal culture," their restrictions on minorities served a social and legal purpose to prioritize the Muslim community over others.

The *dhimmi* system continued under the Ottoman Empire. Religious minorities acquired a different name (*millet*, meaning 'nation'), but according to Gilbert (1999), they suffered the same disadvantages and setbacks as they did under previous Islamic rulers. Mario Apostolov (2001) has thoroughly documented the Ottoman case, and he argues that the Ottoman's harsh treatment of minorities, coupled with their limited autonomy – and later, the overextension of the empire – gave rise to nationalist uprisings in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and particularly in the nation-state era after World War I. Apostolov says that politically plural regimes are often riddled with violent conflict, and that the Ottoman example dramatically affected the way that modern-day minorities in the region define themselves and the world around them. Today, especially in multi-ethnic and multi-religious countries like Lebanon – which was previously part of the Ottoman Empire – sectarian nationalism still plays a major role in the minority psyche, and he explains that this is all rooted in their historical experiences under the Islamic and Ottoman Empires.

Whereas minority identity in the Middle East was based almost entirely on religion, academic opinion is split on the roots of minority identity in Europe. Woolf (1996) and

Hobbsbawm (2003) argue that, historically, loyalty to the crown or ruling dynasty was the binding element in national identity. Gilbert refutes this idea; just like the Middle East, identity in Europe was determined by religion, since these characteristics were the most visible. Nirenberg (1996) supports Gilbert's claim, for in his study of minorities in medieval Europe, Jews experienced vacillating extremes of tolerance and persecution that were based solely on their identity as Jews, which had a lasting effect on certain Israeli administrations and policies.

With the dawn of the era of "self-determination" after World War I, everyone was scrambling to create their own nation-state. Brubaker's (1996) detailed focus on the interwar period and the post-Soviet Union period gives us a detailed and comprehensive look at how nationalist movements asserted their legitimacy. He makes the crucial point that the new nation-states only came into being because of geopolitical and economic factors that were conducive to their creation. Applying Brubaker's argument to other cases, we could say that Lebanon and Israel only came into being because France and Britain allowed them to do so, and not because of Maronite or Jewish claims to the land. This is incredibly important to bear in mind, as the geopolitical situation in which Lebanon and Israel were created – that is, through foreign intervention – contributed greatly to the sectarian tensions that persist today.

Nisan's (1991) study of Middle Eastern minorities provides a sweeping view of power and politics in the Middle East, and how minorities fit into the political framework. Minorities are a tedious topic in the Middle East, as most claim to be native or have historical lands in one place or another. Nisan argues that one of the biggest problems facing the minority-majority relationship is the inability of both sides to differentiate

between nation and state. One key example of Nisan's claim is that the Maronites, as we will see, often equate Lebanon with Christianity, and Christianity with Lebanon. Israel made the same mistake when the two sought an alliance.

2. Maronitism and Zionism: History, Nationalism, and Ideology

Since its creation in 1948, Israel remains a highly controversial and widely contested state, especially in the Middle East. Because it has occupied the regional and international spotlight for so long, there are countless academic studies on the foundations of Israel, the Jewish community, and Zionism in all of its variant forms. My thesis focuses on the rise of Revisionist Zionism – a political orientation situated on the far right of the political spectrum – and its heavy influence on Israeli policy, especially in Lebanon. While David Engel (2009) and the Edelheit brothers (2000) provide a solid foundation for the introductory and general study of Zionism, Eran Kaplan (2005) and Ilan Peleg (1987) write extensively on the Israeli right. Kaplan's work delves into the very origins of the Revisionist movement in the 1920s and 1930s. He focuses particularly on the movement's founding ideologue, Vladimir (Ze'ev) Jabotinsky, who embraced territorial maximalism, a strong and capable army, and radical Jewish nationalism – themes which are still very much present today. Jabotsinky's ideology stipulated that the Jews were (and are) entitled to the land of Israel – which, he believed, should always be a Jewish state – and that conflict with the surrounding Arab population is inevitable, so the Israeli nation must always be ready for battle. Jabotinsky's emphasis on the inevitability of conflict was not entirely unfounded: Alan Taylor (1972) argues that Israel's constant state of conflict and

warfare with its neighbors has fueled rightist tendencies in Israeli politics and society. Kaplan concludes that the conservative legacy of the Revisionist movement – politically represented by the modern-day Likud party – has had a profound effect on the worldview of subsequent Israeli political administrations. Here, Kaplan refers to Menachem Begin in particular, who Ehud Sprinzak (1989) labels a "neo-Revisionist"; he would become the first Likud Israeli Prime Minister in 1977.

Ilan Peleg's study of the Begin administration is almost like a continuation of Kaplan's work, as Peleg portrays Begin as the torch-bearer of Revisionist Zionism. Peleg's chronological history of Begin's policies and rhetoric demonstrates that Jabotinsky's Revisionist ideology strongly influenced the Israeli Prime Minister's decision-making and affected his worldview, especially when it came to interacting with Arabs, and particularly the Palestinians. As Peleg explains, Begin's black-and-white view of the world and his insistence that the whole world was against the Jews left no room for rational or strategic decisions. Peleg argues that Begin's decisions were further radicalized when fellow Likud members Rafael Eitan and Ariel Sharon monopolized the military establishment and enabled his often irrational behavior, especially towards Lebanon. However, in one of his later works, Peleg explains that even though Israeli policy has remained on the political right since Begin resigned and the right-wing parties still maintains their traditional ideology, today's politicians are more compelled to make concessions (albeit modest ones) due to political fragmentation.

Unlike Judaism and Zionism, English-language literature about the Maronite Christians is rather sparse. Indeed, some authors have written books in English which specifically address Maronite Christianity – Walid Phares (1995) is one example. However,

I found that his work omitted crucial historical information that that was indisputably and unavoidably part of Lebanese and Maronite history. Thus, I approached this source with extreme caution and only used information that I was able to cross-reference with other sources. Most of the information that I gathered about Maronite history and nationalism was extracted from various works on general Lebanese history, Christian minorities in the Middle East, or general minority nationalism literature.

The specificities of early Maronite history seem to be shrouded in mystery, as this information was the most elusive. Hilal Khashan's works (1990, 2009) on the Maronite community provided some insight in this regard, particularly his article on Lebanese Maronite Christian political values which critically assesses the Christian perspective in Lebanon. In Fawwwaz Traboulsi's (2007) politico-economic account of Lebanese history, he argues that the concept of Lebanon was formed after the Emirate of Mount Lebanon was established under the Ottoman Empire; this counters other histories of the Maronites, such as that of Walid Phares, who date Lebanon's origins with the coming of the Maronite community in the seventh century.

David Hirst (2010) highlights the development of Maronite nationalism and its consolidation of power under the French Mandate. With France as the 'tender mother' to the Maronites, he argues that their connections with Europe developed within their community anti-Arabist, pro-Western, and often irredentist tendencies. Elaine Hagopian (1989) elaborates on this aspect of Maronite psyche in her article about the ideological evolution of the Maronite community. Hagopian makes the crucial point that because Maronites consider themselves the natives of Lebanon, Maronite nationalism was often mistaken for Lebanese nationalism, though the latter has never existed. She argues that the

Maronite identity revolves around a sense of territorial entitlement, cultural and religious superiority, and in some extreme cases, explicitly anti-Arab tendencies.

Hagopian's description of Maronite identity and nationalism, however, does not consider the practical factors and political realities that the community was facing, especially during the Civil War. In Farid El-Khazen's (2000) exhaustive account of Lebanese politics in the 1960s and 1970s, he describes the rigid sectarian system as the root cause of conflict. El-Khazen explains that Maronite power had been historically safeguarded by France, so when their legitimacy was challenged in the 1960s and 1970s (as it had also been in the 1950s), the Maronites understood this as an overt threat to their existence. Kirsten E. Schulze (1996, 1997, 1998), who has written a number of articles and books on the Maronite experience during the Civil War period, combines all of these factors in her detailed account of the rise of extremist Maronitism under Bashir Gemayel.

3. The Maronite-Israeli Alliance

As it was with the Maronite community, the pool of literature about the Maronite-Israeli relationship is a small one. While many works mention the existence of the relationship, few actually analyze it in depth, and even fewer approach the issue comprehensively. Thus, much of my research depended on Kirsten E. Schulze (1996, 1997, 1998), Laura Zittrain-Eisenberg 1994), Laurie Eisenberg (2010), Hilal Khashan (2009) and Eyal Zisser's (2010) accounts of Maronite and Israeli encounters.

Laura Zittrain-Eisenberg and Eyal Zisser provide an invaluable perspective of early contacts between Lebanese Maronites and Israel. Contrary to other scholarly literature on

this era who claim that the relationship between Maronites and Jews began in the 1920s, Zittrain-Eisenberg places these origins in the 1860s, when two Jewish philanthropists helped support the Maronite armies against the Druze during a devastating civil war in Mount Lebanon. While this was by no means a formal initiation of relations, the Maronite clergy – who were the most important figures in Maronite daily life – never forgot this, and used their historical experience with Jews as the rationale for furthering their relationship. The 1946 Pact, she says, was one of the most significant manifestations of the Maronite clergy's willingness to work closely with the Jewish community in Palestine. Eyal Zisser is skeptical of Zittrain-Eisenberg's approach. He argues that the early relationship between the Maronites and the Jews was mostly clandestine (and therefore unimportant), and that the Maronite community was only trying to find an ally to protect it from the Muslim Arabs. Thus, he explains, the Maronites' interest in a relationship was only self-serving and had nothing to do with friendship ties or 'natural' bonds.

Kirsten E. Schulze has written several books and articles on various aspects of this topic as well. Unlike Zittrain-Eisenberg and Zisser, who focus on pre-state relations, Schulze's analysis places much more emphasis on post-state relations. Schulze thoroughly dissects Israel-Maronite relations from a national and strategic perspective. She contests the conventional view that Israel is uninterested in or isolated from Arab affairs, and instead argues that both indirect and direct interventionism were some of the most significant features of Israeli policy, especially toward Lebanon and the Maronite community. In fact, she argues that it was Israel's relationship with the Maronites that encouraged Israel to invade Lebanon in 1982, and it was Bashir Gemayel's desire for the presidency and protection that encouraged him to perpetuate the alliance. Eisenberg's article on Maronite-

Israeli relations during the 1982 invasion questions Schulze's thesis; denying the minority alliance concept, Eisenberg wonders why Israel decided to launch a full-scale invasion of Lebanon in 1982, while it restrained itself from doing so in previous years. Peleg's work on the Begin administration comes in handy here, since he attributes most of Begin's decision-making to deeply-rooted and often irrational ideologies and opinions about Israel's grandeur mission and its obligation to save the Maronite community. Thus, even if there was no true alliance, Begin might have invaded anyway given his personal characteristics and the unanimity of his administration.

D. Thesis Significance

Many of the studies that analyze the Maronite-Israeli alliance in the pre-state era focus on the relationship as the product of both communities searching for alliances wherever they could find them. As Zittrain-Eisenberg and Hirst tell us, there were major economic benefits to having a partnership, and the entrepreneurial and tourism industries boomed between the Maronites and the Jews. Furthermore, Zionists and particularly the Maronite clergy emphasized the similarities between Christians as Jews as one of the main reasons for establishing a 'natural' relationship based in mutual interest. However, underlying all of this good will and friendly gesture was the practical concern for communal survival.

The studies that focus on the pre-state period pay special attention to personal relationships between Maronites and Israelis (particularly during the Begin administration) and the surrounding geopolitical context in which these relationships were formed. Schulze

argues that the Maronite-Israeli alliance was the result of mutual insecurity in a region swept by Islam and Arabism; in other words, it was a reaction to their surroundings, and the Israeli invasion of 1982 was a product of both the perceived benefits of the relationship as well as state insecurities vis-à-vis the Palestinians and the Syrians. Again, Eisenberg counters Schulze's theory; she does not deny the presence of a clandestine alliance between the Maronites and the Israelis, but she argues that it was only a "cold power-politics" rationale that prompted the invasion.

My thesis combines all of these factors, and adds new ones. In addition to the economic, strategic, and extremist ideologies that form the mainstream rationale for the alliance, I have also found that, at various points in history, both the Maronites and the Israelis believed there were parallels in their identities and nationalist movements. This played a major role in the decision to ally. Conceiving of Israeli-Maronite relations as founded in faulty assumptions of shared nationalisms and struggles, rather than – or perhaps, in addition to – purely realist motives forces us to evaluate the relationship more thoroughly, and to better understand the process behind it. While my work may not reveal groundbreaking information heretofore unknown, I do believe that its nuanced approach in combining nationalism with realist motives will positively contribute to the small but significant body of literature concerning the political and ideological motives behind the alliance. It will challenge academic works which either insinuate that the relationship was a linear, cause-and-effect phenomenon, or the ones that overlook the significance of ideology in the alliance.

E. Thesis Structure

Chapter 1 begins with a basic introduction to the study of minorities, including definitions, foundational concepts, and historical and modern examples of the status of minorities in various societies. In order to better understand the modern-day aspirations of minorities, I analyze their experiences in the pre-state era, paying particular attention to how minorities fared under the Islamic, Ottoman, and European empires. My focus then shifts to the post-state era, highlighting the changes in global perceptions of minorities after the dissolution of empires. It is within this context that I address the minority situation in the Middle East and introduce my two focus groups: namely, the Lebanese Maronite Christians and Palestinian (later, Israeli) Jews.

In chapter 2, I trace the historical experiences of Maronite Christians and Jewish Zionists. For the Maronites, this begins in the seventh century; for the Jewish Zionists, this begins in the nineteenth century when the foundations for political Zionism were established. Against this historical backdrop, I analyze the evolution of Maronite and Zionist nationalist ideologies and extract the common elements and strategic interests between them.

Chapter 3 serves as a continuation of the previous chapter, but specifically focuses on the history of the Maronite-Israeli alliances: its origins, its proponents and opponents, its benefits and faults. I place both communities within the perspective of the other, to provide a comparative understanding of the imbalances in the relationship, the expectations that both communities had of each other, and the personalities that perpetuated the alliance in spite of its shortcomings.

In chapter 4, I evaluate the alliance based on my findings in chapters 2 and 3. I explain the significance of Maronite and Zionist nationalism in forming the alliance, in addition to strategic and ideological factors. Contrary to Maronite and Zionist rhetoric at the time, I argue that their alliance was never natural, but merely a convenient partnership that was based in personal gain and misguided expectations.

In my conclusion, I reflect on the concept of minority alliances – are they ever 'natural'? Or are they just like any other alliance, in that they simply serve the interests of both parties involved? Did the Maronites and Israelis ally with each other because they had no other option, or were other alternatives available? It is within the context of such questions that I address the minority question in Lebanon and Israel and what implications, if any, these questions may have for the future of the Levant.

Now, we will turn our attention to the general study of minorities to see how they have asserted their identities through space and time. This will give the reader a better understanding of how minority experiences affect their worldview, and how Middle Eastern minorities (such as Christians and Jews) have traditionally fared in the region that they call home.

CHAPTER 2

MINORITIES, PAST AND PRESENT

In this chapter, I trace minority experiences throughout history, focusing particularly on Christian and Jewish experiences under the Islamic, Ottoman, and European empires. I will then place these experiences within a post-state era context, highlighting the changes in global perceptions of minorities after the dissolution of empires. By better understanding the way the world looks at minorities and the events which shaped their role in society, I aim to provide a backdrop for the development and evolution of Maronite and Zionist nationalist movements, which had a profound effect on their worldview.

A. Introduction

The academic study of minority communities is vast. With the spread of the 20th-cenutry concepts of universal human rights and self-determination, national and ethnic minorities have gained more recognition and influence than ever before. These same concepts have directly or indirectly influenced an unprecedented number of minority nationalist movements around the world. In some cases, minority nationalist movements have caused violent conflict with little progress, such as the IRA in Northern Ireland and the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka. In other cases, minority nationalist movements are

responsible for the peaceful development of autonomous or self-government frameworks,[2] such as the implementation of partial self-governance in Scotland. While the difference between peaceful and violent movements may be relative to the nature of the individual government in question, it is plain that minorities are increasingly finding themselves, for better or worse, at the center of international and scholarly attention.

More details about my argument, approach, and the particularities of this intriguing relationship will be discussed shortly. But first, in order to facilitate a better understanding of minority alliances, foundational concepts and definitions must be made clear.

B. Defining Minorities

Aside from dictionary definitions of the word, there is no internationally-recognized legal definition of what exactly constitutes a minority.[3] The closest that the international community has come to a standard definition – one that is generally accepted by scholars and which will be used for the purpose of my own study – stems from the 1992 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities (also known simply as the UN Minorities Declaration). As its official title and first article suggests, the UN Minorities Declaration refers to minorities as

[2] Keating, Michael, and John McGarry, eds. *Minority Nationalism and the Changing International Order*. New York: Oxford UP, 2001.

[3] *Minority Rights: International Standards and Guidance for Implementation*. Publication. Geneva: United Nations, 2010. Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. 2.

being based on "national or ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic" identities.[4] Furthermore, the existence of a minority status can extend beyond these objective factors and may include subjective factors, such as one's identification of him/herself as a minority.[5] Another subjective factor for minorities, as Esman explains, lies in which facet or facets of an individual's identity take precedence over others. He gives a perfect example of a Scottish physician who is patriotic and desires independence for Scotland, but who at the same time would like to remain a member of the British Medical Society. At some point, this individual may have to decide which part of his/her identity is more important.[6] In this regard, minorities and their identity as such can be rigidly and fluidly defined at the same time.

No universal formula can be applied to all minorities, though they are generally numerically inferior in their countries of residence. As a result, they are typically excluded from or under-represented in political and government circles, economically disadvantaged, and their culture (language, religion) is marginalized or, at times, persecuted. Thus, through violent or non-violent means, many minority movements around the world seek greater inclusion in politics, as well as greater access to capital and cultural recognition. One example of such exclusion and subsequent retaliation is embodied in the Tamil Tigers of Sri Lanka. The Tamil-speaking population, after years of political, economic and cultural discrimination at the hands of the Sinhalese-speaking majority, launched a violent

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[4] United Nations General Assembly, 92nd meeting. "Resolution 47/135 (1992) [Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious, and Linguistic Minorities]" (A/RES/47/135). 18 December 1992.

[5] *Minority Rights: International Standards and Guidance for Implementation*. 2.

[6] Esman, Milton J. *An Introduction to Ethnic Conflict*. Cambridge: Polity, 2004. 8-9.

secessionist campaign for the creation of an autonomous Tamil state. This led to a brutal civil war that lasted nearly 26 years, and ended with the Tigers' defeat. Although the Tamil Tigers are now officially inactive, they are an example of how institutional discrimination against a numerically inferior minority can have serious consequences for the rest of the population, and particularly the ruling elite.

At the other end of the spectrum, there are countries where the numerical majority is ruled by a minority group that excludes them from positions of power. Examples in these cases include the black population in apartheid-era South Africa, which was dominated by a white minority, and the Shi'a of Bahrain who are subject to a Sunni king. Although the roles are reversed, the marginalized population's underlying aspirations revolve around the same three concepts: political power, material resources, and cultural acceptance. Far from being simply modern-day aspirations, these concepts are rooted deeply in their historical experiences under the various empires that sought to exterminate, assimilate, or subjugate them.

C. Minorities before the Rise of the Nation-State

Before the 'nation-state' concept swept Europe in the nineteenth century, empires controlled wide swaths of territory home to various communities that were culturally, ethnically, and sometimes religiously distinct from each other. Consequently, asserting one's identity within a multi-national empire was – in a word – problematic, and the way in which minorities were treated or addressed in these empires was entirely dependant on the policies of the ruling power at the time. The pre-nation-state era is easily overlooked when

addressing today's minority issues, but while this may be irrelevant 'ancient history' to some, I find that understanding minorities in a historical sense is crucial when delving into the modern minority psyche, particularly for religious minorities.

In this section, I will briefly outline how religious minorities fared under the Islamic, Ottoman, and European empires in order to give a general idea of how minority experiences varied in space and time. This will help the reader to better understand how certain minorities react to today's challenges when I discuss them in detail in later sections. I do not intend to comprehensively survey all minority affairs within these empires during that era, and in order to keep this section narrow in scope, I will only discuss religious minorities that are relevant to my thesis topic when analyzing specific cases. Ultimately, my aim is to see how religious identity played a deterministic role in the treatment of minorities before the rise of the nation-state, when identity was much more fluid than it would come to be after the formation of state boundaries.

1. The Early Islamic Empire

The Islamic Empire is one of the earliest examples of regulated coexistence among different religious factions. When the Islamic faith was established by the Prophet Muhammad in 7th century Arabia, Muhammad and his followers set upon a journey of conquest and expansion in order to spread their newly found faith to the surrounding pagan, Jewish, and Christian communities. Islam's holy book and legal source, the Qur'an, says

that Islam is the only true and eternal religion,[7] and as a result, Jewish and Christian villages in the Arabian Peninsula – as well as Zoroastrian communities in Persia – were often besieged by encroaching Muslim armies when they refused to convert.[8]

However, Muhammad, a shrewd politician and businessman, later struck a deal with a surrendering Jewish tribe that would set a major precedent for non-Muslim communities living under Islamic conquest: Christians and Jews, whom Islam recognizes as "People of the Book" (*Ahl al-Kitab*), could live peacefully and continue to observe their own religion so long as they accepted Islamic rule, provided assistance to Muslim armies if they needed it, and paid a tax (*jizya*). These subjugated populations, known as the *dhimmi*, bore the same social responsibilities as their Muslim counterparts, and were ostensibly entitled to equal property rights, self-administration, and religious education.[9] In practice, however, these 'privileges' tended to fall short of their theoretical design, and the *dhimmi* were often treated as second-class citizens.[10]

As is the case for most minorities under majority rule, the status and rights of the *dhimmi* often fluctuated throughout the different periods and dynasties, namely the Rashidun (632-661), Umayyad (661-750), and Abbasid (750-1258) Caliphates. Andrea Pacini argues that

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[7] The Qur'an. Trans. Abdullah Yusuf Ali. 3:85.

[8] Ye'or, Bat. *The Dhimmi: Jews and Christians under Islam*. London: Associated University Presses, 1985. 44.

[9] Ibid, 49.

[10] Botiveau, Bernard. "The Law of the Nation-State and the Status of Non-Mulims in Egypt and Syria." *Christian Communities in the Arab Middle East*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998. 112.

"Islam has, in fact, practiced tolerance towards Christians and Jews. This tolerance had well-defined limits however, which were institutionally ratified by a number of laws, making Islam the dominant religion from a political and social point of view. The first type of limits imposed on Christians and the other *dhimmi* were religious…The second type of restrictions were mainly social and clearly stated the inferiority of non-Muslims, both socially and legally."[11]

The restrictions and social subjugations that Muslims enforced upon religious minorities within the Islamic Empire may be in the distant past, but they still figure into the psyche and rhetoric of Christian and Jewish populations living in the Middle East today – a topic upon which I will elaborate in later sections. The *dhimmi* status system continued under the Ottoman Empire, though the Ottomans awarded more freedom and autonomy to minorities under their rule. It is to their case that we now turn.

2. The Ottoman Empire

The Ottoman Empire, a religiously heterogeneous extension of the Islamic Empire based in modern-day Turkey, was more accommodationalist in its approach to minorities than its predecessors. The Turkish *millet* system, an institutional framework that separated, controlled, and taxed the minorities residing within its borders, was greatly influenced by the Arab *dhimmi* system, though it did allow minorities more freedoms. Recognized non-Muslim minorities were technically under the empire's protection, they wielded a degree of political and legal autonomy in their respective provinces, and they were granted social rights equitable to Muslims. Of course, this does not mean that these reforms were

[11] Pacini, Andrea, ed. *Christian Communities in the Arab Middle East*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998. 3.

uniformly and systematically applied; on the contrary, Christians, Jews, and others suffered many setbacks and disabilities just as they had under the *dhimmi* sysem.[12] Regardless, the Ottoman Turks were more pragmatic in their approach to ethnic and religious minorities because much of their revenue came from the taxes imposed upon these groups.[13]

Because the *millet* system relied so heavily on religious identity in determining one's social, political, and legal status, it inadvertently fueled intense and sometimes violent religio-nationalist uprisings.[14] These were easily quelled during the empire's golden years, but as Ottoman power declined and its military might waned in the nineteenth century, the Sultanate was forced to give in to the demands of its minorities. This meant that, in addition to giving the existing religious minorities more freedoms, previously unrecognized sects could now declare legal and political autonomy – and, as a result, self-sufficiency. [15] This phenomenon, which was essentially a product of a rigid sectarian system, is largely to blame for the empire's decline and ultimate collapse.[16]

The Ottoman example is incredibly important for this study because Lebanon's political system, a major focal point for my thesis, has been characterized as the "last fragment of the Ottoman Empire".[17] Today's system in Lebanon, of which the Maronite

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[12] Gilbert, Geoff. "Religio-Nationalist Minorities and the Development of Minority Rights Law."*Review of International Studies* 25.3 (1999): 394.

[13] Apostolov, Mario. *Religious Minorities, Nation States and Security: Five Cases from the Balkans and the Eastern Mediterranean*. Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2001. 32.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid, 32-33.

[16] Ibid, 33.

[17] Corm, Georges. *Géopolitique du Conflit Libanais: Étude Historique et Sociologique*. Paris: Découverte, 1986. 48; cited in Apostolov.

Christian community is the head, continues the Ottoman tradition of rigid political and legal separation based on religious identity. It is important to recall the *millet* system, as well as the *dhimmi* system, when rationalizing why Maronite Christians urgently sought help in defending themselves from what they saw as Muslim subjugation in the twentieth century, as well as understanding the voracity with which they asserted their presence, identity, and superiority in Lebanon.

3. Medieval Europe

The European experience provides other examples of the status of minorities during the age of empire. Even before the concept of a 'nation-state' took definitive shape in late-nineteenth century Western Europe, nationalist trends and sentiments had already been present on the continent since at least the fifteenth century.[18] Scholars differ on sources of pre-nation-state identity – Woolf argues that dynastic loyalty was the most important,[19] while Gilbert points to religion, even if only as a cultural identifier[20] – but given the state-like structures in Western Europe at the time, national characteristics and identifiers inevitably developed within the multi-national empires that existed on the continent. These characteristics and identifiers, based on historical, cultural, and religious differences, would later be crucial in making the case for separate nations in the late nineteenth century.

[18] Woolf, Stuart, ed. *Nationalism in Europe: 1815 to the Present*. London: Routledge, 1996. 8.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Gilbert, Geoff. "Religio-Nationalist Minorities and the Development of Minority Rights Law." 393.

However, the importance placed on such characteristics would also be integral in developing an acute sense of 'otherness'.

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to indulge in the vast history of European nationalism and the countless religious and ethnic minorities there, but suffice it to say that with the development of a sense of who belonged in a nation – whether it stemmed from political loyalty, religion, or other factors – came a heightened awareness of who did not. Based on their ethnic, cultural, or religious heritage these 'others', the minority groups, did not fit the predominant national model. They had not yet sufficiently articulated their identities in political terms, and therefore lacked political merit and social affirmation within the system.[21] As a result, and with no institutional mechanisms in place to protect them, minorities were politically defenseless and often persecuted.

Minority discrimination and persecution, which characterized most early European history, was almost always religiously based – at least on the surface, if not at the core. This was especially true for Jews, a community that is the most cited historical example of minority violence in Europe. Unlike the Slovaks, Romanians, Baltic peoples and others who could be reasonably deemed a political threat due to their demands for statehood and recognition, European Jews did not make any explicit political claims to a state or territory. [22] Regardless, they still faced persecution. In his comprehensive work on minorities during the Middle Ages, David Nirenberg argues that the treatment of minorities – specifically, the treatment of Jews – was relative to how good or bad daily life was in general.[23] In other

[21] Woolf, Stuart, ed. *Nationalism in Europe: 1815 to the Present*. 21-22.

[22] Ibid, 22.

words, prosperous times usually meant peace for minorities, while tumultuous times often led to persecution, expulsion, and sometimes massacres. Tragically, for the Jewish people, times were more often tumultuous than prosperous.

The Jewish experience in Europe in the Middle Ages – and also in the twentieth century – and the rise of European nationalism is significant for this study because both are front and center in the modern Jewish and Zionist psyche. The modern-day state of Israel is what Robert Freedman calls "a child of the European nationalism of the nineteenth century,"[24] but it is also a product of the centuries of systematic, and sometimes even whimsical, persecution and expulsion which all but exterminated the Jewish community. The deep psychological scars from these experiences frequently re-surface in Zionist rhetoric, and they are often Israel's rationale for its right-wing, reactionary tendencies against its hostile neighbors as well as its willingness to ally with other minorities that are threatened by an encroaching majority.[25]

By understanding how minorities were treated throughout history, we gain a better perspective on their nationalistic and sometimes xenophobic approach to claiming territory and ensuring security for their community. Riding the popular wave of "self-determination" that peaked during the interwar period, and again in the post-World War II period, these minorities had varying degrees of success in their nationalistic endeavors. The next section

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[23] Nirenberg, David. *Communities of Violence: Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996. 19.

[24] Freedman, Robert, ed. *Contemporary Israel: Domestic Politics, Foreign Policy, and Security Challenges*. Boulder: Westview Press, 2009. 1.

[25] Peleg, Ilan. *Begin's Foreign Policy, 1977-1983: Israel's Move to the Right*. London: Greenwood, 1987. 83.

takes a general look at how minorities fare today after the dissolution of empire and the emphasis on self-determination and human rights.

D. Minorities in a Global Perspective

The way in which the world looks at minority groups has undergone serious transformations over the past century. While today's societies are far from being universally accepting or even tolerant of minorities, the international community has made major strides towards guaranteeing their protection and, in some cases, their participation in society. US President Woodrow Wilson's principle of self-determination is often cited as the beginning of the global 'accommodationist' trend following World War I; the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 is also a common example of the global shift towards recognition and acceptance. Economic globalization and the high mobility of capital in today's global economy should not be overlooked in this regard, for while they have arguably rendered nationalism obsolete,[26] many scholars argue that these phenomena have greatly contributed to fostering interdependence and understanding among "cosmopolitan" cultures.[27] This section briefly addresses how minorities have fared since the dissolution of empires, with the aim of addressing how the creation of the nation-state has affected their identities and relations with each other.

[26] For more information, see Hobsbawm, Eric. *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*. Cambridge University Press, 1991.

[27] Moore, Margaret. "Globalization, Cosmopolitanism, and Minority Nationalism." *Minority Nationalism and the Changing International Order*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001. 45.

The disintegration of the Ottoman and European empires led to the formation of several new nation-states that rode the wave of post-World War I "self-determination" and claimed to represent a particular nation of people. The major components of this claim entailed "nationalizing policies and practices" which were "shaped by the specific political, geopolitical, economic, and cultural contexts" that defined the relationship between the majority and minority populations.[28] The ethno-cultural 'core' of the state was promoted by political elites, whose rhetoric often supported and asserted the dominance of their own language, culture, and demography as being integral to the "state-bearing nation".[29] In other words, the identity of the political elite was often imposed upon the nation-state, and this identity tended to be very distinct from other segments of the state's population. As a result, many of these marginalized populations, or minorities, asserted their right to defend their own interests, while political elites asserted their right to thwart them.

The mandate era – the time between the two World Wars whereby European powers exerted quasi-colonial powers over certain territories – was of particular importance to the minority and nationalist movements in the Middle East that had just been released from the Ottoman grip following its decline in 1918. The French and the British were particularly busy in this area, having arbitrarily created states within the region, divvied them up between themselves, and demanded loyalty and obedience from the native populations. Groups which were relatively cooperative under their rule – ie, the Maronite Christians under the French mandate in Lebanon – were treated favorably and granted autonomous privileges, but even these groups eventually asserted their right to self-

[28] Brubaker, Rogers. *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. 103.

[29] Ibid, 57.

determination and independence. In the Lebanese example, France's favorable treatment of the Maronites, combined with Maronites' belief that they were the only true Lebanese, contributed to their sense of superiority over their Druze and Muslim counterparts and their determination to dominate Lebanon's highly sectarian political system after independence.[30] How this experience affected Lebanon in general, and the Maronites in particular, will be discussed in deeper detail in later sections.

The post-Soviet Union example was perhaps more organic than that of Lebanon and the Middle East, since foreign intervention was less explicit or had less of a direct influence in the political transition processes of the former Soviet republics. The "minority question", however, was just as significant. When the Soviet Union disintegrated, fifteen internal, quasi-nation-states essentially earned their independence at the same time. This presented millions of Russians – who had been living in these republics, and not in Russia proper – with a serious identity problem, especially in the Baltic state region, where "ethnic nationalization" programs had the most appeal and Russians were often targets of institutional, as well as informal, discrimination.[31] While this hostility is most likely the product of these countries being under decades of Soviet rule against their will, there is also a strong element of ethnic nationalism involved. While Russians are indeed allowed to have citizenship in the Baltic states, these policies are incredibly strict.[32] Russians wishing to live in Estonia or Latvia, for example, must speak a working level of Estonian and Latvian,

[30] Hirst, David. *Beware of Small States: Lebanon, Battleground of the Middle East*. London: Faber and Faber, 2010. 9.

[31] Brubaker, Rogers. *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe*. 47.

[32] Ibid, 108.

respectively – a jarring reality for many Russians who have lived in Estonia or Latvia their entire lives, but never learned the native language because Russian was always the primary one. Other countries have been less reluctant to embrace Russian nationals; in Belarus, for example, Belarusian and Russian are both official, state languages.

Despite the romanticism of the "self-determination" and "human rights" language that swept the globe in the twentieth century, these concepts rarely, if ever, manifested themselves ideally. Of course, some nationalities managed to successfully articulate or win support for their cause in creating their own state, but this was almost always at the expense of other ethnic or religious communities residing within the same territory. Nationalism expert Rogers Brubaker highlights three interrelated concepts surrounding the 'national question' which summarize the tense relationship between majority and minority that I have sought to exemplify above. These are the tensions between "incipient national – and nationalizing – states; the national minorities in the new states; and the external 'homeland' states to which the minorities 'belong' by ethno-national affiliation but not legal citizenship."[33] These tensions, which are most often affiliated with former Soviet Union republics, can be easily applied to situations Middle East, like that of Lebanon. However, unlike the Soviet republics, Middle Eastern countries were arbitrarily created by foreign colonialist powers that neglected – or ignored – the demographic make-up of the territories that they controlled. This was disastrous in a region where ethnicity and religion are the most visible and crucial elements of identity and allegiance.

In the Middle East, the region that is the focus of this thesis, the statuses of minority populations vary greatly. The prevalence of tribal identities, powerful families, and external

[33] Ibid, 44.

influence make it easy for one group to monopolize power and, in most cases, shut out the rest. At the same time, this also means that "numerical majority" dominance is just as often the norm as it is the exception. It is to this region and its people that we now turn.

E. Minorities and the Middle East

The Middle East is anything but homogenous. Despite its majority Arab and Muslim face, the region is home to dozens of significant ethnic and religious minority communities: the Kurds, Alawites, Copts, and Druze are just a few. Although the Ottomans are long gone, and because Arab nationalism – despite its unifying allure – failed to incorporate non-Arab populations, identity is still deeply rooted in ethnicity and religion which, in turn, is linked to power (or, perhaps more precisely, discrimination). As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, minorities tend to be both numerically miniscule and politically powerless in their countries of residence. In the Middle East, however, neither of these characteristics is necessarily – or even generally – true. In countries like Syria and Lebanon, the demographically inferior Alawites and Maronite Christians, respectively, are at the head of government. In other countries, however, some majority populations have little to no political power or representation, such as the Shi'a Muslims in Bahrain. Israel, which characterizes itself as a Jewish state, is the only non-Arab state in the region,[34] and is thus a minority in its own regard.

Most minorities in the Middle East are either ethnic (non-Arab) or religious (non-Muslim, and especially non-Sunni Muslim), though some – such as Jews, Assyrians, and

[34] This statement assumes the exclusion of Iran and Turkey.

Yazidis – are both, with an additional linguistic element. What unites many of these communities is their shared history of marginalization. The Kurdish community, for example, has been a historical target of ethnic discrimination by Arabs and Turks since long before the pre-nation state period.[35] The same goes for the Coptic Christians of Egypt: religious violence and discrimination has been a "central theme" in Coptic-Muslim relations from the advent of Islam in the 7th century all the way through modern times.[36] The Druze of Lebanon, on the other hand, wield a disproportionately large amount of political influence, despite the fact that they account for only a small fraction of the Lebanese population.

These are only a few samples of the Middle East's diverse ethnic and religious mosaic: the Berbers, Armenians, Arab Israelis, and other communities scattered across the region all have different backgrounds, aspirations, and grievances. For all of these minorities, their unique identity is both a "refuge and a weapon."[37] In other words, while some communities use their identities as a way of holding on to power – as the Alawites are currently doing in Syria – others have used their identities as a protective shield against encroaching Arab nationalism. The origins of most, if not all of these minorities outdate the modern creation of the nation-state, but as Nisan explains, "the dichotomy between state and nation" in the Middle East creates anomalies that it is ill-suited to address.[38]

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[35] Nisan, Mordechai. *Minorities in the Middle East: A History of Struggle and Self-Expression*. London: McFarland, 1991. 9.

[36] Ibid, 119.

[37] Schulze, Kirsten E., Martin Stokes, and Colm Campbell, eds. *Nationalism, Minorities and Diasporas: Identities and Rights in the Middle East*. London: I.B. Tauris, 1996. 11.

[38] Nisan, Mordechai. *Minorities in the Middle East: A History of Struggle and Self-Expression*. 9.

Therefore, minorities in the Middle East must use whatever means are at their disposal to survive – whether it is seizing power, securing resources for their community, or both – and that once they have done so, to do whatever they can to keep their grip. Two of these minorities that I have mentioned sporadically throughout this chapter, the Jews and the Maronite Christians, were particularly adept at doing just that. In fact, before they became bitterly hostile neighbors, Israeli Jews and Lebanese Maronite Christians had a long history of working together to preserve their own interests in their respective countries.

F. Bringing Two Minorities Together

As scholars of the Middle East are well aware, in this region the exception is often the rule, and this is particularly true for the historical alliance between Israeli Jews and Lebanese Maronite Christians, a relationship that is utterly inconceivable today. The Maronites, a Christian sect that had settled in the Mount Lebanon area since the sixth century and which had remained autonomous for most of its history, had been repeatedly threatened throughout history by waves of encroaching Muslim armies, Ottoman rulers, and finally, by French colonial powers. Jews, as I have mentioned in previous sections, had suffered a long history of persecution at the hands of both European Christian and Arab Muslim empires.

The Maronite-Israel partnership, therefore, was based in what both sides perceived as a shared history of communal struggle, the threat of domination by other groups (particularly Arab Muslims), and a sense cultural superiority amid the “backwards” Muslim masses. For Israel, this relationship was a way for it to assure its own national security; for

the Maronites, it was their last hope in preserving their political dominance in Lebanon. Both sides considered themselves different from, superior to, and threatened by the Arab Muslim majority that surrounded them – a mentality that would cause both of them to bite off more than they could chew. Their largely clandestine relationship, which lasted from the mid-nineteenth century until the late twentieth century, marks a watershed for minority affairs in the Middle East.

G. Conclusion

Christian and Jewish experiences as minorities in the Islamic and Ottoman empires – and the Jewish minority experience in European empires – are fundamental to their modern-day psyche. Their collective memory elicits a feeling of subjugation, exploitation, and sometimes persecution. Today in the Middle East, where might makes right and communal identities determine power, Christians and Jews have been determined to cling on to what power they have. These historical memories have played a significant role in the way Maronites and Jews reacted to later threats to their power in the twentieth century.

In the following chapter, I emphasize the ideological connections shared by the two communities by in my analysis of the evolution of Maronite identity and the rise of Zionism. In doing so, it will later become clear how and why it was impossible for either Maronites or Israelis to objectively and rationally determine whether an alliance was in their best interest.

CHAPTER 3

THE EVOLUTION OF MARONITE AND ZIONIST IDENTITY

In this chapter, I analyze Maronite and Zionist histories, with the goal being to see how their ideologies developed over time, what factors influenced them to become what they are today, and whether their historical experiences provided any rationale for a 'natural' relationship. I do not aim to provide a comprehensive history of either community, but rather a focused and narrow account of the critical points and figures that shaped Maronite and Zionist identities in history. For the Maronites, I trace their history from the seventh century when they first arrived in Mount Lebanon and encountered Arab Muslims for the first time. My account of Zionist history begins much later, in the nineteenth century – for while Jewish community and their concept of returning to an ancestral homeland have existed for thousands of years, the form of Zionism that helped shape modern-day Israel took root much later, in the late 1800s. This will set the stage for the next chapter, when I analyze the development of the Maronite-Zionist relationship from its inception to its demise.

A. Introduction

The historical experiences of the Maronite Christians and the Jewish Zionists played a major role in how they interacted with each other through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In this period of time, both communities exerted a great deal of effort to secure their right to politically dominate what they perceived to be their homeland. This

meant negotiating, arguing, and occasionally clashing with encroaching powers – for both the Maronites and the Zionists, these powers were the Arabs. However, maintaining their security and authority also meant seeking alliances with sympathetic powers. During the Mandate period, the British and the French were the most capable of these allies, but behind closed doors, the Maronites and the Zionists found between themselves what they thought was a unique cultural, spiritual, economic, and strategic bond. Armed with a sense of superiority and self-entitlement, Maronite and Zionist figures entertained lofty, romanticized narratives of an alliance that they hoped would result in both of them wielding absolute power over their territories.

However, as is often the case with absolutist ideologies and dogmatic tendencies, reality is generally ignored. In the end, neither the Maronites nor the Zionists (later, Israelis) lived up to each other's expectations as an unconditional or capable ally. Whether it was because of personal agendas, ignorance of political situations, or institutional obstacles, the Maronite-Israeli relationship that had been courted for nearly a century went down in flames in the latter half of the twentieth century. How did everything go so wrong, even when both sides were so sure that it would go right?

B. The Evolution of Maronite Identity

1. Maronite Origins and Early Encounters with Islam

The Maronite Christians are the largest and "most vociferous" Christian community in Lebanon.[39] Hailing from northern Syria after their split from the Melchite Church in 680 CE, the Maronites took refuge in the mountains of northern Lebanon at the end of the seventh century.[40] Their community was a closed one; identity revolved around family and kinship ties, and marriage outside of the community was not allowed. As a result, the mountain-dwelling Maronites remained relatively isolated from the outside world in their early days, though they did live alongside other religious communities (Druze, other Christian denominations, even a Shi'a minority) that also resided in the Mount Lebanon region.[41]

It was during this early period that Maronites deemed themselves the natives and defenders of Mount Lebanon, and with these titles they created a Lebanese identity that was essentially Christian and non-Arab. To this day, Maronites sharply and explicitly differentiate themselves from Arabs, whom they equate with Islam, but their roots are based in Semitic culture. Maronite liturgy, for example, was written exclusively in Syriac (a dialect of Aramaic), until it was largely replaced by Arabic in the fifteenth century.[42] Nevertheless, the early Maronite community was categorically opposed to being influenced – or worse, absorbed – by encroaching Muslim Arab armies.

In fact, Maronite resistance to Islamist Arabism is one of the central features of Maronite consciousness, and this has manifested itself on many occasions throughout their

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[39] Khashan, Hilal. "The Political Values of Lebanese Maronite College Students." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 34.4 (1990): 724.

[40] Traboulsi, Fawwaz. *A History of Modern Lebanon*. London: Pluto Press, 2007. 247.

[41] Ibid, 8.

[42] Nisan, Mordechai. Minorities in the Middle East: A History of Struggle and Self-Expression. London: McFarland, 1991. 196.

history. Beginning with their affiliation with the Maradites – a militant Christian Armaean group that actively and successfully rebelled against the Ummayyad and Abbasid caliphates – and their support for the Byzantine Empire, Maronites did little to win friends in the Muslim camp, and they often supported whoever was fighting them to prevent an Islamic takeover.[43] The Maronites were unwilling to be subjected to *dhimmi* status like Christians of other denominations in other regions of the Islamic empire, especially not in what they perceived to be their rightful land. When the crusaders swept through the Arab world to reclaim Christian access to Jerusalem in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the Maronites were the only community in the entire region to support the European Christian invaders against the Muslims.[44] Indeed, this support helped the Maronite community come into theological communion with the Catholic Church in Rome during the twelfth century, thus ending centuries of religious isolation and bringing the sect into the European sphere of influence.[45] At the same time, it intensified Muslim resentment and the Maronites were not spared from Muslim retribution when the Mamluks waged war against them shortly after the Crusades came to an end.[46]

The intensity with which the Maronite Christians resisted Muslim-Arab influence was matched only by their eagerness to embrace European influence. The Maronite connection to Christian Europe not only supported the notion that their community was culturally superior to their Muslim counterparts, but it also provided Maronites with

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[43] Phares, Walid. *Lebanese Christian Nationalism: The Rise and Fall of an Ethnic Resistance*. London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1995. 33.

[44] Khashan, Hilal. "The Political Values of Lebanese Maronite College Students." 724.

[45] Phares, Walid. *Lebanese Christian Nationalism: The Rise and Fall of an Ethnic Resistance*. 35.

[46] Khashan, Hilal. "The Political Values of Lebanese Maronite College Students." 724.

external support and protection and, later, domestic privilege. Under the Ottoman Empire, the Maronite Christians were able to "preserve their identity" and "consolidate their autonomy,"[47] though this was more a result of Western intervention and the empire's weakness than the Sultan's goodwill. In the late eighteenth century, the weakening Ottomans made several religious and political concessions to the French, who protected the Maronite community for a time.[48] However, as the overstretched empire began to decline in the nineteenth century, domestic conflicts and foreign interference increased. The relationship between the Christians and the Druze, for example, had vacillated between cooperation and conflict throughout their many centuries of coexistence, but when a twenty-year civil war between them reached its apex in 1860, the French militarily intervened to support the Maronites while the British stepped in to support the Druze.[49] This cemented French sponsorship for the Maronites – many of whom were already heavily influenced by French culture, which further distinguished them from the rest of the population – as well as French presence in Lebanon. Following the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire after World War I, France established an indefinite direct mandate in Lebanon in 1920 under the terms of the Sykes-Picot Agreement, which determined how the French and British would divvy up the Middle East between themselves after the war. Naturally, France claimed Mount Lebanon.

[47] Ibid, 725.

[48] Ibid.

[49] Hirst, David. *Beware of Small States: Lebanon, Battleground of the Middle East*. London: Faber & Faber, 2010. 9.

2. The French Mandate

The Sykes-Picot agreement and subsequent French mandate were back-handed victories for the Maronites, and left them with a false sense of communal security. While France may have 'saved' them from the threat of Muslim conquest under the Ottomans, it prevented them from achieving their ultimate goal: to establish an independent, Christian mini-state in Mount Lebanon. Even more troublesome, the French claimed the largely-Muslim territories that surrounded the Mount Lebanon province – including Beirut, Sidon, Tripoli, Tyre and the Bekaa Valley – and consolidated them all under a single state: Greater Lebanon. The new state forcibly conjoined the autonomous, mountain-dwelling Druze and Maronites with Muslims who were vehemently opposed to the French mandate and the concept of a Christian Lebanon – they preferred instead "an independent Arab state, and, short of that, to be annexed to Syria."[50] However, given that the Maronites were still the largest community in Lebanon, that they had France's full support, and the fact that they were relatively well-educated, prosperous, and "persuaded of the inherent superiority of their Westernized ways," they still believed that they could exert dominance over Greater Lebanon and assimilate its communities accordingly.[51]

Thus, when Lebanon was granted independence from France in 1943, leading Maronite figures exerted a great deal of energy to ensure that the Maronite Christian community would wield the most power in the country. They formally and informally sealed their aspirations for political dominance through the new Lebanese constitution and the National Pact, respectively. While the former guaranteed the Christians a 6:5 ratio

[50] Traboulsi, Fawwaz. *A History of Modern Lebanon*. London: Pluto Press, 2007. 80.

[51] Hirst, David. *Beware of Small States: Lebanon, Battleground of the Middle East*. 11.

majority in the Lebanese Parliament vis-à-vis their Muslim counterparts, the National Pact – an informal agreement made between two leading Christian and Sunni politicians in the 1940s – stipulated that the most powerful position, the presidency, was reserved for the Maronites, while the premiership was reserved for the Sunni Muslims (the Speaker of the House, a decidedly less influential position, was allotted to the Shi'ite Muslims). Given that the president wielded the most power in Lebanon, the Maronites had thus far succeeded in securing supremacy. During this time of power consolidation and nationalist fervor, right-wing Christian nationalist parties – most notably the Christian Phalange, or *Kata'ib* – began to organize and develop their own militias, ostensibly for the purpose of safeguarding the Lebanese state. Because Maronites were at the top of the political apparatus, however, these militias also served a second function: to preserve the Maronite Christian community's privileged political position.[52]

3. The Lebanese Civil War

All of the efforts to secure communal power came under heavy fire and intense scrutiny in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Not only had the Maronite community gradually become more fragmented in its vision of the Lebanese state, but the political position of Maronites in Lebanon was weakening.[53] Faced with growing discontent among the Muslim and Druze populations over the structure of Lebanon's political system, the Maronites

[52] Stoakes, Frank. "The Supervigilantes: The Lebanese Kataeb Party as a Builder, Surrogate and Defender of the State." *Middle Eastern Studies* 11.3 (1975): 224-5.

[53] Hagopian, Elaine C. "Maronite Hegemony to Maronite Militancy: The Creation and Disintegration of Lebanon." *Third World Quarterly* 11.4 (1989): 106.

feared that any negotiation about the political system would result in their losing power. This became both a physical and psychological security issue for their community.[54] The tense situation was only made worse when the bitter Palestinian refugee population – who lived in poverty-stricken camps scattered around Lebanon and had little access to work or education – began to organize their own militias, independent of the Lebanese state. This was particularly problematic in the tiny, sectarian country because most of the Palestinians were Sunni Muslims, and their presence tipped the scale in favor of the Lebanese Sunnis. Furthermore, the Palestinian Liberation Organization (or PLO) was quickly gaining military power and notoriety in Lebanon: it regularly clashed with the army, and their militant activities invited violent reprisals from neighboring Israel. For the Maronites, the Palestinian 'problem' was the last straw. While the Christians may have been supportive of the Palestinian cause, they were strongly opposed to their guerilla activity on Lebanese soil.[55]

When the shots of war rang out on April 13, 1975, thus beginning the fifteen-year Lebanese Civil War, everyone scrambled to take sides, usually along sectarian lines. An influential coalition of leftist parties, known as the Lebanese National Movement (LNM), espoused the abolition of the sectarian system from which the Maronites had benefited since the mandate era. Most notable among their leaders was the Druze politician, Kamal Jumblatt. The LNM flirted with the Palestinian cause, and the PLO – who leaned to the political left – was their temporary and fickle ally. On the other end of the spectrum was the Lebanese Front, a coalition of mainly-Christian, right wing parties that openly claimed

[54] El-Khazen, Farid. *The Breakdown of the State in Lebanon, 1967-1976*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2000. 247.

[55] Ibid, 149.

Lebanon as a Christian nation and called for Christian self-determination.[56] The Lebanese Front exemplified the Maronites' general tendency to revert to "isolationist" rhetoric when they feel that their survival is under serious threat; it would be a recurrent theme in Maronite Christian politics.[57]

No single factor caused the Lebanese Civil War; it was a conglomeration of internal and external factors that had gradually built up over decades, arguably centuries. It is not within the scope of this thesis to thoroughly examine all, or even most of these factors – many authors have documented the war elsewhere. However, what is important for this case is that, for the Maronites (and other communities), Lebanon's complex and multi-layered problems rendered it impossible for any one party, militia, or coalition to solve, or even sufficiently address Lebanon's ailments. Instead, all of the different parties – even those within the same religious community – created their own militias and pursued their own agendas to fill this vacuum. The fact that these same-sect parties and militias, especially the Maronite ones, regularly clashed with each other demonstrated the severe divisions that existed within the same religious community. The urgency of preserving communal solidarity resurfaced constantly in Maronite rhetoric throughout the war, but they never managed to create a unified, Maronite vision for the Lebanese state. How could a community manage to stay in power when it was too busy fighting itself?

Bashir Gemayel, son of the founder of the *Kata'ib* and commander of its military wing, the Lebanese Forces, is a prime example of one who tried to solve this problem. Gemayel advocated a united Lebanon (not an autonomous Maronite nation, like his

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[56] Phares, Walid. *Lebanese Christian Nationalism: The Rise and Fall of an Ethnic Resistance*. 105.

[57] Hagopian, Elaine C. "Maronite Hegemony to Maronite Militancy: The Creation and Disintegration of Lebanon." 107.

irredentist predecessors supported), but only one in which the Maronites were guaranteed a dominant role.[58] He sought to create a unified Christian resistance movement by eliminating all dissension, violently unifying Christian militias, and, most infamously, inviting Israel to intervene on his behalf. By eliminating his political rivals Gemayel sought to rally the Maronite community around its ethnic claims to Lebanon and to unite against its purported attackers – namely, the Palestinians, the LNM, and Arab nationalists.[59] He hoped to unify his fragmented sectarian community and preserve their power in the state. He would accomplish neither. Shortly after his ascension to the presidency in 1982, Bashir Gemayel was assassinated.

For the next eight years, other powerful Maronite Christian militia leaders – Elie Hobeiqa, Samir Geagea, Michel Aoun, and others – took turns fighting and killing each other in what became a war of attrition to "claim" the Maronite community for themselves and lead it to their own version of glory. The war, which had been operating under Christian vs. Muslim, sectarian vs. nonsectarian, or leftist vs. rightist dimensions, accumulated yet another level to the fighting: this time, it was between opposing views within the Maronite community over Lebanon's future. The near-daily clashes between the different Christian militias led to heavy losses. In fact, the Christians lost more fighters in this period among themselves than in their struggle against the Palestinians or the encroaching Syrians.[60]

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[58] Schulze, Kirsten E. *Israel's Covert Diplomacy in Lebanon*. Palgrave Macmillan, 1997. 88.

[59] Phares, Walid. *Lebanese Christian Nationalism: The Rise and Fall of an Ethnic Resistance*. 105.

[60] Ibid, 153.

4. Ta'if: The Offical Decline of the Maronites?

The Ta'if peace accords, which were signed in Ta'if, Saudi Arabia in October 1989, officially ended the war and revised the Lebanese political system. Unfortunately for the Maronites, this revision was not in their favor. Among other minor concessions, there were two prominent changes. One was the distribution of parliamentary seats, which was modified from the previous 6:5 ratio that favored the Christians, to a 1:1 ratio evenly distributed between Christians and Muslims. Secondly, presidential powers were decreased and those of the prime minister increased.[61] The Ta'if also emphasized the need to abolish the sectarian system in the future, but this has yet to take place.

However, while the Ta'if Agreement addressed some sectarian grievances, it was not universally accepted (especially among Maronites), and it did not stop the fighting. Samir Geagea, head of the Lebanese Forces militia, and General Michel Aoun of the Lebanese army – both Maronites – claimed to defend Lebanon and the Maronite community, denied the legitimacy of the other, and both sought recognition for being the leader of the Maronite cause. It was the precursor to one of the most devastating periods in Lebanese Maronite history. What began as a power struggle and war of words led to an all-out civil war in 1990 between Christian factions which resulted in high casualties on both sides, no victors, and official Syrian occupation. Shortly after the cessation of hostilities in October 1990, Geagea was imprisoned for fourteen years, and Aoun was exiled to France until 2005.

[61] Traboulsi, Fawwaz. *A History of Modern Lebanon*. 244-5.

Ultimately, the end of the Lebanese Civil War brought the exact type of political change to which the Maronite community was so adamantly opposed in the first place. One of the biggest developments from the war was that the Maronites lost their near-exclusive grip on power. Although the presidency is still reserved for the Maronites in accordance with the National Pact, executive and legislative powers are much more equitable with other religious communities than they were before the war. Furthermore, the Maronite community has become one of the most politically fragmented in Lebanon, and today's Christian parties are on opposing sides of Lebanon's political divide.[62]

Only a few hundred kilometers south of Beirut, another minority community had also spent the past century struggling for power and recognition. Just like the Maronites, the Zionist Jewish community also laid claim to an ancestral homeland and asserted its right to dominate the territory within. Now, I will turn to the development of political Zionism and trace how this movement has evolved from its European origins to its Israeli resting place.

C. Political Zionism and the Creation of the State of Israel

1. Foundational Concepts and Questions

In the twentieth century, the Jewish people were presented with an unprecedented opportunity: the possibility of forming their own state and building a Jewish society within. In its modern, nationalistic form, this phenomenon was known as political Zionism. But

[62] Here, I refer to the March 14 and March 8 coalitions.

while today's predominantly-secular form of Zionism was born in the late nineteenth century and culminated in the creation of the state of Israel in 1948, it is imperative to understand its cultural and religious origins, which stretch much farther back in time. Although it has enjoyed widespread popularity over the past century, Zionism is not a modern phenomenon by any means. In fact, the concept of returning to an ancestral Jewish homeland has existed for over two millennia and is deeply ingrained in Jewish religious tradition.[63]

However, since Judaism does not clearly distinguish between "religious, national, racial, or ethnic identities", Zionism is not necessarily a religious concept.[64] In other words, Jewish identity typically revolves around religion, but it also incorporates national, racial, and ethnic elements. Therefore, Zionism can be a religio-nationalist concept, but it can also be a political and secular one, and even a mix of all of these. This became incredibly important in the nineteenth century when Zionism was gaining popularity, since many of its secular spokesmen had to resort to religious rhetoric in order to gain a wider following.

Political Zionism – that is, the secular nationalist movement aimed at creating a sovereign state for the Jewish people – was world Jewry's political response to the growing tides of anti-Semitism in Europe and other parts of the world. Whereas Jewish messianic and rabbinic literature stipulates that *Eretz Israel* (Land of Israel) will be granted to Jews at some point in time determined by God,[65] political Zionism was more of a reactionary approach because it actively and arbitrarily sought the creation of a Jewish state (much to

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[63] Edelheit, Abfaham, and Hershel Edelheit. *History of Zionism: A Handbook and Dictionary.* Oxford: Westview Press, 2000. 3.

[64] Ibid.

[65] *Exodus 20:1-14*. *New King James Version of the Holy Bible*. Thomas Nelson, 2006.

the chagrin of some Orthodox Jews) after centuries of persecution in other societies. Political Zionists believed that without a territory of their own, the Jewish Diaspora communities were weak and would continue to be subjected to persecution wherever they lived because they were always a minority. Power resided in nationhood – but where?

2. Beginnings of a Jewish 'State': Foundations of Political Zionism

Zionist tendencies had always been part of the Jewish consciousness, but few believed that actually creating a state was practical, or even plausible – and even if it was, there was no consensus on where such a state would be formed. Mordechai Manual Noah, an American Jew who was one of the earliest political Zionists, even proposed northern New York State as a national territory.[66] Others proposed different areas of Europe. Rather than pondering such romantic ideas, many European Jews instead tried to assimilate with their fellow countrymen as a way of avoiding discrimination and persecution. They snubbed ardent Zionists like Jewish thinker Moses Hess, who compared the Jews rebuilding Israel with the Italians rebuilding their state on ancient Rome; such romanticism was met with strong skepticism from the Jewish community.[67] It was not until the violent pogroms of 1881 in Russia, and the anti-Jewish rioting in France resulting from the Dreyfus affair that many of these assimilationists, fearing for their lives and property, became intensely pro-Zionist.[68]

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[66] Edelheit, Abfaham, and Hershel Edelheit. *History of Zionism: A Handbook and Dictionary.* 23.

[67] Freedman, Robert O. *Contemporary Israel: Domestic Politics, Foreign Policy, and Security Challenges.* Boulder: Westview Press, 2009. 2.

Interestingly, though, the most influential, pro-Zionist Jews promoted mass Jewish emigration in the nineteenth century as a practical and economic solution to their problems – sentimental value and religious fulfillment were but secondary, if not tertiary. Peretz Smolenskin, a Russian Jewish intellectual and renounced assimilationist, was one of the first to propose that Jews immigrate to Palestine on the secular grounds that the sparsely-populated country could "support all those who might wish to take refuge there," and that migrating en masse would allow Jews to set up collective farms and support one another.[69] Theodor Herzl, an Austro-Hungarian Jewish journalist and pioneer of the political Zionist movement, argued that establishing a Jewish state would "result in the normalization of Jewish national existence, thereby eradicating the sources of anti-Semitism that are at the basis of the affliction of the Jews."[70] In his acclaimed book, *The Jewish State (Der Judenstaat)*, Herzl outlines his solution to the Jewish plight, denigrating any religious relevance and highlighting the practical and immediate necessity of a Jewish nation:

> To my mind, the Jewish question is neither a social nor a religious one, even though it may assume these and other guises. It is a national Question, and to solve it we must first of all establish it as an international political problem which will have to be settled by the civilized nations of the world in council.[71]

Herzl faced staunch opposition not only from the Ottoman Sultan from whom he requested a territorial grant in Palestine, but also from within his own Zionist camp. According to the members of Hibbat Tsiyon, a group of Zionist enthusiasts, Herzl's

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[68] Ibid.

[69] Engel, David. *Zionism*. Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2009. 30.

[70] Don-Yehiya, Eliezer. "Zionism in Retrospective." *Modern Judaism* 18.3 (1998): 268.

[71] Herzl, Theodor. *The Jewish State.* Dover Publications, 1989. 33.

approach was too direct – Jews did not need an independent state, but simply permission to settle in their native land.[72] Furthermore, while most leading Jewish thinkers of the time advocated 'secular nationalism and social reform,'[73] the romanticism of returning to a Jewish homeland and fostering a type of Jewish renaissance proved to be more popular for the masses. Creating a Jewish state would provide not just a *destination* for world Jewry, but rather a *return* to an ancestral homeland. Thus the idea of immigrating to Israel was religiously appealing to the wider Jewish community, because it was not only a safe haven for them, but also a means of religious fulfillment and a crucial part of the Jewish history continuum.[74] The Zionist community was obviously in a state of disunity over their identity and their game plan. Herzl's nationalistic ideas about a Jewish state were well-received in some circles, but he had to focus his rhetoric and efforts on Jewish re-settlement in Palestine, and tone down his nationalist rhetoric in order to gain a significant and dedicated following.[75] Such a following never manifested itself, as he died shortly afterward. Without Herzl or a unified vision, winning international support for establishing a Jewish state (or territory) in Palestine would be no easy task for the Zionist movement.

3. Zionism and the British Mandate of Palestine

[72] Engel, David. *Zionism*. 60.

[73] Taylor, Alan R. "Zionism and Jewish History." *Journal of Palestine Studies* 1.2 (1972): 39.

[74] Ibid, 35.

[75] Engel, David. *Zionism*. 30.

The fall of the Ottoman Empire after World War I transferred the control of Palestine from the Ottomans to the British. This greatly benefited the Zionist movement, since British Foreign Minister James Balfour had publicly endorsed the Zionist cause in 1917. His famous declaration of support is historically significant and should be quoted in its entirety:

> His Majesty's Government view with favor the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavors to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.[76]

With these words, Britain ambiguously and inadvertently threw its weight behind the creation of a Jewish state. The League of Nations followed suit, citing the "historical connection of the Jewish people with Palestine."[77] Riding the wave of post World War I nationalism and self-determination, the Zionist movement had achieved its goal of securing a territory specifically for the Jewish community. As a result, Zionist organization membership soared, and immigrants flocked to Palestine by the thousands.[78]

However, British support for the Zionist cause was not entirely based in good-will or, as was the case with some British political figures, religious zeal. At the time of the Balfour Declaration – three years before Britain was officially granted a mandate in Palestine, and one year before the end of World War I – the British used their domestic Jewish immigrant 'problem' as a way of gaining international support for a Jewish

[76] The Balfour Declaration, 1917.

[77] League of Nations. *The Mandate for Palestine*. July 24, 1922.

[78] Engel, David. *Zionism*. 30.

homeland elsewhere; at the same time, it also secured international support for Britain's exclusive right to establish a mandate in Palestine.[79] Thus, by the time World War I ended and Britain was fully in control of Palestine in 1922, the Jewish cause was practically irrelevant for them. Increasingly, the Zionists became more of a liability and less of a pet project.

This was not helped by the fact that the British Mandate in Palestine made irrevocable, conflicting promises to two conflicting populations: namely, the Jews and the Palestinian Arabs. In the Mandate document, Britain promised the Jews that they would help facilitate Jewish immigration to Palestine, while in the White Paper of 1939, Britain promised the Arabs – fearful of becoming minorities in their home country amid a skyrocketing Jewish population – that they would severely limit Jewish immigration to Palestine.[80] Not only did these incompatible promises reinforce a hostile relationship between Palestinian Arabs and Jews from which they have yet to recover, but the White Paper is arguably responsible for the deaths of the millions of European Jews who were prohibited from immigrating to Palestine and subsequently perished in the Holocaust.[81] Both of these repercussions are still front and center in both modern Zionist thought and Israeli policy.

In fact, the consequences of indecisive British policy played a major role in forming the Zionist political right, a movement whose base was comprised of Revisionist Zionists. Revisionist Zionism was a secular movement led by Ze'ev (Vladimir) Jabotinsky, who

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[79] Edelheit, Abfaham, and Hershel Edelheit. *History of Zionism: A Handbook and Dictionary.* 78.

[80] Freedman, Robert O. *Contemporary Israel: Domestic Politics, Foreign Policy, and Security Challenges.* 4.

[81] Ibid.

wanted to "revise" Chaim Weizmann and David Ben Gurion's strategy of only seeking an independent Jewish settlement in Palestine. Jabotinsky not only demanded the immediate establishment of a politically sovereign Jewish state, but he also sought to maximize Jewish territory to include all of Transjordan, which was also under British control at the time. While the majority of Zionists were willing to negotiate with Arabs on the specifics of Jewish settlement in Palestine, Jabotinsky rejected these negotiations outright and accepted nothing less than the exclusive right of Jews to own land on both sides of the Jordan River. The Revisionist party was opposed to the accommodationalist and socialist policies of Mapai (later, the Labor Party), for they believed that these policies would never bring about social or political change.[82] Instead, Revisionists advocated capitalism, tougher responses to Arab hostilities, and maximalism of Jewish territory in Palestine. As a precursor to the right-wing Herut and Likud parties, which were instrumental in Israeli foreign policy, the Revisionist Party – and Revisionist Zionism in general – had a major impact on the Zionist consciousness and how the Israeli state would interact with both the Lebanese and the Palestinians in the years following Israeli independence, as well as how the state would interact with both of them during the Lebanese Civil War.

4. The Creation of the State of Israel

World War II bore both grave consequences and promising opportunities for the Zionist community. The tragic mass extermination of six million Jews under Hitler's Third

[82] Kaplan, Eran. *The Jewish Radical Right: Revisionist Zionism and Its Ideological Legacy*. Madison: University of Wisconsin, 2005. 19.

Reich from the late 1930s through the 1940s was a harrowing experience that the wider Jewish community around the world would never forget; at the same time, the war was also a major factor in creating an independent Jewish state.[83] Exhausted and in massive debt from the war, Britain was eventually pressured into relinquishing their Palestinian Mandate in 1947, and the United Nations subsequently approved a Jewish-Arab federation. The Jews in Palestine accepted the federation plan, as this essentially gave them the independent state that they had been seeking for so long. The Palestinian Arabs, on the other hand, categorically rejected the UN resolution. Neighboring Arab countries were equally enraged, stating that such a resolution infringed on the established sovereignty of the Palestinians. Thus, when the state of Israel declared its independence on May 15, 1948, the Palestinians and their neighboring Arab brethren declared war on the newborn country.

The establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 was a momentous achievement for the Zionist cause, but it was not the end of the Zionist struggle. The first Arab-Israeli War of 1948 – known as the "War of Independence" to Israelis and as "The Catastrophe" to Arabs – was the first time that Israeli military might was put to the test as five Arab countries (Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Transjordan, and Syria) simultaneously invaded the newly created state of Israel to aid the Palestinians in battle. By the time fighting ceased in January 1949, the Israelis were not only victorious; they also possessed 20% more land than they had when the war began, in addition to occupying the Sinai Peninsula.[84] As a result of this war, Zionists – and particularly Jabotinsky – underlined the urgency with which the new Jewish state must train, arm, and discipline its citizenry if it was to survive

[83] Taylor, Alan R. "Zionism and Jewish History." 46.

[84] Engel, David. *Zionism*. 132.

in such a hostile environment. Israel needed manpower, and it relied on the massive waves of immigrants to help meet this goal. Both men and women were conscripted into the armed forces, where they were educated not only in military tactics, but they also received a general education. Indeed, the military became the largest educational institution in Israel at the time, and contributed greatly to a feeling of unity among Israelis.[85] Considering the fact that so many new Israelis came from all different corners of the world, unity was key.

Efforts to expand, train, and unify the Israeli army paid off immensely. From the Arab-Israeli War of 1948 until its 1982 occupation in Lebanon, Israel had gone to war with its neighbors four times and claimed four victories.[86] However, being in a constant state of tense and unpredictable conflict – both internally and externally – has certainly taken its toll on the Israeli psyche. In tracing the events and personalities that have influenced Israeli politics throughout the latter half of the twentieth century, the roots of radical, right-wing Zionism begin to show.

5. The Rise of the Israeli Right

The Six Day War was arguably what caused the radicalization of the Israeli right wing and its ascendancy in Israeli politics and society. Following the 1956 Suez War, Israel and Egypt maintained a tense (though often violated) truce after Egyptian President Gamal Abdul Nasser promised to reverse his plans to nationalize the Suez Canal. When Nasser

[85] Ibid, 141.

[86] Here I refer to the 1956 Suez War, the Six Day War (1967), the War of Attrition (1967-1970) and the Yom Kippur War (1973). Both sides declared victory in the War of Attrition, though Israel did maintain a military presence in the Sinai Peninsula.

received false Soviet intelligence that Israel was planning an attack, he barred Israeli ships from using the canal, and Israel perceived this as an act of war. Hostilities skyrocketed when Cairo Radio announced that 'the Arab people is firmly resolved to wipe Israel off the face of the Earth'; at this point, it became clear to Israeli politicians and Israeli society that the Arab world was not interested in coexistence or negotiation, and that the survival of their country was at stake.[87] Jews from Israel and throughout the Diaspora rallied to provide "money, supplies, and blood" to the war effort at unprecedented levels. Even after the war was over, immigration to Israel spiked, and both Zionist and non-Zionist organizations worldwide made Israel and its national security the focus of their agendas.[88] The voiced determination of Nasser and other Arab countries to destroy Israel resonated deeply with world Jewry, and marked a major and permanent shift in the Jewish psyche.

After the swift and decisive Israeli military victory over its Arab neighbors in the Six Day War and amid continued conflict with Palestinian Arabs within Israel, subsequent administrations in the Israeli government through the present day have thrived on maintaining a 'crisis image' to help fuel right-wing Zionist movements within both Israel and the Jewish Diaspora communities.[89] Israeli politics were sliding farther and farther to the right, and this political tendency culminated with the election of Menachem Begin of the right-wing Likud Party as Prime Minister from 1977-1983. Begin, a former Herut party

[87] Tessler, Mark. *A History of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994. 393.

[88] Engel, David. *Zionism.* 160.

[89] Taylor, Alan R. "Zionism and Jewish History." 51.

member who has often been described as a neo-Revisionist,[90] capitalized on ideology and maximalism in Israeli politics and territory. Whereas the Labor Party – a pragmatist-leftist party that had dominated the Knesset for the past half-century – was willing to work with and negotiate with the Palestinians living in Gaza and the West Bank to achieve a more peaceful coexistence, the Likud's party slogan ("Not an inch!") demonstrated that the party would not take a similar approach.[91] Although the first period of Begin's rule could be described as relatively moderate – he agreed to withdraw Israeli troops from the Sinai and recognized the Palestinians as having 'legitimate rights' at the Camp David accords – the second period was atrociously radical. Not only did he renege on the concessions he made to Palestinians (and there were not many), but he ordered a direct invasion of Lebanon, twice, to stifle Palestinian activity there and to reassert Israel's dominance in the Middle East.

Amid public demonstrations against Begin and the disastrous results of Israel's Lebanon War, Begin resigned as Prime Minister in 1983, but this was not the end of the Likud party's dominance in Israeli politics and policy. They staunchly opposed the Oslo Accords of 1993, signed by Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin of the Labor Party, which formally recognized the Palestinians as a community and made concessions for their control over the Gaza and West Bank territories. Likud Party leader Benjamin Netanyahu made considerable effort to reverse the progress made at Oslo, and under his premiership from 1996-1999, territorial expansion continued and hostilities with Palestinians grew

[90] Sprinzak, Ehud. "The Emergence of the Israeli Radical Right." *Comparative Politics* 21.2 (1989): 172.

[91] Peleg, Ilan. "The Israeli Right." *Contemporary Israel: Domestic Politics, Foreign Policy, and Security Challenges*. Westview Press: Boulder, 2009. 26.

worse. However, just like Begin, Netanyahu was forced to resign early because his policies were unrealistic and mired in an ideology that was not compatible with most of the Israeli public, external powers (particularly the US), or even with the Israeli government.[92] While the Likud party was in opposition following the collapse of Netanyahu's government, Ariel Sharon was chosen as the party's leader. Sharon was a hawkish politician who enthusiastically supported settlement expansion and, as Minister of Defense in Begin's government, prepared and authorized the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) for war with Leabnon in 1982. Nearly two decades had passed since Begin's resignation due to his erratic policies, yet some of his closest men still dominated the party. In fact, even today, Netanyahu has returned as Israeli Prime Minister, and the Likud party is back again.

This short summary of Israeli political history in post-independence Israel is not by any means comprehensive; Israeli and Jewish society is incredibly fragmented and hardly divisible between Left and Right, so trying to portray Zionism/Israeli nationalism in a collective or even chronological manner is impossible. For the sake of relevance and clarity, many events and personalities were omitted (particularly as they relate to the Labor Party) because it was under the right-wing parties that relations with Maronite Christians later blossomed in the 1970s and 1980s. What I sought to highlight was the sudden ascendancy of the Israeli right to political power, the main elements of its ideology, and how this ideology has affected Israeli interactions with domestic and foreign actors.

D. Conclusion

[92] Ibid, 31.

From these summarized histories of the Maronite and Zionist experiences, one can initially assume that both had common identities, enemies, and aspirations. Both of these communities felt threatened by Arabs, particularly the Palestinian and pan-Arabist kind who were directly opposed to both Maronite and Jewish political supremacy. Additionally, both had strong ties with Europe and the West, which instilled them with a sense of social superiority over their Arab counterparts. While no formal minority alliance policy was ever actually established, Zionist (later, Israeli) politicians and Maronite figureheads saw their unique positions as Middle Eastern minorities as a binding element between them. They hoped that, together, they could overcome Arab hostilities. By the late twentieth century, both parties would be very disappointed.

In the next chapter, I analyze the same period through the eyes of the Maronite-Israeli relationship: when it began, how it took root, who supported it, who opposed it, and how the nationalisms and strategic interests that I have described here played a major role in the transition from an implicit relationship to an explicit alliance.

CHAPTER 4

MARONITISM MEETS ZIONISM: LINKING PRE-STATE AND POST-STATE RELATIONS

In this chapter, I review the history of the Maronite-Jewish relationship from its meager beginnings in 1860 until its culmination in 1982, and a brief synopsis of its deterioration following the death of Bashir Gemayel. In doing so, I will demonstrate how the relationship originated and under what circumstances it perpetuated itself over the course of over a century.

A. Introduction

The historical and informal alliance between Israel and the Maronite Christians of Lebanon is neither a secret nor a surprise. The Jewish and the Maronite Christian communities have a long and precarious history of covert communication and assistance. Indeed, the memoirs of many early, influential Zionist political figures reflect what Laurie Eisenberg calls a "prophetic" demeanor towards Lebanon and the prospect of Jewish (and later, Israeli) influence on Lebanese political affairs.[93] At the same time, Maronite Christians found themselves unable to resist the benefits of Israeli entrepreneurship, investment, and tourism – and later, military intervention – in Lebanon. When these attitudes are juxtaposed with Israeli actions in Lebanon leading up to the 1982 invasion,

[93] Eisenberg, Laurie. "History Revisited or Revamped?: The Maronite Factor in Israel's 1982 Invasion of Lebanon." *Israel Affairs* 15.4 (2009): 372.

questions about the intentions, assumptions, and expectations of both the Maronites and Israelis regarding this relationship come to the surface.

The relationship between the Maronite community and Israel was largely clandestine until the mid-1970s, but early contacts between the two were founded as early as the 1860s when the Maronite Christians were mired in civil war with their Druze counterparts in Mount Lebanon. Later, and especially during the French Mandate period beginning in 1920, Maronite and Jewish communities faced similar challenges to their existence. The Maronites felt collectively threatened by growing Islamic influence and the currents of Arab nationalism in what they perceived to be their homeland.[94] On the other hand, the Yishuv – the body of Jews who resided in Palestine before the creation of Israel in 1948 – became increasingly isolated from their Muslim counterparts and also felt threatened by their hostile Arab neighbors. When the Maronite clergy secretly approached the Jewish Agency in the 1920s and proposed the idea of an informal alliance, the nascent Zionist community in Palestine – particularly future president David Ben-Gurion, who viewed this relationship as 'natural' – was all ears.[95]

B. Pre-State Relations (1919-1948)

Many authors who write about this tedious relationship often place the origins of Jewish-Maronite interactions around 1920. While this period was certainly a significant one

[94] Schulze, Kirsten E. "Israeli and Maronite Nationalisms: Is a Minority Alliance Natural? *Nationalism, Minorities, and Diasporas: Identities and Rights in the Middle East*. London: I.B. Tauris, 1996. 162.

[95] Ibid, 163.

for their relationship and marked the first time an alliance was officially proposed (by a Maronite clergyman), it would be misleading to say that this was the first time that both sides interacted with each other. Interestingly, the antecedent to the Jewish-Maronite relationship emerged in 1860, when two wealthy European Jews – Sir Moses Montefiore of England and Adolphe Cremieux of France – extended a helping hand to the Maronites, who were losing a bloody civil war with the Druze and whose pleas for help were falling on deaf, Ottoman ears.[96] Montefiore used his wealth and influence to give the Maronites coverage in the London *Times* and to establish a fund for supporting the survivors. Cremieux, a French statesman, used his political clout to send French troops to intervene on behalf of the Maronites, a successful maneuver that resulted in the Maronites winning control of the Mount Lebanon province.[97] Granted, both Montefiore and Cremieux were acting on behalf of Britain and France – and not under any explicit Zionist banner – but their affinity for a vulnerable Christian population combined with their philanthrophic ventures that supported minority Jewish establishments in Palestine suggested that Maronite and proto-Zionist interests could have something in common. Perhaps even more importantly, Montefiore and Cremieux's humanitarian aid was not lost on Maronite patriarchs, who lauded them and the local Jewish community for their efforts. It was here that the seeds of pro-Zionism were planted within the Maronite Patriarchate and, subsequently, the Maronite community in general.

[96] Zittrain-Eisenberg, Laura. *My Enemy's Enemy: Lebanon in the Early Zionist Imagination, 1900 1948*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1994. 51.

[97] Ibid.

1. Zionists in the Maronite Perspective

The Maronite clergy was perhaps the biggest proponent of a Maronite-Jewish alliance, especially Maronite Patriarch Antoine Arida and the Archbishop of Beirut, Ignatius Mubarak. Even before the Mandate era, Patriarch Arida called for the "creation of a Christian state in Lebanon and a Jewish national home in Palestine."[98] Using Cremieux and Montefiore as historical precedents of Jewish humanitarianism towards Maronites and proof that Jews and Christians were natural allies, Arida strongly supported the idea of a solid Maronite-Jewish relationship.[99] Furthermore, Arida considered Palestinian Jews to be a practical regional ally against a growing Muslim threat. He was gravely concerned about the fate of Christians at the hands of a Muslim-dominated Lebanon, and he warned that the Jews may suffer the same fate. Ignatius Mubarak, for his part, shared Arida's convictions, but he was even more outspoken in his support for a Jewish state. Like the Patriarch, Mubarak saw Christians and Jews as Westernized people, superior to the Arab world and more civilized.[100] Because the Maronite clergy had traditionally wielded enormous influence in the daily lives of its congregation, both Arida and Mubarak used their status to win popular support for the Jewish cause. By 1946, optimism about the benefits of this relationship was high enough that the Maronite Church signed a secret pact with the Yishuv "on the basis of mutual recognition of rights and national desire."[101]

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[98] Khashan, Hilal. "The Evolution of Israeli-Lebanese Relations: From Implicit Peace to Explicit Conflict." *Israel Affairs* 15.4 (2009): 321.

[99] Zittrain-Eisenberg, Laura. *My Enemy's Enemy: Lebanon in the Early Zionist Imagination, 1900-1948*. 52.

[100] Ibid, 63.

[101] Zisser, Eyal. "The Maronites, Lebanon and the State of Israel: Early Contacts." *Middle Eastern Studies* 31.4 (1995): 898.

Maronite politicians also supported the Zionist cause, albeit on a much less explicit level. Emile Eddé – parliament member and President of Lebanon from 1936 to 1941 – also reacted to what he saw as a Muslim threat. Having been raised in Europe, away from the political realities and compromises of a confessionalist Lebanon, he viewed pan-Arabism as a front for Muslim domination and Zionism as an ally in the struggle to resist it.[102] Just like Patriarch Arida and Archbishop Mubarak, Eddé viewed Christians and Jews as cultured, Westernized peoples who were responsible for guiding the rest of the population.

Furthermore, Jewish tourism and entrepreneurship in Lebanon contributed greatly to the Lebanese economy, prompting even suspicious Christians to implicitly accept a growing Jewish presence next door and within Lebanon.[103] Lebanon's porous southern border witnessed a constant flow of Lebanese and Palestinian Jews moving back and forth, enjoying each other's beaches, hotels, and restaurants. Many Jews even purchased homes and land in Lebanon for recreational, agricultural, or commercial purposes; the Lebanese (and not just the Maronites) actively sought Jewish capital.[104] In addition to the demographic incentives of a significant Jewish population in Lebanon (which they thought would help balance the demographic scale vis-à-vis Muslims), the Maronites also believed that Jewish entrepreneurship would solve Lebanon's economic stagnation and give it an advantage over Palestine's booming economy.[105]

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[102] Zittrain-Eisenberg, Laura. *My Enemy's Enemy: Lebanon in the Early Zionist Imagination, 1900-1948*. 63.

[103] Hirst, David. *Beware of Small States: Lebanon, Battleground of the Middle East*. 31.

[104] Ibid, 32.

[105] Zittrain-Eisenberg, Laura. *My Enemy's Enemy: Lebanon in the Early Zionist Imagination, 1900-1948*. 78.

However, the Maronite community was in no way unified; opinion was split on just about everything, and this was especially true for the way in which Maronites perceived the Jews. While the Maronite clergy and some political figures and activists were overwhelmingly receptive to an alliance with the Yishuv, not all Maronites saw this as a wise or practical decision. Prominent Maronite politicians, such as future President Bishara al-Khoury, opposed this relationship because they saw the Zionists as a liability rather than an opportunity – the Maronites' fragile relationship with their Arab counterparts was the key to securing their own power, and adding a Zionist element to the equation would have been a disastrous move. Even Christians from other denominations were opposed: George Antonius, who had frequent dealings with Ben-Gurion and other Zionist leaders, said that "not a single step had been taken by the Jews that gave the Arabs the impression that Jews were interested in their goodwill,"[106] which certainly did not bode well with the Christians who favored an alliance with Arabs. Not to mention, France – who still had a Mandate in Lebanon at the time – categorically rejected any kind of formal treaty or relations with Palestinian Jews, who were still struggling for their own independence under the British Mandate. Thus, even if the Maronite community unanimously supported a Maronite-Jewish alliance, which it certainly did not, they were still under the limits of a Mandate.

Therefore, as would repeatedly be the case especially after independence, the Maronites could not follow through on their promises of support and alliance. Politicians did not enjoy the immunity that the clergy possessed, since openly declaring support for the Yishuv or a Maronite-Jewish alliance would have been political suicide. Still, the clergy was no better at responding to pressure, as they reneged on their 1946 secret pact with the

[106] Ben-Gurion, David. *My Talks with Arab Leaders*. New York: The Third Press, 1973. 43.

Yishuv when its contents were leaked to the public.[107] Whether it was because of internal or external powers, the pro-Zionist Maronites could only pay lip service to the Jews as their own situation became increasingly tense as Lebanon moved toward independence. What both groups tended to overlook was the fact that the Maronites were not monolithic; indeed, their fragmentation and internal quarrels were significant factors in why formal alliance could not be forged. The Zionists, too, were torn on this issue.

2. Maronites in the Zionist Perspective

The Jews who immigrated to Palestine in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were essentially strangers in a strange land. They came from many different countries across Europe with no connections to Israel except their common Jewish heritage, and relatively little understanding of the local culture and subcultures. The socialist policies of early Jewish administrations advocated collective immigration and collective farms as a way of fostering a sense of community among the highly-varied Jewish populations. At the same time that Jewish community organizers were making efforts to create strong social bonds among themselves, their political leaders were working to create friendships in the region.

Establishing relationships with other communities was a tedious and complicated task. The Yishuv was faced with an Arab population that was, at best, suspiciously wary of their growing numbers. In his memoirs, David Ben-Gurion emphasized that "it [was]

[107] Eisenberg, Laurie. "History Revisited or Revamped?: The Maronite Factor in Israel's 1982 Invasion of Lebanon." *Conflict, Diplomacy and Society in Israeli-Lebanese Relations*. New York: Taylor and Francis, 2010. 56.

neither desirable nor conceivable that the present inhabitants be ousted from the land,"[108] but to the Palestinians faced with the possibility of becoming a minority in their homeland, this was not persuasive enough. Zionist politicians did attempt to make some headway with Arab leaders regarding Jewish-Arab coexistence in the area, but nothing lasted long. The Faisal-Weizmann Agreement of 1919, for example, was the most promising attempt at fostering good Jewish-Arab Muslim relations, but due to internal and external pressure on the Arab king, the agreement only lasted a few months.[109] As the prospects of a Jewish-Arab relationship grew dim and hostilities between Palestinian Arabs and Jews increased, the Yishuv looked to other communities in the region as potential allies in order to avoid regional isolation. It was in the Maronite community of Lebanon that they found the most eager candidates for an alliance.

Initially, the Maronite community seemed like a wise ally because they appeared to share common political, economic, and cultural interests. According to their contacts within the community, the Maronites also faced a growing Muslim threat, especially after the French Mandate incorporated majority-Muslim provinces within Greater Lebanon. Both the Maronites and Palestinian Jews, perhaps harkening back to their days as *dhimmi*, feared being subjugated by Muslim Arabs, especially in what they believed was their homeland. With the help of the French, the Maronites took considerable care to ensure their political supremacy. The Zionists, and especially future Prime Minister David Ben Gurion, were just

[108] Ben-Gurion, David. *My Talks with Arab Leaders*. 7.

[109] Schulze, Kirsten E. *Israel's Covert Diplomacy in Lebanon*. Palgrave Macmillan, 1997. 14

as eager to live next to the only Christian state in the Arab world as the Maronites were to create it.[110]

Furthermore, the Maronites' western connection with French culture paralleled European Jewry's self-image as being more civilized, sophisticated, and advanced than their Arab Muslim counterparts. Both communities depended on their European connections for financial and military support (especially during the Mandate era), and they used these connections as justification for their superiority.[111] The Zionists explicitly shared this view of the Maronites, as one local newspaper stated that "Lebanon…has a not unimportant role to play in this part of the world, forming, like the Jews in Palestine, a link between the West and the Orient."[112] Thus, their European connections not only made them culturally superior, but they also shared the responsibility of maintaining that link between East and West.

The 1930s were a tumultuous time for Jews living in Palestine, as Palestinian Arab opposition to the Jews' presence grew stronger and more violent, which in turn negatively affected the Lebanese Muslim population's perception of Jews. It was during this period of increasing isolation that relations with the Maronites – heretofore an idea that was entertained, but never initiated – took on greater importance. David Ben Gurion, head of the World Zionist Organization and later the first Prime Minister of Israel, favored a relationship with the Maronites quite intensely, and for several reasons. First, he shared the

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[110] Schulze, Kirsten E. "Israeli and Maronite Nationalisms: Is a Minority Alliance Natural? *Nationalism, Minorities, and Diasporas: Identities and Rights in the Middle East*. London: I.B. Tauris, 1996. 163.

[111] Ibid.

[112] *Palestine Review*, 16 October 1936.

view that the two communities were, in some way, spiritually and culturally connected. Second, since relations with Arabs were unlikely, he felt that having any ally in the region was a plus. Third, having a joint border with a Christian nation would be economically beneficial, and Ben Gurion was particularly keen on getting access to Lebanon's water resources in the south.[113] In fact, Ben Gurion was so convinced that a Maronite alliance was in the Zionist interest that, after Lebanon's independence, he went so far as to suggest instigating a military coup in Lebanon that would put a Christian regime in power in order to ensure that such an alliance would survive.[114]

Other Zionist statesmen also favored an alliance with the Maronites, though with less vigor than Ben Gurion and for more strategic reasons. Eliahu Epstein – a student, journalist, and member of the Jewish Agency – also supported the idea that minority alliances would help to bring the Yishuv out of regional isolation, but his main focus was gathering information. By keeping relations cordial with Lebanon and friendly with the Maronites, the Yishuv could better keep track of Arab activity in the country.[115] Eliahu Sasson and Reuven Zaslani, also members of the Jewish Agency, expressed similar feelings. It was through their efforts that the Jewish Agency was able to establish frequent contact with Maronite clergy and political circles, as well as keep an eye on pan-Arabists and the Lebanese political climate.

Of course, there were the non-interventionist Zionists who were either suspicious of such a venture. While they appreciated any support they could get, they realized that the

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[113] Zittrain-Eisenberg, Laura. *My Enemy's Enemy: Lebanon in the Early Zionist Imagination, 1900-1948*. 41.

[114] Zisser, Eyal. "The Maronites, Lebanon and the State of Israel: Early Contacts." 913.

[115] Schulze, Kirsten E. *Israel's Covert Diplomacy in Lebanon*. Palgrave Macmillan, 1997. 17

fragile sectarian balance in Lebanon could not withstand such a controversial element. They believed that, if any kind of Maronite-Jewish relationship were to become formal or too publicized, then the Muslims would irrevocably turn against the Maronites or, in the case of the Yishuv, against the Jews.[116] Either case would have been a disaster. Moshe Sharett, Secretary of the Jewish Agency's Political Department, categorically rejected David Ben Gurion's suggestion of forcibly creating a Christian government in Lebanon; not only did the Zionist movement lack the resources for military or diplomatic intervention, but the negative repercussions in both Lebanon and Palestine (and later, Israel) would have been too much to bear.[117]

Like the Maronites, the Yishuv also lacked a general consensus on an alliance, and for many of the same reasons: like Ben Gurion said, the cultural and spiritual connectedness of the Maronite and Jewish communities was a rare gift in the Middle East, and the Zionists were both shocked and pleased to find such moral support in a place where they were generally unwelcome; they, too, perceived this amicable relationship as an opportunity to unite against the numerically superior Muslims. They were specifically interested in the strategic and economic benefits of having connections in Lebanon, which were particularly tempting even for the cautious types. However, establishing a relationship did have its consequences, as Moshe Sharett emphasized. Being too overtly friendly with the Maronites could prevent the Zionists from establishing relationships with Arabs or

[116] Hirst, David. *Beware of Small States: Lebanon, Battleground of the Middle East*. 27.

[117] Zisser, Eyal. "The Maronites, Lebanon and the State of Israel: Early Contacts." 913.

other communities down the road, and too strong a relationship could actually turn the Muslims against the Maronites in a sectarian country like Lebanon.[118]

At the same time, the Zionists and Maronites did not want to completely ignore a potential alliance, so interactions between the two were limited to "tendencies, exploratory probings, and personal relationships."[119] The Yishuv never established a systematic policy for minority relations, and the Maronites were not at political liberties to create one. For better or for worse, this lack of an official or systematic policy would come to characterize the relationship between the Maronites and the Zionists for the rest of its existence, and would have dire consequences in the latter half of the twentieth century.

C. Post-State Relations (1948-)

The establishment of the Jewish state of Israel in 1948 immediately resulted in the first Arab-Israeli War, pitting the fledgling state against a coalition of Arab League and Palestinian armies. Among these anti-Israeli forces was Lebanon, then only independent for five years and officially espousing an anti-Israeli stance. However, its restrained participation in the war signaled to some Israeli officials that Lebanon had far less animosity towards the Jewish state than the other Arab participants. Its limited action against Israel may have been due to its small army, but Laurie Eisenberg speculates that Lebanon had no intentions of claiming Israeli territory or trying to eradicate the Jewish state. Because most Lebanese military operations took place within Lebanon's borders, she

[118] Zittrain-Eisenberg, Laura. *My Enemy's Enemy: Lebanon in the Early Zionist Imagination, 1900 1948*. 26.

[119] Hirst, David. *Beware of Small States: Lebanon, Battleground of the Middle East*. 27.

argues, it seemed that Lebanon only wanted to prevent large numbers of Palestinian refugees from pouring into the south, something the Israelis seemed to be encouraging.[120] Meanwhile, many Maronite families provided refuge for Lebanese Jews and contacts between Israeli officials and Lebanese individuals continued.

Israel claimed victory in 1949, having defeated all of its Arab antagonists and expanding its territory beyond its initial borders under the 1947 UN Partition plan. Arab regimes subsequently refused to acknowledge Israel's existence, imposed a "strict policy of avoidance" with the state, and adopted a "culture of resentment and confrontation" towards it.[121] Despite, or perhaps, because of widespread anti-Jewish and anti-Israeli sentiment in the Middle East, the Israeli government maintained its ambiguous relationship with Maronite individuals in Lebanon. In fact, after the war was over, an official Israel-Lebanon Mixed Armistice Commission (ILMAC) was formed where both sides coordinated landmine removal on both sides of the border, returning stolen livestock and allowing stray teenagers to return home on the other side.[122] The ILMAC operated smoothly until it was severed during the 1967 war.

Meanwhile, informal relations between the Maronite community and Israel continued, and especially during politically chaotic years of the 1950s, and during election periods. The Phalange, a Maronite political party established by Pierre Gemayel in the 1930s, sought Israel's help in the upcoming general elections in 1951 – though, as Khashan

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[120] Eisenberg, Laurie. "History Revisited or Revamped?: The Maronite Factor in Israel's 1982 Invasion of Lebanon." 57.

[121] Khashan, Hilal. "The Evolution of Israeli-Lebanese Relations: From Implicit Peace to Explicit Conflict." *Israel Affairs* 15.4 (2009): 322.

[122] Eisenberg, Laurie. "History Revisited or Revamped?: The Maronite Factor in Israel's 1982 Invasion of Lebanon." 58.

explains, Gemayel was personally agonized by seeking Israeli help.[123] Israel's foreign ministry debated the issue heavily, but Israeli ventures with the Maronites had yet to produce any promising results for either side, so Israel donated only a negligible sum to the Phalange.[124] The Maronites again secretively requested Israeli assistance – this time, both financial and military aid – during Lebanon's 1958 Civil War in order to stave off the pan-Arabist challenge to Camille Chamoun's presidency. Israel's contributions to the Maronites, however, were insignificant.[125] The tendency of both sides to speak highly of each other but offer little tangible assistance continued well into the 1960s and early 1970s.

On the state level, however, Lebanon's relationship with Israel went from tense coexistence to explicit conflict. Despite what was happening at the informal level, Lebanon's official position of opposition towards Israel and its support for the Palestinians in the Arab-Israeli conflict has not changed since 1948. Israel had hoped that Lebanon would at least be a passive neighbor due to the lukewarm ties it maintained with individuals within the Maronite community, but when Lebanese Prime Minister Rashid Karame declared Lebanon's solidarity with Egypt, Syria, and Jordan, it became painfully obvious that Lebanon would be a confrontation state. Faced with worsening diplomatic relations – or, perhaps more accurately, a complete lack of diplomatic relations – with a country that was inching closer and closer to sectarian war, and an increasingly agitated Palestinian community along Lebanon's southern border, Israel geared itself for conflict.

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[123] Khashan, Hilal. "The Evolution of Israeli-Lebanese Relations: From Implicit Peace to Explicit Conflict." 322.

[124] Ibid.

[125] Ibid.

1. The Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990)

The Lebanese Civil War, which was briefly documented earlier in this chapter, represented the high-water mark for Maronite-Israeli relations. After nearly a century of lip service, their relationship was finally put to the test and brought out into the open. Unfortunately, though perhaps not surprisingly, the Maronites and Israelis found it incredibly difficult to reconcile their interests and objectives. It would be the last time that such an alliance would surface.

With Lebanon's incredibly fragile sectarian system in shambles, the Maronites were flailing. Faced with growing opposition from the pan-Arabist camp over the Christian monopoly on government power – exacerbated by the fact that the Maronite population had shrunk considerably – and an increasingly agitated and violent Palestinian community, the Maronite community armed itself and went to war. They had grown weary of what they viewed as Palestinian lawlessness in their country, which was inviting violent reprisals from Israel, not to mention meddling from other Arab states. Furthermore, the Palestinians were a majority Sunni Muslim group, and the Maronites feared that their numbers would steer the fragile sectarian system away from the Christians and towards a Muslim, pan-Arab government.

However, the strong presence of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) forces in Lebanon was a serious security concern for Israelis too, who were experiencing constant rocket attacks from Palestinian groups dotted along Lebanon's southern regions. For the Israelis, having an organized Palestinian resistance next door was simply intolerable. Although Israel would not become directly involved in the fighting until they

launched Operation Litani in 1978, they began sending military aid and intelligence to the Christian camps as early as 1976. Israeli operatives in Lebanon trained and funded right-wing Christian southern militias to take care of business while they were away.[126] Thus, once Operation Litani was underway to eradicate the Palestinian presence in Lebanon's southern regions, the Israelis already had capable allies helping them in the south. Under the leadership of Saad Haddad, the southern Christian militias would eventually form the South Lebabnon Army (SLA), Israel's proxy army in the southern security zone. When Israel was forced to withdraw due to US pressure, the SLA worked to secure the southern situation and ward off Palestinian activity there.

Israel invaded again in 1982, this time with the objective of wiping out Palestinian opposition altogether. This was in accordance with Israel's interventionist policies under Menachem Begin's Likud government, who adopted a much more ideological and dogmatic stance against Palestinian and Syrian aggression, as well as a more supportive role for the Maronites Christians. Indeed, Begin once compared the plight of the Christians to the Jewish Holocaust experience, and warned that if swift action was not taken, then they would have "abandon[ed] the Christians into the hands of their tomentors".[127] The Maronites, who were far from maintaining the communal solidarity necessary to constitute a commendable force against the Palestinians (or anyone else), saw Israel's invasion and Begin's sympathy as an opportunity to "salvage the sinking Maronite ship."[128]

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[126] Hamizrachi, Beate. *The Emergence of the South Lebanon Security Belt: Major Saad Haddad and the Ties with Israel, 1975-1978*. New York: Praeger Publishers, 1988. 63.

[127] Quoted in Schulze, Kirsten E. *Israel's Covert Diplomacy in Lebanon*. 106.

[128] Nisan, Mordechai. *Minorities in the Middle East: A History of Struggle and Self-Expression*. London: McFarland, 1991. 216.

At that time, Israel had been working closely with Bashir Gemayel, son of Pierre and the head of the Phalangist military wing, the Lebanese Forces. Bashir commanded the most formidable Maronite militia in Lebanon at the time. Like Begin and his administration, Bashir believed that military power translated into political power. His disdain towards the Palestinians, his distrust of the Syrians, and his up-and-coming political status made him very appealing to the Israeli officials who wanted to establish relations with Lebanon in the future. Here, he lays out his support for Israel and emphasizes their common goals:

> Lebanon cannot return, ever, to be part of the Arab world. Lebanon must go hand in hand with Israel, because the two countries find themselves in the same situation and both loathe the Arab world. This cooperation is of far-reaching meaning, even if on the way there are misunderstandings and arguments and different approaches in the dispute about reaching the objective.[129]

Bashir Gemayel was not alone in his view that a joint Lebanese-Israeli effort could save their countries. Etienne Saqr, leader of the Guardians of the Cedar (another right-wing Maronite group), publicly stated that "the Lebanese should turn to Israel to save what [is] left of Lebanon."[130] The Maronite church, though not as involved with Israel as it had been under Patriarch Arida in the 1930s, also welcomed a relationship with the Israelis if it meant quelling the Palestinian threat.[131]

However, in what would become a classic repeat of history, the Maronites did not always live up to their word and expected the Israelis to do the dirty work for them. Bashir

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[129] Schulze, Kirsten E. *Israel's Covert Diplomacy in Lebanon*. Palgrave Macmillan, 1997. 90.

[130] Rabinovich, Itamar. *The War for Lebanon, 1970-1985*. New York: Cornell University Press, 1984. 70.

[131] Schulze, Kirsten E. *Israel's Covert Diplomacy in Lebanon*. 90.

had every desire to become president, and with covert Israeli backing, he was sure to get it. However, openly allying with the Israelis, like Etienne Saqr, would negatively affect his chances of reaching the presidency. For example, when Israeli forces were destroying Syrian jets and requested Bashir's assistance, he was unwilling to join forces in public and withheld his troops. Regardless, in 1982, Bashir was elected president – thus securing Israel's man in office – and the PLO was practically destroyed. Israel had essentially achieved all of its main wartime objectives with minimal Christian assistance.

Shortly after Bashir Gemayel's election, two events occurred which changed the trajectory of the civil war: Menachem Begin resigned as prime minister, and Bashir Gemayel was assassinated. For the remainder of the war – and for the next 17 years – Israel's military presence in Lebanon was largely confined to the southern security zone that they had established during Operation Litani. Once the PLO was quashed, the Israelis were dealing with a new enemy in Lebanon: the Shi'ite militant group, Hezbollah. Israel spent the next several years trying to neutralize Hezbollah, while the latter did all that it could to send the Israelis home.

The post-war era brought many changes in how the Maronites view both Israel and Lebanon. In addition to ending the civil war and recalibrating the Lebanese system in a more equitable fashion, the Ta'if Agreement also officially declared that Lebanon would have an 'Arab face.' Thus, directly or indirectly, the Maronites accepted Lebanon's linkage to the Arab world, rendering a minority alliance obsolete. Many Christians – and especially the Maronites – are at least wary if not explicitly opposed to having anything else to do with the Israelis. The members of the South Lebanon Army were officially viewed as traitors in the eyes of the government and of the Lebanese people, and when Israel

eventually withdrew completely from Lebanon in 2000, many of the SLA fighters went with them, never to return to their homeland. Relations between the Maronites and the Israelis have not been rekindled since, and Lebanon maintains its anti-Israeli stance today.

D. Conclusion

The Maronite-Israeli alliance was a disappointing experience for both parties. In this chapter, I demonstrated that the relationship which many Maronite and Zionist figures hailed as a 'natural' coming together of Jewish and Christian identities and objectives was, in reality, a synthesis of neither of these things. Each side did support the other in various ways and at various times, but only when it was convenient, strategically sound, and in their personal interest to do so. Furthermore, since Israeli's withdrawal from Lebanon in 2000, Maronites have virtually severed all contact with the Israelis and no attempt has been made to reignite relations. Looking at the relationship retrospectively, the Maronite-Israeli alliance was more so one of convenience than anything else. The 'natural' aspect was not only dubious; it was simply untrue.

In the next chapter, I will take a closer look at what I believe are the main reasons why the Maronites and the Zionists had the special relationship that they did. I will speculate as to why these factors, based on the historical accounts I have given here, were persuasive enough for both Maronite individuals and Israeli officials to be convinced of their symbiotic relationship – and why, in reality, they were merely a conglomeration of conveniences, misperceptions, and coincidences.

CHAPTER 5

EVALUATING THE MARONITE-ISRAELI ALLIANCE

In this chapter, I will highlight the main factors which I believe contributed to the Maronite-Israeli relationship and facilitated its continuance throughout the twentieth century. In my research, I have found several underlying reasons which necessitate analysis. There was the idea that the Maronites and the Zionists believed that they shared common cultural, religious, and historical experiences and that their shared identity as minorities meant that an alliance was in their best interest. Both sides believed that they were fighting a common Muslim enemy, and that a strategic alliance would help to solve their security problems. Also, the rise of the radical right in Israeli politics rejected the views of Israelis who were doubtful of the Maronites' reliability, and made their salvation a moral obligation – something that extremist Maronites openly welcomed – despite evidence that the Maronites would not carry their weight during the war. I will explain the significance of these factors from both sides of the relationship and, ultimately, I argue that the alliance was not natural in any sense, but merely a convenient partnership based on ulterior motives and misunderstandings.

A. Similar Nationalisms, Similar Histories?

One of the most recurrent themes in the interactions between Maronites and Israeli figures is that they constantly refer to their shared identities, experiences and aspirations as

minorities in the Middle East – and even more importantly, their belief that these identities, experiences and aspirations run counter to those of Muslim Arabs. The feeling of camaraderie based on these criteria was evident in the earliest Maronite-Jewish encounters and, regardless of whether or not it was actually true, this sentiment had an immense influence on early Maronite-Jewish relations, which in turn, had a profound effect on their relationship down the road. The zeal behind the belief that both Zionist and Maronite nationalist narratives had so much in common prevented some leaders from realizing that, in fact, both communities were actually quite different.

In this section, I will analyze the evolution of Maronite and Zionist (Israeli) nationalisms, the circumstances under which their nationalisms were formed, and the elements of the nationalist narratives that define them. In doing so, I aim to find the parallels between the two in order to determine where Maronite and Zionist individuals found enough common ground to confidently espouse the great potential that such a symbiotic relationship would have to offer, and why such a relationship was not possible with the Muslim population.

1. Maronite Nationalism

The concept of Maronite nationalism (or Maronitism) is constantly evolving to adapt to its ever-changing political environment. Just as the demographic makeup and political situation in Lebanon are varied, changeable, and contested, so too is Maronite identity and, as a result, its nationalist sentiment. Generally, we can say that Maronite nationalism is linked to the idea that the Maronite community in Lebanon is a permanent

and native one. However, given that this community has become increasingly fragmented over the past century, the consensus tends to stop there. An exhaustive history of the Maronite experience in Lebanon would have been too expansive for my purposes, but looking back at Maronite activity and rhetoric at key points in Lebanese history, we can extract several points from the Maronite nationalist narrative:

First, that Lebanon has always been the native homeland for a Christian, non-Arab population and that it must remain a safe haven for them. Quoting centuries of ancient history, Maronite rhetoric emphasizes that their community was established in Lebanon before that of any other, including the Druze. In doing so, they assume the 'right' to political power. Whether the Maronite community assumes political dominance as an innate right by heritage or as a security mechanism against subjugation, they have historically exerted a great amount of effort to ensure their political dominance, based on their belief that Lebanon was historically Christian and non-Arab. In fact, they generally tend to shy from, or even outright deny, any Arab influence or heritage.[132]

Second, that Maronites categorically reject – or are intensely wary of – Islamism and Arabism. From the early days of Islamic conquest all the way through the rise of Arab nationalism in the twentieth century, Maronite Christians have proven incredibly resistant to Muslim and Arab influences, and they strongly oppose the idea of an Islamic Lebanon. Based on their adherence to the notion that Lebanon is Christian in essence, political dominance does not belong to Muslims, and an Islamist Lebanon would mean the end of

[132] Hagopian, Elaine C. "Maronite Hegemony to Maronite Militancy: The Creation and Disintegration of Lebanon." *Third World Quarterly* 11.4 (1989): 103.

the Maronite community. Bashir Gemayel elaborated on this concept, and it is worth quoting at length:

> Our people in this part of the world are threatened by several perils. Ever since the blood ordeals of April 13, 1975, the Christians realize that their fate hangs in the balance, and their existence is dangling on a slender thread. If, therefore, we do not determine our own way of life, if we are not vigilant and prepared for any contingency, the slightest whiff will snuff out our candle and blow us out of existence.[133]

Third, the Maronites believe that they have a special connection with the West, which they assume them culturally superior and responsible for bringing enlightenment to Lebanon. Because of their theological communion with the Latin Church beginning in the 12th century, and later their close relationship with France before and during the Mandate era, Lebanese Maronite Christians emphasize their Western identity and special place in the Middle East. Especially in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, thanks to French preferential treatment, the Maronite community was considered relatively educated, wealthy, and refined compared to their Muslim counterparts, whom they generally viewed as backward.

In a confessionalist state like Lebanon, where all of the different religious sects compete for resources and political influence, ethnocentrism and minority nationalist movements were the norm. As a result, national interests were subordinated to the interests of a particular community, and this was particularly the case for the Maronite Christians. The Lebanese Civil War of 1975-1990 witnessed the pinnacle of Maronite Christian nationalist rhetoric, which sometimes bordered xenophobia, and it was their obsession with

[133] "Lebanese Society." *Bachir Gemayel Foundation*. 2009. Web. 1 May 2012. <http://www.bachirgemayel.org/index.php?option=com_content>.

power – and fear of exploitation at the hands of the Arabs – that would "sow the seeds of their own eventual adversity".[134]

However, Maronite Christians were not the only ones paranoid about their fate at the hands of Arab Muslims at the time. Israeli Jews, having established the state of Israel in 1948 to the utter consternation of their Arab neighbors, were struggling to establish relations in the area. In the Lebanese Christians, Zionists saw an ally with whom they shared similar ideologies and, perhaps most importantly, similar troubles. Now, I will analyze Zionism and the Israeli right. This is not to say that the leftist Zionists/Israelis were insignificant in the Maronite-Israeli relationship: in fact, some of the alliance's biggest and earliest proponents, like David Ben-Gurion, considered themselves leftists. However, I focus my attention on the right wing because it has had the most profound effect on modern Israeli politics in recent history, and it was under a right-wing government that involvement with the Maronites reached a high-water mark and came out into the open for the first time.

2. Zionism and the Israeli Right, in Retrospect

Since its inception in the nineteenth century, political Zionism has undergone many changes. However, one thing that has remained constant about Zionism is that it remains a fragmented and contested concept, even – or perhaps especially – among Jews. Even from its nascent beginnings in Germany and Russia as the dream of a future Jewish state, world Jewry has never been able to collectively rally around one interpretation of political Zionism. In its early days, Zionist leaders knew that Jews needed a safe haven – but how,

[134] Hirst, David. *Beware of Small States: Lebanon, Battleground of the Middle East*. 13.

where, and even when was up for debate. Today, fragmentation is even more complex: divisions are wide between Left and Right, not to mention the countless divisions within both ends of the political spectrum. Some currents of Zionism even contest the legitimacy of Israel's existence altogether. Thus, attempting to deconstruct Jewish nationalism as a whole requires expansive and intricate elaboration. For the sake of clarity and relevance to my thesis topic, I will focus on the Israeli Right, referring to the Left only in a referential or comparative sense. Again, this does not negate the importance of the Israeli Left in domestic and foreign policy, but merely highlights the overall significance of the Right in the culmination of the Maronite-Israeli relationship.

The Israeli Right finds its roots in pre-state Revisionism, which has been constantly evolving since its inception in the Mandate period, though it has not changed much from its original form. Originating with Ze'ev Jabotinsky's 'radical' claims that the Jews needed an expansive state which dominated all of historical *Eretz Israel*, a strong military, and limited tolerance for Arab dissent, Revisionist Zionism (which forms the base of the Israeli Right, manifested in the Herut and Likud parties) has not strayed far from this path.[135] In fact, most of these elements of the Israeli Right are what bolstered it to power in the wake of the 1967 Six Day War, and although its oft-radical tendencies are responsible for its periodic downfall, the Israeli Right still maintains a dominating presence in Israeli politics today.

Thus, it would be useful to highlight and elaborate on the main elements the Israeli Right and how their form of Zionism (or Israeli nationalism) has affected the way in which the state perceives and interacts with others, particularly non-Jews. Based on a review of

[135] Peleg, Ilan. "The Israeli Right." *Contemporary Israel: Domestic Politics, Foreign Policy, and Security Challenges*. Boulder: Westview, 2009. 23.

Zionist and Israeli history, particularly under the Begin administration, three main themes of Revisionist Zionism stand out. The first is the emphasis on the Jews' religious and historical entitlement to *Eretz Israel*, which in turn justifies the (oft-illegal) expansion of its territory that continues today. Revisionists underline the Jewish tradition that asserts God's promise that the Israelis will once again return to the Land of Israel. Once the opportunity to create a Jewish state presented itself in the early twentieth century, it had appeared that God was fulfilling his promise – however, *Eretz Israel* historically extends beyond Israel's modern-day borders. In the 1920s, even before the creation of the state of Israel, the Revisionists under Jabotinsky demanded the immediate realization of *Eretz Israel* in its entirety, which included much of Lebanon and Jordan.[136] Although it is unlikely that Israel will absorb these territories, it is equally unlikely that Israel will concede any of its current territory to the Palestinians based on this notion. Modern-day Revisionist Mordechai Nisan argues that "the presence of non-Jews in the country is morally and politically irrelevant to the national right of the Jews to settle and possess the land…The Bible states the Jewish right regardless of non-Jewish presence."[137] In line with this mentality, members of the Gush Emunim – a radical, right-wing group in Israel – continue to expand Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza based on their belief that they are within their religious right to do so.

Secondly, as mentioned in an earlier chapter, the Right maintains a 'crisis image' by portraying the non-Jewish world, and particularly the Arabs, as fundamentally hostile to

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[136] Kaplan, Eran. *The Jewish Radical Right: Revisionist Zionism and Its Ideological Legacy*. Madison: University of Wisconsin, 2005. 48.

[137] Peleg, Ilan. *Begin's Foreign Policy, 1977-1983: Israel's Move to the Right*. New York: Greenwood Press, 76.

Israel and actively seeking its destruction.[138] For Revisionists (and neo-Revisionists, like Begin), anti-Semitism is a permanent fixture in the world: the Holocaust, as well as the countless pogroms in Europe were primary examples of the ramifications of this anti-Semitism. Because of historical experiences like these, world Jewry – and especially those living outside Israel – will never experience normalcy because of their identity as Jews. For Revisionists, poor relations between Arabs and Israelis are inevitable because the Arabs have explicitly stated that they want to annihilate the Jews.[139] Therefore, compromise (territorial or otherwise) is not acceptable to Revisionists, so they accept hostility and confrontation as being inevitable. As a result, Israel's ostracized regional and international status is not so much because of its inability to compromise on political issues, but is instead an extension of inherent, global anti-Semitism and the Jewish struggle against it.

Third, and as a result of the second, the Right emphasizes Israeli military power as "the sole instrument in the relations between nations"[140] and the bases its victories in military power, not negotiation. Jabotinsky, who advocated a strong military, was convinced that force was the only way to deal with the Arabs. His militaristic convictions were justified by the Revisionists every time that Israel went to war with its Arab neighbors, and each victory was a result of their military prowess. Even though the Yishuv had traditionally maintained a policy of restraint, these policies gradually eroded after the creation of the Israeli state, and were altogether reversed under the Begin administration.[141]

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[138] Ibid, 53.

[139] Tessler, Mark. *A History of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994. 393.

[140] Peleg, Ilan. *Begin's Foreign Policy, 1977-1983: Israel's Move to the Right*. 34.

For Jabotinsky, and later Begin and Netanyahu, "deterrence and domination" made peace, not "mutual acceptance and recognition."[142] This shift in ideology dramatically affected Israeli foreign policy (especially under Begin), and is one of the main reasons that Israel invaded Lebanon in 1982.

While many of these elements of Israel's rightist ideology are extreme, they are not unique. Right-wing nationalist movements have a tendency towards dogmatic and absolutist rhetoric, especially when they feel that their community and livelihood is being threatened by someone or something else. While right-wing Maronite nationalism may not mirror every element of right-wing Zionism or vice-versa, much of this characterization of the Israeli Right could loosely be applied to the right-wing Maronites as well. In this sense, one begins to see how and why Maronite and Israeli Jewish historical experiences found common ground, even though their ideologies and experiences were much more different than they initially believed. In this next section, I take a detailed look at the practical and theological parallels between Maronite and Israeli Jewish communities, and why an alliance seemed like such an obvious choice for leading officials.

3. Finding Common Ground

Although Maronite Christianity and Judaism differ significantly in many aspects, the foundational tenets of their nationalist fervor are quite similar. Elaine Hagopian[143]

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[141] Peleg, Ilan. "The Israeli Right." 37.

[142] Ibid.

[143] For more details of her argument, see Hagopian, Elaine C. "Maronite Hegemony to Maronite Militancy: The Creation and Disintegration of Lebanon." *Third World Quarterly* 11.4 (1989): 101

argues that there are three main themes that Maronite and Zionist nationalism have in common: first, that both communities originated from a specific homeland to which they believe they still belong and have always belonged. This assertion forms the base of both of their claims to political power in their respective countries. The Maronites justify their dominance of the Lebanese political system by insisting that, in addition to being one of the last, remaining islands of Christianity in the Middle East, they are also the only truly native Lebanese. This generally refers to the fact that the Maronite community has resided in Mount Lebanon since the seventh century (before the arrival of the Druze or Arabs), though Maronites sometimes claim to be direct descendants of the ancient Phoenicians who settled in Lebanon thousands of years before that. This sentiment was manifested in the Lebanese constitution and in the National Pact of 1943: not only was the presidency reserved solely for Maronites, but the constitution specifically refrained from giving Lebanon an Arab 'identity', and instead stated that Lebanon only had an 'Arab face'. Underneath this subtle language was the Maronite conviction that they are non-Arab, and because they equated Lebanese identity with their own, then Lebanon, too, was non-Arab. By marginalizing all of the other communities, especially the Arabs, the Maronites used their 'native' status as a means of consolidating their power.

The Zionists took a similar approach, focusing on *Eretz Israel* as the Jewish ancestral homeland. The Revisionists in particular view Jewish domination of Palestine and the rest of *Eretz Israel* as a theologically inevitable truth; since the Jews were the original inhabitants of the land, they believe that it is only natural that they control and rule over it. Although political opinion varies on the practical limits of *Eretz Israel* – the Left does not

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seek to expand territory as intensely as the Right – the question of Israel's right to exist was less contested and certainly had more consensus across the political spectrum. While the Left may be willing to negotiate over land concessions and a possible two-state solution, neither the Left nor the Right in Israeli politics would be able to agree on Palestinian autonomy within Israel because the state is a Jewish one, and therefore political power resides with the Jews.

A second theme in the Maronite/Zionist nationalist narrative is the unique and "enlightened" characteristics that define both of the communities.[144] Zionists highlight their status as the 'Chosen People' in religious text,[145] as well as their connection with the West through diplomatic, financial, and military support. Because of this link with the West (and particularly the US), Israel considers itself a Western nation. Similarly, Maronite Christians emphasize their connection to both the Latin Church and French influence as what gives them a superior status over their Muslim counterparts and makes them more cultured than their fellow countrymen. Inherent in Maronite and Zionist nationalisms is the belief that they have a "special mission to bring light and progress"[146] to the Middle East. According to Hagopian, Maronite and Jewish consciousness holds that Islam does not respect their rights as non-Muslims – harking back to their *dhimmi* status under the Islamic Empire – but that Christians and Jews do respect the rights of Muslims. In this stream of thought, it then follows that Christians and Jews are therefore the only sects who respect diversity and can

[144] Ibid, 108.

[145] Habib, Camille. *The Consequences of Israel's Invasion of Lebanon, 1982: Failure of a Success*. Thesis. 1993.

[146] Hagopian, Elaine C. "Maronite Hegemony to Maronite Militancy: The Creation and Disintegration of Lebanon."109.

be trusted in ruling religiously diverse nations. Thus, in addition to their ethnic and religious claim to political dominance, the Maronite and Jewish orientation towards the West and their support from Western nations rationalizes their right to power in the Middle East.

Finally, both the Maronites and Zionists share a resistance to Arab Muslim domination and pan-Arabist movements. In the pre-state period, the Maronites demonstrated their opposition to Muslim influence through their isolationist tendencies in Mount Lebanon and their close relationship with the French. After independence, they defended their power through power-sharing agreements, and when it became obvious that this was at stake, they were willing to defend it to the death during the Lebanese Civil War. Pre-state Zionists vacillated between coexistence (David Ben-Gurion) and conflict (Ze'ev Jabotinsky) with the Palestinian Arabs during the pre-state era, but modern Israeli policy generally leans toward Palestinian marginalization. As Israeli politics have eased farther and farther right, tolerance toward the Palestinian population has neared zero, and negotiations for any kind of state solution are stagnant.

4. Shaky Foundations

Both Zionist and Maronite forms of nationalism share an unquestionable right to rule based on historical or religious claims to land, an innate feeling of superiority over others based on their direct or indirect connections with Western society, and a common struggle against Arabism. From the early beginnings of the relationship, Maronite and Zionist figures frequently cited these reasons in their meetings with each other. Lebanese

President Emile Eddé himself echoed this exact sentiment succinctly when he said that Jews and Maronites were

> natural partners because of their similar situation. Jewish and Lebanese cultures were both superior to that of the Arab neighbors and both were struggling for the same goal – to build a constructive bridge between Eastern and Western culture.[147]

As I have demonstrated above and in the previous chapter, Eddé was not alone. The Maronite clergy, specifically Patriarch Arida and Bishop Mubarak, were even more intensely in favor of an alliance due to the Maronites' experiences with Jewish aid in the mid-nineteenth century. On the Jewish side of the equation, Zionist leader David Ben-Gurion, as well as others in Israeli political circles throughout the 21st century, also thought of the Maronites as a 'natural ally' for the same reasons.

Yet, based on these criteria, how strong or promising could a strategic alliance birthed from mutual insecurities really be? Let us take another look at both sides of the issue. For the Maronites, even though the clergy espoused their positive historical experience with philanthropic Jews like Cremieux and Montefiore and used this as proof that Christians and Jews were natural allies, this type of aid was a one-time occurrence. The aid did not even come from the Jews per se; it came from their respective governments. Later Maronite requests for Israeli aid (until the civil war) were met with either inaction or haphazard assistance because the Zionists did not want to mire themselves in the largely anti-Zionist Lebanese political environment. At the same time, because Lebanon was balancing on a fragile, teetering sectarian scale, and its multi-confessional structure made it

[147] Quoted in Schulze, Kirsten E. *Israel's Covert Diplomacy in Lebanon*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998. 23.

the weakest state in the region and the easiest to penetrate. This was particularly advantageous for the Zionists (and later, the Israelis), who assumed that they could influence events in Lebanon through their contacts with the Maronite Christian community. However, these contacts did not represent the Maronite community in entirety; many Maronite politicians and activists were vehemently opposed to establishing relations with the Zionists, and instead preferred to try their luck in maintaining solid relations with the Arabs.

The same case applies to the Zionists. Even though many Jewish leaders dreamed of a friendly, Christian neighbor, it was clear that the Maronites were only paying lip service to the Zionist cause. Bashir Gemayel, for example, rejected Israeli requests for assistance several times during the civil war. Furthermore, virtually no one – except perhaps the clergy, who were politically immune – was willing to come out in the open to throw their weight behind the Jews, and when they did, they were ostracized (Eddé) or assassinated (Bashir Gemayel). Again, this relates to Lebanon's rigid political arrangement, which allowed no room for external relations, and especially not one so regionally controversial as a relationship with Zionists. Israeli leadership was also split on the issue – no one wanted to forgo a possible alliance in the face of regional isolation, but at the same time, no Jewish leader until Begin really trusted the Maronites, nor did they want to subject Israel to Lebanon's fickle and volatile political environment.

If this was relationship really was, as so many have put it, a 'natural' phenomenon between two communities who shared so many cultural, religious, and historical similarities and who demonstrated so much potential for a positive, symbiotic relationship, then the pro-Zionist Maronites and the pro-interventionist Zionists would not have been

such an ostracized minority within Maronite and Zionist circles. Secondly, if the Maronites and Jews did indeed share similar nationalisms and histories – which is somewhat dubious, as their disdain for Arabs was their only real binding element – proposing a concrete alliance based on such intangible criteria is not only illogical and unjustifiable, but it put both communities at serious risk for retaliation from their neighbors. As history has demonstrated, however, the absolutist ideologies present in the highest levels of government often distorted reality and affected the decision-making process accordingly.

B. An All-Star Lineup

The Maronite-Israeli relationship always had its proponents on both sides of the divide, but never as overtly and recklessly as it did during the Lebanese Civil War. The victory of the right-wing Likud party in the 1977 elections marked a significant shift in Israeli policy towards Lebanon, and especially toward the Maronite Christians. Israeli Prime Minister and Revisionist ideologue Menachem Begin, together with right-wing Chief-of-Staff Rafael Eitan and Defense Minister Ariel Sharon, formed a hawkish politico-military triad that unanimously pushed Israeli security policy toward an unprecedented level of interventionism and preemption. While Eitan and Sharon had no particular love for (or trust in) the Maronites, Begin felt that it was his personal duty to save their community from what he thought would be complete annihilation by Muslims. Meanwhile, across the border, Maronite militia leader Bashir Gemayel was pursuing his goal of unifying the Maronites in his bid for the presidency, while at the same time trying to make himself look like the Maronite community's protector from the encroaching Syrian army and continuing

conflict with the PLO. Bashir saw in the Israelis an all-powerful and sympathetic ally that could help him destroy his enemies and propel him to power…and against all better judgment, Begin saw many of the same qualities in Bashir.

In this section, I take a closer look at the masterminds who engineered this major shift in Israeli security doctrine and how their priorities affected Israel's Lebanon policy, particularly in regard to its relationship with the Maronites in the lead-up to the 1982 invasion. I will also focus on Bashir Gemayel's interactions with the Israelis, and how this personal relationship distorted the Begin administration's perception of reality. Ultimately, I find that the alignment of these personalities at the same time was largely responsible for both the invasion and the illusion that both the Maronites and the Israelis were fighting the same war.

1. The Rise of the Likud Party

The victory of the Likud party in Israel's 1977 elections indicated that Israeli politics and society had undergone – and would continue to undergo – drastic changes. This was the first time that any party other than Labor was elected to power, though it was not without reason: up until this point, Israel had fought three major wars with its Arab neighbors, and given the prevalence of anti-Israeli rhetoric in the region, as well as increasingly frequent clashes with Palestinians, there was every reason to believe that another attack was imminent. As a result, the mentality of Israeli society generally shifted from one that favored accommodation and negotiation to one that made national security and military power a priority. In this regard, the Likud ticket was a perfect fit.

When it was first elected, the Likud party was a complex combination of right-wing tendencies, but it bore three, overarching qualities that have remained constant throughout its existence: a strong emphasis on national security, an orientation towards extremist nationalism and territorial maximalism, and an explicitly anti-Arab outlook.[148] As an extension of Revisionist Zionism, the Likud party places national security above all other state concerns, and military power is its preferred instrument in this endeavor. Whereas the Labor party tended to seek compromise within the Arab-Israeli conflict, Likud members vehemently opposed this strategy, which they saw as a futile exercise. A defensive military strategy gave way to "completely unprovoked broad active military operations" towards the Palestinians and towards other Arab countries.[149] None of these characteristics were new; in fact, they had defined right-wing circles since the days of Ze'ev Jabotinsky in the 1920s. The only difference now was that, in light of perpetual warfare with the Arabs, this state of mind was more unanimous among Israelis – something which the 1977 elections demonstrated.

Not only was Israeli society more unanimous in this regard, but perhaps more importantly, the Israeli political and military elite were gradually becoming more unanimous as well. When Begin was first elected as Prime Minister on the Likud ticket, his policies were more or less continuous with those of his late Labor predecessor, Yitzhak Rabin: despite a large, but brief and limited military operation in southern Lebanon in 1978 (Operation Litani), Israel under Begin's first term generally maintained its policy of

[148] Freedman, Robert, ed. *Contemporary Israel: Domestic Politics, Foreign Policy, and Security Challenges*. Boulder: Westview Press, 2009. 4-5.

[149] Schulze, Kirsten E. *Israel's Covert Diplomacy in Lebanon*. 94.

indirect intervention in Lebanon.[150] This was not because of Begin's personal restraint; his concern for Israeli national security and his disdain for the Palestinians left no room for this. Instead, Begin's decisions were more moderate in its first term because his administration was more evenly divided between Likud and Labor party members. For example, his first Defense Minister, Moshe Dayan, was a Labor party member who advocated restraint in Lebanon. Once Dayan resigned, however, the Begin administration took a hard right.

When Likud member Ariel Sharon was appointed as Begin's Defense Minister in 1981, Israeli foreign policy witnessed its most drastic conceptual change yet. Sharon was a staunchly right-wing interventionist with no tolerance for Syrian or Palestinian trouble, and his appointment as Defense Minister meant that Israel's power resided within a homogenous, right-wing political and military elite. Begin's political circle urged him to take direct action against the PLO and Syria in Lebanon. His Chief of Staff, Rafael Eitan, was determined to crush the PLO and argued that direct military action against Yassir Arafat's headquarters in Beirut was the only way to achieve this.[151] Sharon was no friend of the Palestinians, but he focused his efforts on repelling the Syrians, whose psychical presence in Lebanon and antagonism towards Israel were more than he could bear. Both of these men, among other members of the political elite, were unreservedly in favor of invading Lebanon, as they felt that a decisive Israeli military victory would be the only way to protect Israel's national interests. With no moderating forces left, Begin essentially had

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[150] Zisser, Eyal. "The Israeli-Syrian-Lebanese Triangle: The Renewed Struggle over Lebanon." *Conflict, Diplomacy and Society in Israeli-Lebanese Relations.* New York: Taylor and Francis, 2010. 83.

[151] Eisenberg, Laurie. "History Revisited or Revamped?: The Maronite Factor in Israel's 1982 Invasion of Lebanon." *Conflict, Diplomacy and Society in Israeli-Lebanese Relations*. New York: Taylor and Francis, 2010. 67.

the carte blanche for invading Lebanon whenever he saw fit. So, in line with the Likud's new unanimous consensus on military intervention, he did.

2. Menachem Begin's Personal Mission

However, describing Begin as merely a political piece of the Likud puzzle would not be wholly accurate, for his personal convictions, experiences, and interactions played a major role in his decision to invade Lebanon, and especially in his decision to ally with the Maronites. It is worth taking a brief look at his personal life experiences, as they helped to shape his perception of the world.

As a Russian Jew born under the Russian Empire and later a student in Warsaw, Begin witnessed the growing tides of anti-Semitism unfolding in Russia and Europe. He was an ardent Zionist, and his Zionist political activity in 1940 Warsaw resulted in his arrest and a two-year sentence in a labor camp.[152] Upon his release in 1942, he negotiated being sent to Palestine, where he became actively involved with the Revisionist movements that were strongly opposed to British colonial presence.[153] Much of Begin's own ideology was inspired by fellow Revisionist Ze'ev Jabotinsky, and he was particularly passionate about establishing a Jewish state and defending it with a strong military. The Holocaust, which claimed many of his own family members, had a deep and lasting impression on his view of the world and humanity.[154] To Begin, the Holocaust was part of a 2,000 year

[152] Peleg, Ilan. *Begin's Foreign Policy, 1977-1983: Israel's Move to the Right*. 20.

[153] Ibid.

[154] Ibid, 18.

continuum of Jewish persecution, and it proved that Jews would never be safe if they did not defend themselves. It was a point in history that would resurface in much of his political rhetoric, especially vis-à-vis the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Begin's radical and emotional approach to Israeli politics and foreign policy stemmed from his personal experiences as a victim of anti-Semitism, and this strongly influenced his absolutist and "all-encompassing view of reality which did not concern itself with details." [155] As a result, his perception of the world and the events taking place around him were radically distorted to suit his ideology. This included the way he categorized the Arabs (specifically, the Palestinians) and the Maronites as the ultimate enemy and the ultimate ally, respectively. This absolutist perspective would deceive him in the long run.

Begin held the Maronite Christians in a very high regard, and he felt a strong sense of personal and moral obligation to ensuring their well-being. To the Israelis, the Maronites were a minority community in the Middle East who shared with the Jews a constant struggle against Arab Muslim oppression, and according to one observer, "Israelis were looking at the Christians as somehow being Jews."[156] However, while the Maronites had their own militias, their ability to protect themselves was limited; Israel, on the other hand, had a lot of military power to spare. Therefore, when the Civil War began in Lebanon, Begin made it his personal mission to save the Maronites from 'genocide,'[157] and warned

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[155] Schulze, Kirsten E. *Israel's Covert Diplomacy in Lebanon*. 114.

[156] Ibid, 107.

[157] Hanf, Theodor. *Coexistence in Wartime Lebanon: Decline of a State and Rise of a Nation*. London: I.B. Tauris, 1993. 233.

the Knesset that the Christians would face their own Holocaust if the Israelis did not step in to help them.

Neither Sharon nor Eitan had any sentimental attachment to the Maronite community. In fact, they were incredibly suspicious of Bashir Gemayel's ulterior motives in seeking out Israel as an ally, and based on his shoddy performance in Operation Litani, they doubted that Bashir would uphold his end of the alliance. At the same time, they saw the Christians as a way of helping Israel defeat the PLO and the Syrians, and they wanted a Christian neighbor to the north, so they were willing to overlook these setbacks.[158] Other Israeli military intelligence officials warned Begin of Bashir's questionable loyalties. They said that, even if Bashir become president of Lebanon, the sectarian nature of the state would compel him to court the Arabs as well; he was only using the Israelis as a tool to achieve his own ends.[159] Begin dismissed these ideas. With Sharon, Eitan, and several Mossad officials on board, forming an overt alliance with the Maronites was a done deal.

Begin's blatant dismissal of reasonable military intelligence, plus the fact that Gemayel and his troops had practically deserted the Israelis during Operation Litani, is indicative of his inability to make objective and rational decisions that would best serve Israel's interests. Kirsten Schulze describes his policies as being laden with "constancy of purpose, single-minded determination, sense of mission, and an absolute inner certitude of being right and in the right,"[160] and each of these qualities manifests itself in his Maronite policy. While his commitment to Maronite survival might be noble, much of his decision to

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[158] Peleg, Ilan. *Begin's Foreign Policy, 1977-1983: Israel's Move to the Right*. 148.

[159] Schulze, Kirsten E. *Israel's Covert Diplomacy in Lebanon.* 126.

[160] Ibid, 96.

invade was based on his inability to distinguish between genocide and civil war: any losses that the Christians would sustain were a result of the latter, not the former. The product of this line of thinking was disastrous for Israeli foreign policy and mired Israel in a devastating war that had neither a clear nor limited objective, and it resulted in Israel's eighteen-year occupation of Lebanon.

3. The Maronite Role

To be fair, though, the Maronites did share some of Israel's strategic objectives and they certainly shared the same enemies. Maronite leaders, among others, strongly resented the presence of the PLO in Lebanon because they were a foreign, non-state actor and their personal conflict with Israel prompted the latter to militarily intervene in Lebanon on several occasions. Furthermore, the Maronites were opposed to Syrian presence after it became clear that Syria wanted to occupy Lebanon once it had quelled the Palestinians. Thus, what was a security crisis for Israel was also a problem for the Maronite community and a strategic alliance might have been beneficial, at least theoretically.

However, even a limited strategic alliance was incredibly problematic. Israel's inability to grasp the political reality in Lebanon – which was partially fuelled by Begin's personal *modus operandi* – coupled with its high expectations of the Maronites and trust in Bashir Gemayel as an ally resulted in nothing short of disappointment. The Maronites under Bashir, on the other hand, seemed to believe that they could use Israel's military prowess to fulfill their own objectives without getting their hands dirty. The fact that Bashir Gemayel had a major role in the development of Israel's Lebanon policy both before and

after Israel's 1982 invasion indicates that his powers of persuasion far exceeded his capabilities as a political or military leader, and it is this role that I will now address.

By the time that Bashir Gemayel rose through the ranks of his father's *Kata'ib* party and assumed control of his own militia, he had already established a working relationship with Israel. Unlike his father, Pierre, who preferred allying with Syria, Bashir was convinced that Israel's military might would guarantee Maronite supremacy and, with any luck, push him toward the presidency. By 1977, he enjoyed firm support from Israel, who saw Bashir as the poster child and savior of the Maronite community. Bashir did enjoy a strong base of support among Maronites militia leaders, but this was only because his violent military unification policy presented his competitors with an ultimatum: join forces with Bashir, or be killed.[161] While this policy helped unify the Maronites and rendered Bashir's militia (the Lebanese Forces) the strongest Christian force in the region, the fact that such a feat required violence indicated that he did not enjoy as much popular support as Israel thought.

Operation Litani was Bashir's first major trial run in his relationship with the Israelis, and his performance showed little promise for the future. When Israeli forces entered Lebanon in response to a PLO attack based from the southern part of the country, they set up a security belt and a proxy army (the South Lebanon Army, or SLA) to patrol the area. The SLA was led by defected Lebanese army commander Major Saad Haddad (a Greek Catholic) and largely consisted of southern Lebanese Christians, though some Shi'a also joined the group. The SLA received extensive training and weapons from Israel, and their job was to eliminate all PLO activity in the security belt, which covered all territory

[161] Hanf, Theodor. *Coexistence in Wartime Lebanon: Decline of a State and Rise of a Nation*. 247.

south of the Litani River. Bashir Gemayel rejected Haddad because he was facing charges of treason in Lebanon for defecting from the army and creating his own. Furthermore, Bashir objected to Israel's southern security zone on the grounds that Israel was infringing on Lebanon's sovereignty. Thus, when Israel asked Gemayel to send 800 men to assist Haddad during Operation Litani, he was incredibly hesitant.[162] In the end, he complied, but his men deserted Haddad shortly after. The same incident repeated itself after Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982, when Gemayel again refused to link up with Haddad's forces in Jounieh at the request of the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF).[163] This should have been a red flag to Israel that the Maronites were not fully committed to them.

Another example of suspicious Maronite behavior came in 1980-81. In late 1980, Bashir sent his troops from Mount Lebanon to the eastern city of Zahle, a Christian city located in the majority-Muslim Beqaa Valley region. Syria opposed this aggressive move so near to its border, and demanded that Bashir withdraw his forces. When he refused, the Syrian jets began shelling the city in March 1981, completely overwhelming Bashir's Lebanese Forces. This was a perfect moment for Bashir to call in Israel, who had agreed not to attack Syria under two conditions: one, that it would not cross the 'red line' into the security zone south of the Litani River; and two, that it would not use its air force.[164] Thus, Syria had violated the cease-fire, but this was not the only reason why Israel responded immediately to the Syrian air strike. Bashir Gemayel, overrun by Syrian air power,

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[162] Schulze, Kirsten E. *Israel's Covert Diplomacy in Lebanon*. 106.

[163] Hamizrachi, Beate. *The Emergence of the South Lebanon Security Belt: Major Saad Haddad and the Ties with Israel, 1975-1978*. New York: Praeger Publishers, 1988. 185.

[164] Waldman, Adir. "Building Blocks for a Future Israeli-Lebanese Accord?" *Conflict, Diplomacy and Society in Israeli-Lebanese Relations*. New York: Taylor and Francis, 2010. 131-2.

personally appealed to Begin for help when he said: "What is being done today to the Christians in Lebanon is exactly what the Nazis did to the Jews in the 1940s in Europe."[165] This played directly to Begin's emotions, and he needed no further justification: he immediately deployed Israeli air power, which successfully repelled the Syrians. This time, Bashir was the one requesting assistance, and he received it immediately – whether or not it was because of his reference to the Holocaust is speculative, but it did show that Israel was willing to support the Christians militarily.

One of Bashir's biggest goals was securing the presidency, and he was willing to work with just about anyone to achieve this goal. Thankfully for him, the Israels were also willing to work with him on this issue: Ariel Sharon, Begin's Defense Minister, was keen on creating a Christian Lebanon under Bashir, as were many others in the Israeli administration.[166] Despite his shortcomings, Bashir seemed to have a great deal of Maronite support, and a Christian neighbor would have been beneficial for the isolated Jewish state. Thus, no one was surprised when Bashir was elected President in August 1982, merely two months after Israel invaded Lebanon.[167] During the month before his inauguration, Bashir met with Begin in Israel. The Israeli Prime Minister pressed him about opening negotiations and signing an Israeli-Lebanese peace treaty. Unwilling to upset his Muslim constituents before even taking office, he tried to avoid the issue and asked Begin to give him time. It was clear that Bashir had no intention ruining his blossoming political career

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[165] Schulze, Kirsten E. *Israel's Covert Diplomacy in Lebanon*. 117.

[166] Zisser, Eyal. "The Israeli-Syrian-Lebanese Triangle: The Renewed Struggle over Lebanon." *Conflict, Diplomacy and Society in Israeli-Lebanese Relations.* New York: Taylor and Francis, 2010. 84.

[167] Traboulsi, Fawwaz. *A History of Modern Lebanon*. London: Pluto Press, 2007. 215.

by committing Lebanon to peace with Israel, who was still occupying the country. Whether or not he would have done so eventually is uncertain, as he was assassinated weeks later.

C. Conclusion

Amine Gemayel was immediately elected to replace his fallen brother, but he did not have the same warm feelings towards the Israelis. In fact, Bashir was Israel's last man.[168] Except for Maronite and Israeli cooperation in carrying out the massacres at the Sabra and Shatila Palestinian camps in Beirut, which occurred after Bashir's death, the era of strong Israeli bonds with ranking Maronite officials had essentially come to an end, even though their occupation would last another eighteen years. Retrospectively, the Maronites had not done much to uphold their end of the alliance. Bashir and his militias generally relied on Israel to do the "dirty work" – whether it was taking out the PLO, repelling the Syrians, or saving them from 'genocide' as they did in Zahle, the Israelis often carried the Maronite burden when the latter was too weak or unwilling to do so. In return, the Maronites warmed up to the Israelis and paid them lip service when necessary, but it when it came to tangible assistance, their contributions were haphazard.

This is not to say that Israel was assisting the Maronites purely out of good will. Indeed, good will was a factor since Begin felt a moral obligation to save the Christian population. At the same time, the Maronites and the Israelis were fighting the same enemy, and the Israelis were eager to have one of their allies become the president of Lebanon so

[168] Schulze, Kirsten E. "Israeli and Maronite Nationalisms: Is a Minority Alliance 'Natural'?" *Nationalism, Minorities and Diasporas: Identities and Rights in the Middle East*. London: I.B. Tauris, 1996. 159.

that they could normalize relations with one of their neighbors. Thus, Israel's national interests in Lebanon coincided with Bashir's political and military goals, and he was willing to take advantage of Israeli power to achieve his own ends. What Begin's administration did not realize, or what they chose not to realize, was that Bashir Gemayel did not fully represent the Maronites, and the Maronites did not fully represent Lebanon. Far from having a symbiotic 'natural' bond with the Maronites during the Civil War, Israel instead had a shallow relationship with one man that was purely based on convenience.

Yet, the Begin administration's relationship with Bashir Gemayel does not paint the whole picture, even if it was the most immediate factor in their decision-making. Underneath their strategic framework lay a subconscious notion that had been developing for over a century: that Jews and Maronite Christians shared a similar mission in the Middle East as the native, cultured, and rightful heirs to their land. Both Maronite and Israeli nationalisms were most visible during the Begin-Gemayel era, and it was during this period that the relationship between the two reached its peak. Thus it is no coincidence that upon Bashir's assassination in 1982 and Begin's resignation in 1983 that the alliance was laid to rest, even as the war continued.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Throughout history, the Maronite Christians of Lebanon and the Jews of Israel have experienced various degrees of subjugation (or threats of subjugation), all of which have taken a significant toll on their world view. Their partnership in the twentieth century is a quintessential, modern-day example of how minorities interact with each other within their respective geopolitical environments, particularly when they feel threatened. The Maronite-Israeli alliance uniquely illustrates how reactionary mentalities that are based in romanticized mythologies can severely distort reality and hinder rational decision-making. In other words, irrational thinking leads to irrational decisions, and their alliance is a perfect example of this cause-and-effect phenomenon. In this concluding chapter, I will elaborate on the arguments that I have presented thus far in this thesis, detailing what I have taken away from this unique and compelling period in Lebanese-Israeli history, and speculating on the implications that such a relationship has not only for Israel or Lebanon, but for minority alliances in general.

This study of the Maronite-Israeli relationship had two main objectives. First, to understand how and why the Maronites and Jews came together in the early twentieth century, and to see whether this helped or hindered either of their security interests; and second, to determine why the proponents of the Maronite-Jewish relationship claimed that it was ‘natural’, and to demonstrate why this claim was dubious. As for my first objective, I found that it was mutual insecurity and nationalist/ideological delusions that brought both

communities together and kept them together in times of crisis, even though neither served each other's security goals the way that either of them had expected. In the end, their interests were ill-served by this relationship. The Maronites did not manage to maintain their exclusive grip on power, while the Israelis were mired in an eighteen-year occupation that only caused Israeli domestic disapproval and created new enemies for in Lebanon (particularly Hezbollah).

As for my second objective, proponents of the relationship constantly referred to the 'natural' occurrence of this relationship as the overarching reason for an alliance because they believed that, based on their historical experiences and links with Europe, that both Maronites and Jews had a unique religious, cultural, ideological bond that made their relationship special. This perspective was repeated so often that, by the time Begin came to power, it appeared that many in Maronite and Zionist circles actually believed it. In reality, this claim was dubious because both communities were religiously distinct, had completely different historical minority experiences and, perhaps most importantly, had different security objectives. The only element that bound them, I found, was their general disdain for Arabs and their determination to hold on to power. Furthermore, depending on intangible factors like 'shared nationalisms', 'naturalness', and 'cultural' or 'ideological' bonds to produce tangible results is not only unlikely, but highly irrational.

A. The Alliance, in Retrospect

The historical narrative of the Maronite-Israeli alliance presents us with a compelling dichotomy: why the alliance was expected to work, and why it ultimately failed.

The first question evolved constantly over time, but centered on two main factors: first, that Jews and (Maronite) Christians shared a link in identities, nationalisms, and global outlooks. The earliest and most vociferous proponents of the alliance, Patriarch Arida and Archbishop Mubarak, attempted to draw religious parallels between the Maronite and Jewish communities, and insisted that they had common histories of communal struggle, especially against the Arabs. Some Zionist politicians, who were facing growing dissent from the Palestinian Arabs, agreed with this rationale and sought to maintain the informal-yet-friendly relations that were incredibly difficult to find elsewhere in the region. Furthermore, the element of cultural superiority and connection with the West created a bond between them which, they believed, the "backwards" Arabs simply would not understand. Developed over time, this mentality became the foundation from which Israeli politicians (particularly Begin) later sought a more overt and direct alliance in times of regional crisis.

The second factor involves strategic motives and interests. In the early years, both communities economically benefitted each other in the entrepreneurial and tourism sectors, which promoted both monetary and cultural exchange. Additionally, faced with overbearing Arab opposition to their monopoly on power, the Maronites and the Jews perceived themselves as fighting a common Arab enemy. This was particularly apparent during the Lebanese Civil War, when the PLO threatened the communal security of the Maronites and the national security of Israel. Later, both would also oppose Syrian interference in Lebanon. In the end, the combination of both of these factors formed the backbone of Begin's decision to ally with the Maronites and invade Lebanon.

Armed with common identities, nationalist sentiments, and strategic interests, many (though certainly not all) figures in Maronite and Zionist circles were convinced that such an alliance was foolproof. However, upon taking a closer look, it becomes clear that none of these factors were true in reality, and that the only thing that both the Maronites and Israelis shared was insecurity. First of all, the 'natural' historical, cultural and religious bond between the Maronites and the Jews was theoretically dubious: their religious practices and beliefs are completely different, and their histories shared little in common. Until the Civil War, for example, the Maronites had never experienced a Diaspora. This bond was also dubious in practice, especially with the Maronites – despite all of the grandeur rhetoric that Patriarch Arida fed the Zionists, he reneged any of his commitments when pressured by Lebanese political circles. The situation was similar for the Israelis: their relationship with the Maronites, which was often tempered by political moderates, only reached epic proportions when the Right dominated the political scene. In the end, this intangible bond was an irrational justification for an alliance between two officially conflicting states, especially in light of Lebanon's incredibly fragile sectarian political system.

The inequity of the relationship was further proof that the relationship was doomed. Despite all of his promises for better relations with Israel and his professed support for the Jewish state, Bashir Gemayel – Israel's number-one ally in Lebanon – rarely followed through on anything. Not only did he practically reject Israeli requests for military assistance when the IDF was fighting Gemayel's own enemies, but he avoided formalizing relations with Israel at all costs, in order to save his own political career. Even though the Israelis had worked to put him in power, Gemayel was clearly not returning the favor.

Gemayel's lack of commitment in the relationship was countered by Begin's over-commitment to it. Despite all evidence to the contrary, Begin believed that Gemayel was Israel's best bet for normalizing relations between their two countries. Considering that Egypt had just signed a peace deal with Israel, a treaty with Lebanon would mean that almost all of their immediate neighbors would be pacified. Furthermore, Begin believed that interventionism was the only option if Israel wanted to save itself and the Maronites from genocide by the Palestinians and, later, the Syrians. His inability to distinguish between a Maronite 'Holocaust' and the tragic effects of a civil war were further proof of his inability to assess reality.

Looking back at the Maronite-Israeli relationship, it was an utter failure from the beginning because both sides held unrealistic expectations of each other, of themselves, and of the geopolitical context within which they operated based on intangible qualities and characteristics that they never shared in the first place. While both the Maronites and the Israelis certainly had the same enemies, they shared them for different reasons. The Maronites wanted to get rid of the Palestinians and the Syrians because they constituted the biggest political and demographic threat to their power. The Israelis, on the other hand, wanted to eliminate the PLO and thwart the Syrians for national security reasons, as well as to guarantee a friendly northern neighbor amid their increasing regional isolation. Ultimately, the alliance failed because it was artificial.

B. Debating the 'Naturalness' of an Alliance

Throughout my research, the concept of a 'natural' alliance constantly reappeared in Maronite and Zionist (later, Israeli) rhetoric. Both Maronite and Zionist leaders believed that there was some kind of spiritual, cultural, and/or ideological bond between the two communities based on their shared histories and experiences as minorities which made an alliance not only preferable, but logical. Within the small pool of extant literature on this topic, some authors do mention this 'natural' aspect of camaraderie, but few, if any, highlight its significance in later Maronite-Israeli interactions. It is for this reason that, in addition to their practical security concerns, I also focused on Maronite and Jewish identities, nationalisms, and ideologies to determine at what point their alliance stopped being traditional and started being 'natural'. I have argued in previous chapters – and will reiterate in this one – that their relationship was not at all 'natural,' but was instead a result of mutual insecurities and misguided perceptions of reality; a partnership of convenience, so to speak. Yet, it makes one pause for thought. For while the 'naturalness' of the alliance was conceptually farcical, the *illusion* that their partnership was natural played a major role in how the Maronites and Jews interacted with each other, especially in the early and formative years of the alliance.

Indeed, practical strategic concerns certainly fueled the alliance as well, especially in later years: as non-Muslim communities in the Middle East, the Maronites and the Jews felt increasingly threatened by their Arab neighbors. For the Maronites, allying with the Israelis was a way for them to secure their own power within Lebanon and thwart those who they believed were trying to usurp or override that power. For the Israelis, their alliance with the Maronites served their own security interests because it provided them with a partner in crippling the PLO and fighting Syria. If we look at the alliance within a

traditional context – assuming that a traditional alliance is comprised of two or more parties working together to achieve common goals that they could not easily achieve on their own – then there were certainly elements of a traditional alliance in the Maronite-Israeli example.

However, in the early twentieth century, these security concerns had not yet become an imminent and ominous threat to the Maronite and Jewish communities. For the Maronites, they had 'loving mother' France to protect their community and keep them in positions of relative power. For their part, the Jews had the British to protect them and facilitate their immigration to Palestine. Furthermore, while the Maronites and the Zionists were never particularly fond of the Arabs, their relationships with them had not always been mired in conflict. Indeed, the Zionists had little hope for an amicable relationship with the Palestinians, but they made concerted efforts at forming partnerships with other Arab communities. The Chaim-Weizmann Agreement, though short-lived, exemplified these efforts. The Maronites, for their part, had Muslim friends too: Bishara al-Khoury, a Maronite politician, was the co-creator of the National Pact with Riad al-Sulh, a Sunni. Thus, because the Israelis had not yet become a regional pariah, and because the Maronites had a working relationship with their fellow Muslim countrymen, their relationship was not necessarily self-serving or the result of a lack of alternative alliances.

Later on, however, this was exactly the case. Following a series of regional wars, Israel's prospects of forming any kind of friendly relationship with Arab countries – including Lebanon – were virtually non-existent, and its relations with Palestinian Arabs had been on a downward spiral for decades. The Maronites, too, were struggling for allies in a sectarian war that threatened their survival and their grip on power. The insecurities of

both communities hit a high-water mark, and the rhetoric between them regarding their 'natural' bond resurfaced accordingly. After decades of promoting a Maronite-Jewish relationship and capitalizing on what they believed was their historical struggle against Arab domination, it seemed that Maronite and Israeli leaders finally believed that what they had been telling each other all along was true: that they were destined to work together to preserve their unique religious and cultural heritage in the Middle East Begin, in particular, truly believed that Christians and Jews were destined to preserve their historical lands – to him, the fact that the Maronites and Israelis had maintained an alliance for all of those years demonstrated their unshakable bond. Even when it became blatantly obvious that the Maronites were not going to fully cooperate with the Israelis, he still clung to this idea.

I have outlined this concept in detail in previous chapters, so further elaboration is not necessary here. What I sought to do was to place the Maronite-Israeli relationship within the greater context of minority alliances and what, if anything, makes them 'natural.' Looking at the Maronite-Israeli relationship, we can separate this question into two seemingly-related, but significantly different categories: what made the Maronites and Jews believe that their relationship was 'natural,' and what it actually was. As for the first category, the Maronites and the Jews attributed their special relationship to religious, cultural, and ideological similarities based on their shared histories and experiences as minorities – thus, so their logic continued, it was only 'natural' for them to come together, and especially in times of crisis. The common threads between Maronite and Zionist nationalism – such as territorial entitlement and anti-Arab sentiment – further engrained the 'natural' concept, especially because these qualities were more closely aligned with their strategic goals later on. Yet, the belief that an alliance is natural does not make it 'natural'

per se, which leads me to the second category: that the Maronite-Israeli relationship was actually just a haphazard partnership promoted by irrational and extremist ideologues who had little understanding of geopolitics and of their own histories. If the relationship had actually been 'natural' as they proclaimed, it would not have faced such intense scrutiny from other members in Maronite and Zionist circles, and it probably would have survived today.

But can we say that any relationship between state or non-state actors is actually natural? While both state and non-state actors are certainly capable of demonstrating goodwill towards other communities or nation-states, the "cold power-politics" of the international system dictates that no power will deliberately put their own community at risk for the benefit of another. Bashir Gemayel demonstrated this when he refused to aid the Israelis in southern Lebanon: he believed that General Haddad was a traitor, and that any affiliation with him would ruin his chances for the presidency. Furthermore, even when he was elected president, he avoided establishing formal relations with Israel because he was unwilling to face political backlash from the Muslim (and ostensibly, some Maronite) constituents in the government. Until the consolidation of right-wing power in 1981, Israeli politicians were also very careful about their dealings with the Maronites. Rather than directly intervening on their behalf, previous Israeli administrations only indirectly aided the Maronites because they did not want to mire themselves in the anti-Zionist Lebanese political environment. On the other hand, when they shared the same strategic interests and goals, the alliance was sometimes a worthy endeavor. For the Maronites, having Israel on their side saved them from destruction in Zahle, and the Israeli intervention in 1982 quelled the Palestinians, one of the Maronites' biggest enemies in the Civil War. For the Israelis,

having a friendly ally in an unfriendly territory gave them hope for peaceful relations with one of their neighbors, while also giving them the opportunity to infiltrate Lebanese circles and gauge the security situation there.

The 'natural' alliance concept and its development over time was largely responsible for the perpetuation and intensification of the Maronite-Israeli relationship. While there were certainly advantages of the relationship from which both sides benefitted at various times, there was nothing 'natural' about it. Underneath all of the lofty and romantic rhetoric was a traditional alliance based on common strategic goals; it simply had the illusion of being natural because its supporters insisted that it was so. It seems that the Maronite and Israeli politicians who promoted the alliance were either incapable of – or unwilling to – make the important distinction between a friendly relationship and a 'natural' alliance, perhaps because such a distinction would reveal the weak foundations on which their relationship was built. In fact, I believe the Maronite-Israeli relationship demonstrates that 'natural' alliances do not exist anywhere, and that each state or non-state actor will always do what it believes is in its best interest, and will always discard what is not. Given that the Maronite-Israeli relationship no longer exists today, I believe it is safe to say that it was in neither of their best interests.

C. Looking Forward

By the time the Israeli Defense Forces unilaterally withdrew from southern Lebanon in 2000 following an eighteen-year occupation, the friendly relations that the Israelis once had with the Maronite Christians were completely shattered. The ever-

changing nature of the Lebanese political scene pushed the Maronites away from cooperation with Israel and towards domestic, internal cooperation. For their part, the Maronites did ultimately lose their monopoly on power, but now they are no longer hostile to the Arab world like they were before and during the war. In fact, many have embraced political cooperation with Lebanese Muslims, and Christians are visible in both the March 8 and March 14 coalitions. With the myth of a 'natural' bond dispelled and communal security fears allayed, the Maronites see little point in rekindling their relationship with Israel. Furthermore, the Lebanese political environment is almost unanimously anti-Israeli, so Maronites would have nothing to gain from a relationship with Israel anyway.

Similarly, Israel has no interest in "plunging into the Lebanese quagmire" again.[169] Faced with an unrelenting, militant anti-Israeli resistance movement (Hezbollah) in the South and increasing domestic Israeli opposition to their presence in Lebanon, the Israelis clearly lacked the allies and public support that they had when they first invaded in 1982. This does not mean that they distanced themselves from Lebanon completely – indeed, their 33-day bombardment of Lebanon in July 2006 following an attack by Hezbollah shows that they are still willing to use overwhelming military force in and against Lebanon when they feel that their security has been threatened or compromised. However, military incursions appear to be the extent of Israeli involvement in Lebanon for now. Following Saad Hariri's resignation as Lebanese Prime Minister in 2011, Hezbollah – one of Israel's most vocal opponents – now enjoys a legitimate majority position in the Lebanese government. Reaching out to sympathetic Lebanese political allies in this kind of political environment would be risky, to say the very least.

[169] Khashan, Hilal. "The Evolution of Israeli-Lebanese Relations." *Israel Affairs* 15:4 (2000). 331.

The post-Civil War political situation in Lebanon has witnessed some interesting developments in Maronite Christian behavior which may shed some light on minority alliances, the minority psyche, and prospects for the future of Maronite Christian political parties. After Syria officially withdrew its forces from Lebanon in 2005, ending three decades of occupation, a major dichotomy emerged in Lebanese politics: those who support Syria's presence in Lebanon (known as the March 8 coalition) and those who oppose any and all Syrian influence (known as the March 14 coalition). Both of these coalitions are comprised of a wide spectrum of political parties and religious affiliations, a rare occurrence for sectarian Lebanon. But perhaps the most interesting aspect of this coalition structure is that the same religious sect (though represented by different political parties) can be found on both sides of the divide. One major example of this is the Maronite Christians. Most Maronite political parties are very pro-March 14: the *Kata'ib* (led by Bashir's brother Amine Gemayel) and the Lebanese Forces (headed by Samir Geagea) are the largest Maronite parties within this coalition. However, the Free Patriotic Movement led by Michel Aoun positions itself within the March 8 coalition. Considering the fact that the Syrians were one of the Maronites' sworn enemies during the Civil War, it is curious that the largest Maronite party in all of Lebanon now throws its support behind the Syrian regime. Why the change of heart?

This has nothing to do with apologies or forgiveness; this is a power grab. The Free Patriotic Movement was initially part of March 14, but following constant disagreements with the other Maronite parties in the coalition, Aoun joined the March 8 coalition and signed a memorandum of understanding with Hezbollah in 2006. Clearly, Aoun, who is

widely accused of coveting the presidency,[170] was displeased with his Maronite counterparts and believed that his political aspirations were best served within the increasingly popular March 8 coalition, even though its political affiliations were historically at odds with Maronite Christian interests. Another religious minority party in Lebanon, the Progressive Socialist Party (a majority-Druze movement led by Walid Junblatt), made a similar switch from March 14 to March 8 in the lead-up to the 2009 parliamentary elections. So far, it seems that both of their decisions have served them well.

The Maronite example carries with it major implications for how minorities interact with their surrounding environment. Whether they reached out to Israel, Syria, or even to Hezbollah, it appears that the Maronites are willing to ally with any group, coalition, or country that is capable of protecting their interests and propelling them to power because they are unable to do this on their own. Though Israel's selection of potential allies was, and still is far more limited, this holds true for them too: they allied with the Maronites in the hopes of securing their northern border and saving themselves from regional isolation. Even though their hopes bore no fruit, their underlying motivation for the alliance bore a striking resemblance to what motivated the Maronites to ally with the Israelis, and later, the March 8 coalition. Thus, I reiterate that no alliance is ever 'natural'; everyone works towards their own benefit, even if it means allying with a former enemy. In that case, maybe a future alliance with Israel is not entirely out of the question.

[170] "Sleiman and Aoun in Virtual Spat." *The Daily Star*. 29 Apr. 2012. Accessed 21 May 2012.

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