The Maronite Cause

Volume I
History, Collapse, and the Case for Survival

Tony Saghbiny

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The Path of Freedom for Christians in Lebanon

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Mount Lebanon 2026

To the stewards, the warriors, the monks, and all the unknown heroes walking the mountain path…

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Preface

How to read the two-volume edition

This work was originally conceived and drafted as a single volume.

As the manuscript grew, it became clear that it was carrying **two distinct but inseparable tasks**:

1. **to establish the historical and political record** of our nation from origins, through the making and unmaking of the Lebanese state, to the present moment; and
2. **to argue a way forward** for all Christians in Lebanon through defining the threats, clarifying the doctrine, assessing models and constraints, and eventually presenting a practical roadmap for sovereignty and survival.

In a single large book, these two tasks can create a predictable risk: some readers will engage with the historical case but will not reach the strategic program. Others will seek the roadmap but feel they must "push through" an academic first half to earn it. A two-volume edition resolves that tension without compromising the unity of the argument.

This edition is therefore published as:

Volume I — History, Collapse, and The Case for Survival (chapters 1–7)

Volume I builds the foundation. It traces the long arc of the Maronite experience and the modern political trajectory of

Christians in Lebanon. It culminates in a central conclusion: **the Lebanese state, as it currently exists and functions, no longer guarantees the survival of Christians as a vibrant and free community.** It is the evidentiary and diagnostic volume using history as proof. It corrects the narrative of Modern Lebanon as seen from a Christian perspective, making it the basis for any serious proposal for their future.

Volume II — the program (chapters 8–14)

Volume II begins where Volume I ends. It moves from diagnosis to doctrine and design. In the second volume, we map existential threats, articulate the Maronite spirit as something worth preserving and as a political posture, extract lessons from small nations, examine autonomy models in Mount Lebanon, and outline a concrete roadmap. We move from idea to institutional reality while confronting the risks, opposition, and obstacles that any such project must face.

Each volume is written to be coherent on its own. Readers may choose to begin with either one, depending on their purpose. Some will prefer to start with the historical record; others will start with the roadmap and return to the record as needed. If you are starting with Volume II, it is beneficial to read the introduction of Volume I, as it serves as the presentation of both volumes. It is also best to read through Chapter 7 that outlines the current failures of the Lebanese Republic, providing the essential reason why we're arguing for autonomy instead of reform.

The two volumes are intended to be read as a single argument in two parts: **foundation, then construction; evidence, then execution.**

If Volume I asks, How did we arrive here? Then Volume II asks, What must be built, lawfully, strategically, and patiently, for a future to be possible?

Introduction

I didn't want to write such a book. In a perfect world, I'd be busy tending my fruit trees in the Shouf mountains and spending time with my family, while you, dear reader, would also be focusing on building your own life and "just living" without carrying the heavy burden of existential geopolitics.

Alas, if you're reading this now, I assume that we have the same worry that keeps us up at night: our concern for the lives and future of our community.

Unfortunately for both of us, we live in remarkably interesting times. In historical times. Entire nations are being put to the test and their destiny decided for several generations ahead. Such times require big thinking, big ideas, and a lot of bravery. This book intends to be exactly that: a brave venture into a forbidden conversation.

Our region is boiling, and Lebanon itself is not going through a normal storm that will clear on its own. It is living the endgame of a system built on empty promises. A system where governance is a trade of favors, where law is the rule of the strongest, where freedom is negotiated and decent life is a rarity. It's a system where bargains and failures extending over more than a century are called a republic.

WHY DOES THIS BOOK EXIST?

The true problems of the Lebanese Republic are not a deficit in currency or electricity; they're the result of a terminally flawed republic.

Politics gridlock. Courts delay and bend. Borders leak and bristle. Ministries speak in the language of deals while delivering little to citizens. In such a house, religious and personal freedoms aren't merely threatened; they grow thin to the point of breaking. Language and identity become decoration. Faith becomes private consolation. Land becomes real estate instead of covenant. Even the ordinary work of adulthood, schooling a child, planning a business, repairing a car, or getting an official paper, all turn heroic, then impossible.

This is not a mood; it is a structure. For Maronites and Christians, who have historically relied on institutions aligned with their freedom of worship, their life ethics, and their way of land governance, the structure's failure is existential. A people can survive hardship; they cannot survive indefinite institutional failure.

We write this book because time is short and our community deserves clarity and a way forward.

Of course, we're not the only ones seeking radical solutions to the Lebanese problem. The country is brimming with new ideas and daring proposals. That said, we want to go unapologetically further into what many consider a taboo: establishing a state for Christians in Mount Lebanon.

I'm familiar with the standard reaction whenever this solution is proposed: a set of understandable concerns that's sometimes mixed with anger and indignation, followed by a litany of excuses and objections of why this wouldn't work.

"Reform from within" promises that a better coalition or a cleaner election will alter the country's architecture. "Federalism" offers the grammar of decentralization where

each community can rule itself to a certain degree. Both are comforting but re-centralize failure.

Meanwhile, each year of drift depletes more parishes and schools of our young and turns our villages and cities into a summer memory. Our community is being offered the option to die politely, by assimilation into the pleasant anonymity of elsewhere, or by integration into the identity and culture of others. That is one path, but one we refuse.

The other is renewal, grounded not in nostalgia or anger, but in building a political home scaled to our duties and able to keep promises in daylight and through darker nights.

WHY THE MARONITES?

The vision we propose in this book is inclusive of all Christians in Lebanon and the state we envision guarantees the rights for all its citizens, regardless of their religion. The Mountain State, however, is deeply aligned with the Maronite Cause, and I wanted to speak with my community directly first, as I believe the Maronites are an essential element required to make this project work.

I also can't claim to speak for other communities or understand their history and dreams better than their own. Our duties as individuals lie with our communities first; especially when it's facing one of its most dangerous existential challenges.

The Maronites are intrinsically linked to Mount Lebanon, and it's almost impossible to discuss the destiny of the Mountain without having them at the heart of it.

The Maronites are one of the most enduring Christian peoples of the Middle East, and they stand at a decisive threshold. For centuries, the mountains of Lebanon have sheltered their monasteries, villages, and way of life. From the time of Saint Maron's disciples who sought refuge in rugged valleys, to the Mutasarrifate that offered a fragile yet real form of autonomy, Maronites survived not by accident but by will, faith, and attachment to their Mount Lebanon fortress.

Today, the Maronite legacy faces its greatest trial. The Lebanese Republic, once imagined as a homeland for Christians and a model of coexistence, has completely collapsed into corruption, foreign dependency, and sectarian imbalance. The central state no longer guarantees sovereignty, nor protects the freedoms of its citizens. For Maronites in particular and Christians in general, it has brought demographic decline, political marginalization, and mass emigration. What was promised as a pluralistic refuge has turned into a structure that accelerates their disappearance.

Unfortunately, amid this dangerous decline, most of today's Maronites are disconnected from their roots, ignorant of their history, detached from their culture, and unaware of their cause, drifting slowly into a future that wants to erase them. This book wants to help remedy this problem.

This doesn't mean that this book is for Maronites only. We call on Maronites through these pages to embrace their own cause of self-determination and governance in their historical homeland, but this book is also for all young Lebanese Christians who no longer trust speeches and who want to weigh claims by whether they can be realized, repeated, and scaled. If you are falling into despair about fixing the

Lebanese Republic and are skeptical of sect noise and theatrics but you want a rights-first solution that works when the cameras are off, then this book is also for you.

This book is also for diaspora Maronites and Christians who will not accept nostalgia as a strategy and who are determined to be co-owners of a future, not donors to a memory.

Finally, this book is also for secular friends and fair-minded neighbors from all beliefs and sects, who are also, like us, looking for solutions, but who want to judge any proposal by law, restraint, competence, and transparency rather than by slogans or lineage.

This book is for those who are tired and searching for a real agenda; those who want a country with true freedom, quiet borders, binding courts, honest budgets, and schools that reproduce our culture and do not apologize for it.

This book is for those who know why the church bells of Mount Lebanon should always ring.

WHAT IS THE MARONITE CAUSE?

This book seeks to answer an existential question: *how can the Maronites and Christians of Lebanon endure?*

It does so on two levels. First, as a reference work, it traces the religious, political, and cultural history of the Maronites, drawing from sources both Arabic and Western, from Istifan al-Duwayhi to modern historians. It examines the failure of the Lebanese state, not as a matter of passing politics, but as a structural flaw with existential consequences.

Second, as a political guide, it proposes a path forward: the re-imagination of Mount Lebanon as a Christian homeland, a state that protects their existence and culture while guaranteeing freedom for all Christians who seek refuge in the Middle East.

Our proposition is simple and stark. The central state of Lebanon has structurally failed us Christians. Survival with dignity requires a lawful return to Mount Lebanon as the fortress of freedom: a small, neutral, lawful polity where rights have rails, where one chain of coercion exists under civilian law, where services are predictable, and budgets are boring in the best way.

We do not present a miracle or a shortcut. We present a sequence that adult politics always require: consciousness → organization → parallel institutions → legitimacy → consent.

First, a confident political culture that knows what it is for and what it refuses; then a disciplined grassroots body that can meet, serve, and hold a tone; then a set of useful institutions that quietly perform the state's essential tasks; then layers of domestic and international legitimacy built on performance, and only then acts of public consent to make sovereignty lasting and peaceful.

The measure of success is not a banner on a building or a news headline. It is a governable life: a border you do not think about, a court date that arrives on time, a school bell that rings for Syriac and for science, water that runs clear, a ledger that balances, and a quiet doctrine of neutrality that becomes an element of regional stability.

Because this is an introduction and not a conclusion, we will not rehearse our evidence here or anticipate every objection. The chapters will do that work, but it's important to note

something obvious first: when we say a state for Christians in Mount Lebanon, we don't mean a Christian state in the theocratic sense, nor in the pure demographic sense. Mount Lebanon is also home to the Druze and other sects, in addition to individuals who do not fall into traditional beliefs, and the freedom and rights of all of them would be guaranteed. What we mean is a Christian-majority state that unapologetically protects and supports the present and future of Christians in the Mountain. The Mountain State we envision is one based on equal rights and modern rule of the law, not discrimination, not expulsions, and not oppression of any minority or majority because of their culture or beliefs. This doesn't mean that such a State would follow the misguided politics of tolerance that enable intolerant elements to abuse the system; the freedom of thought and belief does not and should not extend to ideologies that want to eradicate and erase Christians or others.

That said, what follows is a brief map of the book so the reader knows where each rung of the ladder sits and what it delivers.

Part I: The Historical Roots of the Maronite Nation

Chapter 1 — Origins of The Maronite Nation

We examine the history of the Maronites from Mar Maroun to the Ottomans and explain why Maronite freedom historically grew from the mountain's geography, economy, and liturgy, and why that pattern still matters now.

Chapter 2 — Under The Ottoman Shadow

We analyze the development of the Maronite Nation in the Mountain under the Ottoman Empire with a focus on the experiments of Fakherdin II and the Mutasarrifate that translated the deep Maronite inclination for self-rule in the Mountain.

Chapter 3 — The Birth of the Lebanese Republic

We examine the Maronite role and logic in the creation of the Lebanese Republic and the structural problems and transformations in Christian society that came with it from inception to independence.

Part II: The Long Collapse of the Lebanese Republic

Chapter 4 – The Lebanese Dream Broken

We investigate the crisis of 1958 and the compromise that followed that paved the way to the bloody civil war of 1975.

Chapter 5 – Civil War and the Maronite Struggle

We examine the civil war, not to re-narrate it, but to extract useful lessons from the strategies, goals, victories, and losses that Christians went through in 15 years of war.

Chapter 6 – Post-Taif Decline and Marginalization

We look into the state of Christians and Maronites in the Lebanese Republic post-Taif and shed light on the security dualism, emigration, and gradual bleed and loss of influence Christians experienced post-war.

Part III: Broken Dreams, Old Threats and New Hopes

Chapter 7 – Why the Lebanese State no Longer Protects Maronite Survival

We explore what a failed state means for the future of Maronites and Christians in Lebanon and evaluate if this failure is terminal.

Chapter 8 – Existential Threats to Maronites and Christians

We go in-depth over the main elements that pose an existential threat for Christians in Lebanon, including Political Islam, demographic decline, cultural loss of identity, and structural majoritarianism in the Lebanese Republic.

Chapter 9 – The Maronite Spirit: Why we Fight

We post and answer a simple question: why fight for our identity and homeland when we can simply leave or accept a slow drift into oblivion? We name the elements of the Maronite Spirit and argue why identity is worth preserving without apology.

Part IV: The Way Forward

Chapter 10: Lessons from Small Nations

We distill what can be adapted and what must be avoided from the experience of other peoples who secured a sovereign space for themselves.

Chapter 11: Autonomy in Mount Lebanon: The Case for Independence

We discuss precedents and proposed solutions for the Lebanese problem, including reforms and federalism, and make the case for an independent Mount Lebanon and

whether it's viable on the political, economic, and security levels.

Chapter 12 – Envisioning a Mountain State for the 21st Century

We share a vision for the Mountain State worth the sacrifices of our people and the blood and sweat needed to achieve it. We highlight the Mountain's focus on rights as fixed rails, a single chain of coercion, neutrality, transparent finances, and subsidiarity.

Part V: The Roadmap to a Free Mount Lebanon

Chapter 13 — Mount Lebanon Autonomy: From Idea to Reality

We set a political roadmap that begins with consciousness and ends with legitimacy, grounded in service, law, and a tone the undecided can trust.

Chapter 14 — Risks, Opposition and Obstacles: A Long Road Ahead

We map internal, regional, and international resistance and the doctrine for navigating it without swagger or surrender. We also outline the possible scenarios that can happen as the independence agenda gains momentum.

A Vision for The Future

We paint the end-state on a human scale: a secure home for Christians, a beacon of ordered freedom and stability in the region, and a living continuity with the Maronite mission.

You will not find party arguments or sectarian theater here. You will find mechanisms, timelines, and moral clarity. Where we claim, we show the numbers. Where we warn, we name. Where we propose, we keep the proposal realistic and measurable.

Over the course of this book, I try my best to reference every claim, but as this work does not intend to be a full historical or political narration, we focus on what we think is more relevant to our cause. As I work a full-time job and drafted this book during long nights and busy weekends, some mistakes might have occurred, which are completely my responsibility. That said, I think any inaccuracies within the human margin of error don't detract from the central message.

If you already agree with the destination but lack a route, this book supplies it. If you doubt the destination but are willing to listen to the tone of political realism, this book is an invitation. If you are young and tempted to emigrate, it is a plea, that wherever you go, you can carry the light of what an autonomous mountain could mean for your life and the lives of those around you.

We argue for letting go of a failed republic, for facing the hard choices before us, for reclaiming the mountain, and answering the call with faith, courage, and will.

This is not a dream detached from reality. The Maronites have always chosen survival over despair. All the Christian sects of this land endured for 1,500 years in the most complicated and hostile region in the world. They fought with bows and slings when the caliphates banned them from carrying swords. They built schools while others built armies. They carved terraces into mountainsides when

empires taxed them into poverty. They carried their faith in their chants and in their hearts through exile, through caves and valleys, and through wars, famine and persecution.

Each time they seemed destined for disappearance, they re-emerged from their mountains, resilient and unbroken.

Lebanon as a centralized state has failed, but Mount Lebanon as a Maronite and Christian homeland, remains possible. The mountains still stand, as they did for eternity. The task is to remember, to plan, and to act.

We begin, then, not with despair, but with a decision. We will not ask you to inherit a feeling or to cling to some vague hope; we will ask you to inherit a task. Read with a pencil. Argue with our steps. Evaluate our ideas and put your hands into building the future of our community.

Whatever else changes, two facts do not: no identity survives long without institutions that protect it, and no institutions last long without a people willing to carry them. If this book does its work, it will give you reasons to do the carrying — and a mountain worth the climb.

Whether you are a Maronite in Lebanon, a descendant in the diaspora, or simply someone who cares for the future of Christian presence in the East, this book is both a record and a call. A record, so that the history of a people is not lost or distorted. A call, so that the Maronites may once again take up their cause, not in arrogance, but in faith and courage.

The choice is before us: assimilation into silence, or renewal into freedom.

History has given the Maronites a mountain. They are invited to be strong enough to claim it.

My Journey Back to the Mountain

As it is with these kinds of things, a lot of discussions about the ideas proposed here might devolve into questioning the author's personal motivations and worldview, so a short disclaimer might be beneficial here.

Like most Maronites of my generation, I've spent many years of my adult life as a secular liberal with strong leftist inclinations. I'm a political scientist by training, with a master's degree in political science from the Lebanese University, but for many years I was a writer first and a political activist.

Like most Maronites, I grew up in a household that reveres Bashir Gemayel and respects the sacrifices of traditional Christian parties, although most of my family, small and extended, are not members of any political party. My personal path from this upbringing goes a bit extreme.

My teenage rebellion took me to a short month of training with a Leftist Palestinian Organization in Bekaa, and then my high school and university years were spent exploring, evaluating, and being a member of different far-left and nationalist organizations. I walked my talk: I studied in what's called the first branch of the Lebanese University, where I was the only Christian in class. I lived in the Southern suburbs for years. I shared bread and activities and political actions with Amal, Hezbollah, PSP, the Communist Party, SSNP, and others. I even clashed with Lebanese Forces and FPM members on occasions. When the 2006 war with Israel happened, I was in a mobilization unit in a student leftist organization, ready for engagement and stationed in an area that witnessed heavy air operations.

My activism and membership with these organizations were short but deep enough to become disillusioned with leftism and traditional political parties in a few short years. By my 4th year of university, I had learned a lot but came to realize that these organizations have strong Islamic tendencies inside them, are immune to real secularization, and are empty dysfunctional shells with nice slogans, using the naivety of their young members to acquire money and power. I decided to go my own way, leaving activism and leftism behind.

Fate had it that my first job after graduation was in a newspaper that was known for being the intellectual center of the so-called "resistance axis." I still hesitantly considered myself on the left back then, until Hezbollah's attack on the capital in 2008 ended that hesitation and drove me to resign from my position and abandon journalism altogether. After that time, the Left in my eyes was dead, and I realized that "the axis" is the embodiment of something extremely vile.

The next few years were also rich with exploration where I became close to environmental and rights-based organizations, including several prominent NGOs in Beirut. I wanted to examine if this scene can be a conducive environment for political change and a functional alternative to traditional political parties. This was between 2008 and 2012, during the height of the Arab Spring and Occupy Wall Street movement, when politics in the entire world were shifting. Like with the left, these "modern" organizations and grassroots initiatives proved utterly incapable of delivering any true change. I authored a book about my experience and the failures of this style of millennial politics, titled "*The Millennium Curse*," where I criticized the tactics, strategies, and ideas of such movements and moved on.

As I kept exploring, disillusioned yet again, the liberal, secularist and leftist currents were moving fast to what was considered previously the fringe left. The movement became an obsessive focus on genitals, sexual orientations, and personal behavior, with politics that increasingly align with Political Islam and the mainstream establishments they used to oppose.

At the same time, regional politics were moving equally fast in the direction of Political Islam, with the Muslim Brotherhood electing a president in Egypt, Libya disintegrating, Sudan becoming two countries, Iraq plunging into civil sectarian war, and the establishment of a full-blown Islamic Caliphate in Syria. All developments that made me and many others wonder about the impact it'll have on our communities and our future in this region.

Like most Christian men of my generation, a point came in my life where I had to choose between staying in Lebanon and failing as an adult or leaving the country to give myself and my family a chance. I ended up working in the Gulf region for years and came back with my savings in September 2019, just in time for the Lebanese banks to steal all my money. In one month, the Lebanese Republic undid all my life's hard work and deprived me of the ability to build a life back home and establish a family. Just like the millions of other Lebanese back then, I lived through the complete collapse of the state and suffered the results of 30 years of "axis" rule.

I had to leave for another two years to go to the Gulf, but I couldn't stomach more exile, so I returned. My return this time was even more eye-opening: the country changed deep and fast and isn't recognizable to me anymore. Syrian

refugees make up almost half the population, Hezbollah rules every corner of the state, nothing in government or public life is functional, and Christians have been systematically erased and displaced. The level of state failure that people at this point consider "normal" was jarring. The decline of Maronite and Christian communities was palpable and alarming, but major Christian parties were still hung up on trivial politics and name-calling without any true plans to address the situation. Most people I know have already left the country, are trying to emigrate, or have simply been exhausted and are just trying to survive.

This time, I've also returned in time to live through Hezbollah's new war and its long-term consequences. The two years I spent in Lebanon since then were punctuated by the usual frustrations and struggles of daily life and more goodbyes to friends and family.

However, since coming back the first time in 2019, I made it my purpose to reconcile with my heritage and do my part in serving my community. That started first with writing "*The Warrior Path,*" outlining what I feel is an integral part of the Mountain's Identity, and continues with this book, being another natural result of this effort.

Now of course, for some, my personal story might invalidate my propositions. Some people just cannot overcome their personal biases when evaluating new ideas, but here's what I think is important:

First, I'm just a normal guy who spent most of his youth trying to contribute to making this country better, sacrificing jobs, comforts, relationships, and time and money, without reaping any personal benefits or amassing titles and wealth in return. I explored different approaches and solutions

without prejudice, and I collaborated with individuals from all backgrounds with a completely open mind. I'm not a politician nor belong to any party, and I'm not some social media personality. I barely use the internet and prefer to avoid the headache of daily politics and digital arguments. I've been through what everyone else in this country has been through and like most, I had no support, no ideology, and no network to shield me from the harsh realities of Lebanon. Like others, I had to deal with the failings of an entire country on my own. That means my conclusions come from my personal experience and from a place of knowledge, not from preconceptions. I present the conclusions I made as a political scientist first, and a person who's lived through the hell of this republic second.

Second, given the background of my journey, my path to the Maronite Cause was extremely long, colorful, and deep. I didn't inherit this path and didn't come to it as a traditional sectarian Lebanese or because I don't like other sects. I didn't come to these conclusions because I don't know or understand secular and Islamo-leftist alternatives, but exactly the opposite. What I present in this book is the result of logic, reason, and research. I'm still what you would consider secular, believing in the separation of Church and State. Spiritually, my leanings are deeply esoteric, and I'm reconciled with my Christian faith, but my understanding of the Divine might lead some to classify me as a heretic at best and pagan at worst. I've been in Muslim mosques and Hindu temples and Buddhist stupas and pagan megaliths as a student and seeker of truth and knowledge. I washed my face with the salted water of Bourj Al Barajneh, was ready to fight when Israel was invading in 2006, I protested in front of the American Embassy in Awkar, and sat in long meetings

with Beiruti NGOs where I was told that my voice as a man is a micro-aggression, and I shouted against the political class in the uprising of October 2019. I didn't come to the calling of the Maronite Cause from a place of narrow-mindedness or tribal belonging, but from a place of rationality and care for my community. This is what I think gives me a unique perspective that I want to share through these pages.

I learned the hard way that no slogan matters if your community's future is on the line. I learned that exploring the world means nothing if you lose your homeland. And I learned that no idea is worth its salt if it doesn't preserve the freedom and well-being of your community.

Third, I know most Maronites and Christians in the Mountain have a story similar to mine, maybe not in the same details, but in growing up with an identity that transcended our communal belonging, and in leading a life that adopted universal ideals. The vast majority of Maronites today are influenced by Lebanonism, Liberalism, and Leftism, to different degrees. I think we were lucky enough to explore and a bit misguided, and had a luxury of options in life, enabled by the sacrifices of those who came before us. Now it's our turn to do the work to make sure the Christian generations that come after us will enjoy the same freedoms, but with better lives and a functional state. I also feel that my journey is a testament to the righteousness of the Maronite Cause; it's a truth so bright that it could bring someone back from the farthest reaches of the extreme left. I think this can help others do the same.

At the time of writing this book, I am working with other individuals and groups to make this dream a reality, but it's important to note that all the opinions expressed here are completely my own personal views, and do not necessarily

express or align with those groups or individuals. Any criticism of the content outline here should be directed exclusively at me.

Today, our community needs us, and as I returned to the Mountain after a long journey, I hope this book will help you to do the same. Maybe your distance is shorter than I had to travel, maybe it's longer, but there's definitely a journey that you also need to make, dear reader, coming back to the valleys and slopes of our homeland. I hope this book will accompany you on it. See you on the Mountain's path.

Part I

Historical Roots of the Maronite Nation

Chapter 1

Origins of Song and Stone

The Making of The Maronite Nation

At the lip of the Kadisha gorge, the wind is colder than the sun suggests. On a ledge barely wider than a mule's path, a boy and his grandfather pause before a dark mouth in the cliff. The old man traces a cross into his chest, as his father did before him, and as his father's father did before them, and tells his boy, "Here is where they prayed and chanted, here is where they endured".

Inside the cave are not treasures but traces of a tenacious nation: crosses and stairs cut directly into rock, soot-scored vaults, faint frescoes, and hidden chapels. This isn't just a place, the old man says, but a way of living: rock for shelter, prayer for soul, and a road that climbs into heaven when the world below burns.

The Maronite identity isn't some ideological doctrine that was envisioned in books and closed rooms, but a living culture that was carved on the rocks of Mount Lebanon over hundreds of generations.

It took shape at the nexus of a blessed mountain, a deep faith, and centuries of struggle. The Maronite nation was forged by Mount Lebanon's valleys and cliffs, disciplined by the dangers that surrounded it, and sustained by a life of prayer and work.

To understand why such people would insist on the guarantees of self-rule, we must first see how the Mountain trained them to survive and how faith ordered that survival.

This chapter is about where our people came from: how a Syriac Christian community, later called Maronites, formed its identity between the fifth and the early sixteenth centuries.

It offers a careful, source-based narrative: first, the monastic seed around St. Maron and the open-air asceticism that founded an ethos of endurance. Second, it examines the mountain habitat that turned geography into a refuge and school. And third, it recounts the long centuries of pressure starting with the Byzantines and Islamic caliphates up to the Ottomans, when survival required both prayer and arms.

And finally, we examine the consolidation of a people who, by the eve of the Ottoman takeover in 1516 AD, had learned to live in the shelter of cliffs, through the cadence of Syriac hymns, and in the discipline of small communities.

Through the centuries, when larger powers passed over them, the Maronites learned to be "invisible to empires and visible to each other"[1]: keeping fasts, keeping silence, and keeping watch.

I. St. Maron and The Foundation of Ascetic Endurance

Our oldest detailed window into the spiritual DNA at the root of Maronite identity comes from Theodoret of Cyrrhus's *Religious History* (also known as *A History of the Monks of Syria*), composed in the mid-fifth century.

In a brief but vivid chapter titled "On Maron," Theodoret depicts a hermit who chose the elements of nature over the comforts of sheltered life, spending his days in "continually hymning the lord."[2]

St. Maron lived in 350–410, in Al-Assi Valley in what's today northern Syria: "Embracing the open-air life", Theodoret writes of him, "he repaired to a hill-top formerly honored by the impious… [and] pitched a small tent which he seldom used." Theodoret's sketch is brief yet loaded: the site is reclaimed cultic ground; the asceticism is conspicuously exposed to heat and frost, and the shelter exists but is barely used. Since the very beginning of this path, endurance was seen as a testament of will and faith, which converted the surrounding populace through word and practice.

A second passage, this one on Eusebius of Asikha, a disciple of St. Maron's, unpacks the practical edge of such endurance: the hermit "continued for the rest of his life to endure the hardship of the open air… feeding on chick-peas and beans soaked in water; and sometimes he ate dried figs."[3]

For the first Maronite monks, such a tough life was made by choice: a testament of their commitment to the path of Christ, and a single-pointed quest for communion with the Divine. The path of Maronite monks in life and worship was surviving extreme hardships without the distractions and comforts of normal life.

From such testimonies, scholars infer a distinctive Syriac asceticism that prized deep contemplation, self-reliance, and the endurance of weather, hunger, and monotony. It was an ascetic "school" Theodoret thought Maron had "planted" like a "garden", and it sprouted many trees and gathered disciples and believers without effort.[4]

The Maronite community at the time was entirely shaped by ascetic discipline, where monks built small monasteries and drew the surrounding laity into rhythms of prayer and labor[5].

The earliest Maronites, therefore, were not "Western Catholics" in origin that suddenly appeared in the mountains during the Crusades, nor leftovers of the Byzantine army or Arabs who happened to be Christian. They were an Antiochene community whose liturgical language, rites, and monastic culture were West-Syriac.

Latinizing influences came centuries afterward, especially from the 12th century onward, while arabizing influences followed in the 19th and 20th centuries, but those cultures are not the founders of the tradition.[6]

The relationship of the Maronites with Lebanon starts from the beginning of their story.

Around the year 402, Abraham of Cyrrhus, remembered in Maronite memory as the *"Apostle of Lebanon"*, undertook missionary work among the pagan and semi-Christian populations of the Phoenician hinterland and the northern Mountain slopes. Abraham linked new converts to the Maronite ascetic network on the Assi River and planted the first stable communities in Mount Lebanon[7]. By the mid-fifth century, monasteries and dependent villages were already well established in the Mountain as the natives of Lebanon embraced the message[8].

Despite its young age, the Maronite community relied on clear institutional habits: fixed hours of prayer, a close relationship with the open nature, common work, hospitality to kin and charity for travelers, quick mobilization in crisis, and strict hierarchy.

These habits became social reflexes that later carried families through centuries of sieges, famine, and war.

By the 6th century, Maronite communities became big and visible enough that conflict found them.

When the Council of Chalcedon (451) defined the union of Christ's two natures "without confusion, without change, without division, without separation," it affirmed a creed that Maronites were already aligned with[5], but that choice had consequences that echoed for centuries.

The definition of Chalcedon became a creedal touchstone in which Maronites found a way of life that placed them in communion with Jesus The Son of Man, who went through their same human suffering willingly, as much as it connected them with Jesus The Son of God.

The Chalcedonian alignment, however, although natural for Maronites, exposed them to hostility from rivals within the faith, accelerating their drift to defensible high valleys and consolidating the monastery-village pattern that would later define their Lebanese history.

The religious tensions came to a tipping point in the year 517, when several Syriac and Greek chronicles record an attack on the monastery of St. Maron[9]. Monks were killed, and houses of worship were burned, marking the first large-scale trauma in Maronite history.

II. The Attack on the First Monastery: Memory and Resolve

The earliest shared memory of communal hardship in Maronite tradition is the attack on the Monastery of Maron on the Assi River in 517 AD.

The episode sits inside the faultlines that opened after Chalcedon: disputes over the nature of Christ and God hardened affiliations and made monasteries targets of persecution because they were centers of influence with their focus on teaching, copying, and lay formation.

The intensity of the conflicts at that time was not religious in nature but more political: a struggle of domination between different centers of power in the increasingly fractured Roman empire. As Rome, Constantinople, and Alexandria competed for influence, the Roman Emperor attempted to forge political unity through a unified religious doctrine by convening the Council of Chalcedon. This initiative accomplished the opposite of what it intended and made the schism deeper and more violent.

The attack on St. Maron Monastery was reported by Greek and Syriac chroniclers. Theophanes the Confessor (9th c.) alludes to massacres amid doctrinal strife, while Michael the Syrian (12th c.) explicitly describes an assault on the Maronite monks at the Assi monastery by opponents in the faith. The sources do not agree on the number of victims, but they agree on bloodshed at a site emblematic of Chalcedonian fidelity.[10]

This is a formative memory in Maronite history that ignited many social and political mechanisms of endurance for this

growing community and cemented a path in which it's understood that belief required courage and sacrifice.

The lesson taken by later generations was also practical: Maronite institutions like monasteries, scriptoria, parish schools, and villages must be designed to survive persecution cycles.

In other words, the 517 trauma accelerates the institutional hardening that will mark Maronite life in the Mountain: multiple small houses rather than one great abbey; duplication of manuscripts; dispersal of leadership; a structured communal life based on mutual aid and the habit of moving the center when it is threatened.[11]

This event led to an accelerated displacement of monks and institutions into the impenetrable northern Lebanese range, where many local communities had already adopted the Maronite way.

III. Yuḥannā Mārūn and The Genesis of a Nation

The clash between the Eastern Roman Empire and the invading Arab armies bloodied the seventh century. On top of religious tensions with Constantinople, Maronites also had to contend with the Arab invasion that brought a new level of brutality to the region.

The period following the Arab invasion of the Levant was marred by chaos and blood. Among the Christian communities of the Levant, the Maronites chose to resist and paid the price dearly. Wherever the Islamic armies landed in the Levant, they gave Christians a choice: sign the terms of what became known as The Pact of Umar or face the

consequences. Maronites, among many other Christian sects, chose to face the consequences.

The Pact of Umar was formulated in the year 637 and organized the life and political rights of Christians under the Islamic caliphates.

It dictated in line with Islamic Sharia that churches were not allowed to be built or repaired; buildings and people were not allowed to display crosses publicly, and Church bells were forbidden from ringing. A Christian couldn't take a position in the army and was banned from many professions. Christians were not allowed to buy land, own horses or weapons or even dress like Muslims, and were mostly confined to specific living quarters even in cities.[12]

Legally, the testimony of non-Muslims (such as a Christian or a Jew) was not considered valid against the testimony of a Muslim in legal and civil matters. This contributed increasingly to Christians losing their wealth, property, and even sons and wives in any local conflict with their Muslim neighbors.

Even those who submitted to the pact weren't spared from losing life and property. When the Islamic leader Amr ibn al-'As conquered Tripoli in 643, for example, he forced the Jewish and Christian natives to give their wives and children as slaves to the Arab army as part of their *jizya*[13].

The Lebanese historian, Philip Hitti, writes that "Disabilities, particularly those imposed by the Ummayyad 'Umar, [and later] the Abbasid al-Muttawakkil, and the Fatimid al-Hakim" made the Christian minorities at best "second-class citizens".

These were not acceptable terms for the Maronites. In the decades that followed, a giant figure appeared in the Maronite community that completed their transformation from a monastic movement into an ecclesial nation and saved them from the turbulences of history. This figure is none other than John Maron (Yuḥannā Mārūn), the first Maronite Patriarch (c. 685).

The historical details about Yuḥannā Mārūn are scarce, but the impact attributed to this character is so deep that some earlier Catholic sources doubted his existence and attested him to be a mythological figure, rather than a historical one.[14]

However, this leader's memory was strong enough to organize a patriarchal line that lasted across millennia. There are credible medieval Maronite chronicles and later Latin writers that affirm a patriarchate that consolidates leadership in the Lebanon range against both old and new enemies in the late seventh century[15].

What the tradition outlines is this: at the Byzantine Arab frontier, a Maronite bishop gathered monasteries and laity, pivoted leadership from the Assi valley into the Lebanese mountains, and held the line during the turmoil of Byzantine wars and Arab conquests. Eventually, he ensured the survival and prosperity of his people[16].

Yuḥannā Mārūn wasn't just a religious figure but a capable military leader and a statesman who established the Maronites as a self-governing nation with its own regulations, languages, army, and land.

Yuḥannā Mārūn commanded the first Maronite army, which came to be known to the Arabs as al-Jarājima or as the

Mardaites (al-marada), and fought against both the Byzantine Empire and invading Arab forces.

In this era, we see two identities fusing, sometimes becoming one: the monk who prays and learns, and the mountain warrior who fetches water and watches borders.

The roots of the transformation of the Maronites from a monastic order into a nation are found in the void left by the Byzantine Roman withdrawal from the Levant amid rising Arab pressure.

The seat of the Chalcedonian Patriarch of Antioch was vacant since 609, as the last patriarch was killed and his titular patriarchs resided instead in Constantinople from that time onwards.

The election of Yuḥannā Mārūn as a Patriarch of Antioch came at a time when all the Christians of the Levant were looking not just for spiritual leadership but also for a governing body that guarantees their safety and freedom in the face of Islamic conquest and its humiliating jizya system.

When Damascus fell into Umayyad hands in 634, followed by the fall of Jerusalem in 636-38, the Byzantine empire was already exhausted from a decades-long conflict with the Sassanids in Persia. Constantinople was increasingly unable to achieve order in the Levant and resist the Arabic expansion.

In Lebanon, the invading Arab armies led by Yazid and Mu'awiyah conquered the coast around 635, passing Beirut and Tripoli into Arab-Islamic hands. Another Arab-Islamic army led by Khalid Ibn Al-Walid conquered the Bekaa plain, reaching Baalbek around the same time. Arab Islamic armies,

however, never entered or conquered Mount Lebanon, which was protected by the Maronite Army.

The Maronites fought fiercely to repel the Arab invasion, forcing Mu'awiyah and later the Islamic Caliph Abd al-Malik bin Marwan to pay tribute to Constantinople to stop their incursions on Syrian territory. In return, Emperor Justinian II tried to relocate the main Maradaite force to Byzantine-controlled territories in Anatolia and Greece. Many warriors refused the order and stayed in Mount Lebanon to defend the faith[17].

The election of Yuḥannā Mārūn marked him as the political and spiritual leader for all Christians in the Near East, in a time when Maronite presence spread from Aleppo in the north to Damascus in the center and Jerusalem in the south.

However, Byzantium was marred by internal political conflicts at the time, and this move was seen as an act of rebellion.

Constantinople sent several armies to subjugate the Maronites, including a raid that burned and pillaged St. Maron's monastery in Apamea, killing hundreds of monks in the year 694, along with several attempts to capture Yuḥannā Mārūn.[18]

The conflict culminated in a final Byzantine campaign led by two generals sent to capture the Patriarch in Koura. The Maradites achieved complete victory over the Byzantines in the Battle of Amioun, killing both of their generals and routing their army.[19]

This victory finally cemented the Maronites as a self-governed nation in the Northern Lebanon range. Yuḥannā Mārūn moved the new headquarters of the Maronite

Patriarchate to Kfarhay where he enshrined the relic of Saint Maron's skull.[20]

That didn't put an end to Maronite trouble. During the Byzantine – Umayyad clash, the Maronites mostly fought beside their Christian brethren, and their armies served as a buffer zone between the invading Arabs and Constantinople. They also found themselves a few times on the good sides of the Umayyads.

The struggle for Maronite independence continued. They were never subjugated by the Islamic Caliphates or had to pay Jizya to ensure their safety, but their political influence contracted into the stronghold of the Mountain.

This defiance had consequences. Maronite chronicles locate several patriarchal seats after Kfarḥay: Yanouḥ, Mayfūq, Habil, Kfifan, Hardin, and eventually Qannoubine, mapping a community that was always fighting and a leadership that moved with danger.[21]

The Maronite community learned to disappear into deep valleys when the armies of the enemies were insurmountable, and fortify at highlands and peaks when battles were unavoidable.

In his *History of the Maronites*, Pierre Dib frames the early patriarchate as a mobile center rather than a fixed place: a network of monasteries and village heads coordinated by clergy, able to negotiate, muster, and act under pressure.

That mobility mattered. In the centuries to come, whenever rulers or armies changed, the Maronite capacity to re-center, to move a seat and regroup around a monastery that could hold people and books, would keep the community coherent without a fortress or a city.

In Matta Moosa's presentation, the significance is sociological: the community learned to recognize one authority even when it had no fixed address.[22]

By the 10th century, the Maronite network of monasteries and villages in the Mountain's northern valleys was vast, with Qannoubine later emerging as a vibrant center.

The relationship that Yuḥannā Mārūn started with Mount Lebanon as a refuge against all odds continued to develop and deepen over the following centuries, and the Mountain came to be shaped by the Maronites, as much as the Maronites came to be shaped by the Mountain.

IV. The Clash of Titans: Caliphates and Crusaders

As we have discussed earlier, the Arab conquests transformed administration, imposed sectarian tax systems on Christians of the Levant, (Jizya / kharāj), and excluded them from having a say in their own affairs and destinies.

This was not the reality in North Mount Lebanon, where Christians from all sects kept their freedoms and self-governance in the Maronite state.

The Islamization of the Levant was slow but steady, with entire villages sometimes converting to avoid religious persecution or the ever-rising Jizya. It's during this time that Mount Lebanon first became a refuge of freedom and defiance for all the persecuted sects in the region.

The Maradaites embodied the Mountain's emerging doctrine of defense at this time: not outright conquest, but persistent harassment that wore down imperial supply lines and forced

negotiated truces. Chronicles from Theophanes the Confessor describe them as "a people who dwell in the Lebanon mountains... who were not subject to the Arabs," launching raids that "devastated the lands of the Arabs" and even extracting tribute from the caliphs.

This was no mere banditry; it was a calculated strategy that leveraged the terrain's chokepoints like narrow passes, dense forests, and high ridges, for ambushes and retreats. Maronite fighters, often monks-turned-warriors, drew from their ascetic training: enduring hunger on chick-peas and figs, as Theodoret noted of earlier hermits, now applied to prolonged sieges. Such tactics not only preserved communities but instilled a cultural ethos of mobility and vigilance, where villages could evacuate to hidden caves at the signal of smoke or bell.

Yet, this resistance came at a steep cost, accelerating the bleed of population and resources. Under the Umayyads (661–750), the Pact of Umar's restrictions were enforced harshly in coastal plains but not in the highlands, where Maronites sometimes negotiated exemptions through sheer inaccessibility. In 717, an edict from Caliph Umar II demanded disarmament and conversion, which Maronites refused once more. Oral traditions recount patriarchs smuggling weapons under monastic robes, blending faith with subterfuge, and enabling the resistance to continue.

By the Abbasid era (750–1258), as Baghdad's golden age brought cultural exchanges, Maronites adapted through bilingual practice, using Arabic for administration, contracts and trade while Syriac was still the spoken language and the language of liturgy and learning[23]. They translated Syriac texts into Garshuni script precursors, and resisted full assimilation.

Michael the Syrian's chronicle laments forced conversions in Antioch but praises Maronite holdouts in Lebanon as "a remnant faithful to Chalcedon," with their liturgies serving as coded acts of defiance. This period hardened institutional reflexes: patriarchal elections in secluded monasteries ensured continuity, while lay "moukaddams" (village captains) emerged as dual spiritual-military leaders, foreshadowing the self-rule experiments of later centuries.

This is also the period when communal self-defense takes on more durable forms with a small standing army in addition to watch posts, horn signals, hidden paths, and seasonal militias led by monastic or village notables[24].

Even if the era was characterized by constant vigilance, the Maronites were not in a permanent state of war during this time. Records show that they traded with Muslim towns, renting pasture, remitting taxes in some cases, and occasionally entering armed service for a governor while keeping a core of a distinct liturgical and legal life[25].

The arrival of the first Crusade in the Levant in 1099 changed the political landscape entirely, and the Maronites seized the opportunity to get out of their isolation.

As the Crusaders marched past Tripoli, Maronites descended from “high up in the lofty range of Lebanon,” offered “congratulations to the pilgrims,” and pointed them to Jerusalem.

A “stalwart race” of “valiant fighters,” according to William of Tyre, Maronites joined the Crusaders with scouts, guides, archers, and cavalry riders who were all “of great service to the Christians in the difficult engagements which they so frequently had with the enemy.”[26]

During the Crusades, the Maronites paid a hefty price of blood for their renewed freedom and religious revival. It is mentioned in oral traditions of the First Crusade that of the initial 30-40,000 Maronite fighters who joined the crusader army, only a few dozen returned alive to their villages.

Close relations were also established between the Latin clergy who accompanied the Crusaders and the Maronite Church. Ties with the Holy See became closer. Latin practices were adopted, and influences and changes in the Maronite liturgy followed[27]. These ties peaked with an official affirmation of affiliation with the Holy See in the year 1182.

The era of the Crusades produced a veritable renaissance in the Maronite Church. Numerous churches were built and many works of liturgy and religious art were produced at this time. Ernest Renan cites churches in the towns of Hattoun, Maiphouq, Helta, Toula, Bhadidat, Ma'ad, Koura, and Semar-Jbail among others, as examples of the beautiful architecture of this era.[28]

These contacts enlarged the horizons of the Mountain with trade, learning, and liturgical cross-pollination. It also increased exposure to the Islamic Caliphates, who became increasingly aware of the decisive martial role of the Maronites in the Crusades.

The 1187 fall of Jerusalem rippled into Lebanon, with Ayyubid raids burning villages in Batroun. Maronite resilience, honed by prior centuries, allowed quick rebuilds, using concealed granaries and kin networks.

As the Crusader counties fell one after another during the next 200 years, the Crusader County of Tripoli endured the longest with the Maronite Mountain at its back.

These interactions under caliphates and Crusaders distilled key lessons: geography as armor, faith as the engine of social cohesion, and arms as a necessity. Unlike lowland Christians who were assimilated, converted, or emigrated, Maronites' mountain refuge enabled a free "theocratic nation" model that sustained them through flux.

When the Mamluks finally realized the situation, their eyes were set on the heart of the Maronite nation in Keserwan. They started sending military expeditions aimed at Maronite strongholds, opening up the way to the fall of the County of Tripoli in 1289. This event initiated a new chapter of history that will be the hardest and the bloodiest in Maronite existence.

V. Contraction and Tenacity: Kadisha and the Logic of Refuge

The fall of Tripoli in 1289 and then Acre in 1291 to the Mamluks marked the end of Latin Christendom’s coastal presence and brought punitive expeditions into the mountain.

The Mamluks burned Coastal cities, massacred populations, and reorganized power. The Mamluk governors pressed into the highlands of Mount Lebanon, viewed as seditious or suspect. The history of the period is a scene of the coast engulfed in flames and sacked with an unprecedented level of cruelty that changed the region forever.

The Keserwan campaigns of the Mamluks started in 1268 and continued intermittently with ruthless military expeditions into Bsharri and the northern mountain until the

fall of Mamluk rule in 1516. This period looms large in Maronite memory and modern scholarship.

Accused of aiding the Crusaders and defying the caliphate, Keserwan's mountaineers were targeted by Mamluk commanders. Expeditions razed villages, vineyards, and churches. Fighters and fighting-age males were killed, deported, or recruited as children into the Mamluk army. After each campaign, the Islamic rulers re-engineered the coast through displacing the natives and bringing Turkmen settlers to secure the coastal corridor, under the newly appointed Assaf chiefs[29].

Entire villages were emptied of their populations. In our oral traditions, it's described that the campaigns were so intense that no tree was left standing in all of Keserwan.[30] It's said that one of the campaigns massacred the entire population of Jebbet Bsharri, and only three women survived.

These campaigns, spanning over 250 years, left the Maronites suffering from poverty and misery on top of crippling taxation. The Maronite nation at the time was living in isolation from the outside world, deprived of the ability to trade, and surviving in a rugged Mountain that wasn't suitable for agriculture.

These conditions reduced many Christians to poverty. Even though Christians were still the majority in the Levant up to the 11th century, these financial and social hardships forced many Christians to convert to Islam[31].

The Maronite presence contracted, and the community went into a renewed instinct for sanctuary. Still, they endured, the mountain provided, and Holy providence didn't leave their side.

The repression struck at the leadership as well as the common people. In 1282, Patriarch Daniel Hadshiti, with his staff in one hand and a sword at his side, organized the defense of Jebbet Bsharri and held off the Mamluk army for forty days. The Mamluks could not defeat the Maronites in battle, and their only way of achieving victory was by capturing Patriarch Hadshiti through a ruse of inviting him to negotiations. Once he exited Bsharri, they captured and executed him, trying to extinguish the flame of Maronite resistance.

The Patriarchs and laity continued their fight generation after generation. In 1367, the Mamluks captured the Maronite Patriarch Gabriel of Hjoula and burned him alive in the city square of Tripoli.[32]

In the north, where Maronites were densest, Mamluk campaigns against Byblos culminated in attacking the headquarters of the Maronite Patriarchate in Ilige. Maronite leadership and population retreated into the Kadisha heartland. The Patriarchal seat moved to Qannoubine in 1440 in an act of strategic entrenchment that would last until the 19th century[33].

It is not an exaggeration to say that for stretches of the 14th–15th centuries the Maronites were, in practice, almost confined to a single area around Jebbet-Bsharreh, Zawye, Batroun, and Jebbet al Mnaitra.

In the valley that became holy in their history, the Maronites held their ground: a patriarchate and a cluster of mountain parishes living, praying, and rebuilding under overhanging cliffs.

The valley itself became a testament to the perseverance of a people. Surveys of the valley's monasteries and hermitages like Qozhaya, Qannoubine, Mar Līsha, and Hawqa, reveal monasteries built into rock, cave dwellings carved into soft limestone, barrel-vaulted chapels under rock-shelves, hidden stairways, cultivated terraces, and storage niches. Raymond Kévorkian's illustrated corpus describes it as an architectural doctrine of dispersion[34].

It's an architecture that expresses the extreme tenacity of a people, built for survival, concealment, rationing, and quick evacuation.

Despite the trouble, codices from the valley show continuous copying in the 14th–16th centuries, suggesting that even in the face of oppression, the community produced, preserved, and transmitted its unique culture in liturgy, law formulas, and local memory.

The religious fervor of Maronites helped them endure the persecution and provided a practical function for survival. The rhythm of the monastic calendar, with its long fasts and ascetic traditions, doubled as ration rules, stabilizing supply under siege.

Syriac hymns and prayers served as mnemonics: a device that preserved collective memory. The hymns were easier to safeguard orally when scripts and ink were scarce, and easier to protect against an enemy that made a habit out of burning monasteries. Seely J. Beggani emphasizes how early Syriac theology functions pedagogically; it's a doctrine taught by song, with which the Kadisha setting became a technology of cultural survival and continuity[35].

In the church's local history, if you passed by the valley during these centuries, you'd hear men and women chanting

and praying in unison at specific times of the day. These prayers kept the faith and culture alive, just as they were techniques of breath management and rhythmic movement designed for long stretches of hard manual work.

On the military side, survival in the valley hinged on mobility, intelligence (with dedicated runners and smoke marks), and a defensive militia that avoided pitched battle. When forced to fight, the Maronites used ambushes at chokepoints, rockfall traps, and night raids to break siege lines. Monasteries functioned as armories and granaries as much as houses of prayer[36].

In Maronite historiography and liturgy, this era became a catechism of tenacity. Centuries later, Maronite sermons still praise the steadfastness shown by their ancestors at that time, not in the abstract sense but in the keeping of fasts while under watch, the copying of manuscripts while under hunger, and the hiding of children while men hold the pass.

A letter from the Maronite Patriarch Jeremiah of Amshit to Pope Leo X in 1514 captures the tone towards the end of the Mamluk rule: he sends a cry to be delivered "from the jurisdiction of the infidels who devour us, crush us, and inflict on us taxes."[37]

The deliverance came no more than three years after that letter, but it didn't come from the Pope or Latin Europe, but from another unexpected place.

The story of Kadisha offers an eternal lesson that matters today for all Christians in the East more than ever: if a people is to endure without armies or walls, it must use land, kinship, and liturgy as instruments of survival and cohesion.

It must uphold leaders who stand as both shepherds and symbols when empires are hostile.

By the 16th century, the core of a self-governed Maronite nation was already on the ground: the Maronites were a Syriac liturgical theocratic community, with an aristocracy of monastic fathers and village captains (Moukaddam), trained by the valleys to live off the land, to fight as fierce mountaineers, to save culture and love knowledge, to measure time by fasts and harvests rather than by dynasties, and to keep their collective memory alive with story and song.

VI. Ottoman Suzerainty: An Apprenticeship in Semi-Autonomy

The Ottoman conquest (1516–1517) ended the Mamluk regime and folded Mount Lebanon into a different imperial order. At Marj Dābiq (1516), Selim I shattered Mamluk field armies, and provincial reorganization followed.

Istanbul abolished the old Jizya system and managed the mountain through tax-farming (iltizām). In governance, the Ottomans mediated rule through local notables. What the center could not administer directly, it tolerated so long as revenue and order were maintained. This translated into a pragmatic tolerance for highland autonomies in the Mountain.

The Ottomans rewarded their local allies who aided them against the Mamluks, the Druze Maʿn emirs, and later the Shihābs, with the rule of the Mountain.

For the Maronites, this meant neither instant security nor uniform repression; it meant that the habits honed under the Mamluks, like local self-management, patriarchal cohesion, wary diplomacy, and militia readiness, remained their practical rule.

The period that followed the Ottoman rule was one of Maronite reclamation and rebuilding. By the 16th–17th centuries, the Kadisha valley is no longer just a hideout; it is a radiator of leadership and a center of an energetic mountain culture.

The Maronites slowly shifted from survival to institutional rebuilding. The same geography that allowed concealment and survival allowed dynamic expansion along the slopes and cliffs of the Mountain. Their rebuilding efforts were fruitful in a short time after they mastered the art of living and thriving in this impenetrable mountain range[38].

In this setting, Maronite communities refined their terracing techniques, rebuilt monasteries and villages, and expanded further into the Southern parts of Mount Lebanon. This renewed presence was the start of a long dance of cooperation and friction with Druze leadership and Ottoman rule.[39]

We will go into more details on the Maronite history under the Ottomans, but what we want to mention here is that their long apprenticeship in semi-autonomy under the Mamluks explains the political competence the Maronites displayed later. When the Ottomans arrived, Maronites already knew how to aggregate villages, staff councils, manage resources, resolve disputes, and police and defend their communities. This proved to be an advantage in peacetime and led to inevitable frictions with other mountain communities.

By the time the Mutasarrifate (1861/64) formalized a Christian-governed system in Mount Lebanon, the ground had been prepared by centuries of practical autonomy. When the new system was established, it didn't invent self-rule for the Christians of Mount Lebanon as some historians posit; the Ottomans simply recognized and formalized this pre-existing autonomy.

Engin Akarlı calls the Mutasarrifate period "The Long Peace," but it rested on old capacities: village federations, monastery schools, and the habit of self-defense under public rules.[40]

The path from the Assi river to Kadisha Valley to Ottoman incorporation explains not only how the Maronites survived the long medieval storm, but also why they possessed, at the dawn of the modern era, the structures of endurance: land, education, arms, and leadership that would carry them throughout new trials and possibilities.

VII. What the Mountain Taught Us

As we have shown, between the 7th and the 16th century, the architecture of Maronite identity was complete in its classical form: a warrior-monk nation with a highly educated population, deeply attached in its identity and customs to Mount Lebanon. Let us examine these traits in more detail.

1. Inseparable from the land

Mount Lebanon was not merely a backdrop for the Maronite story; it is the teacher and shaper of their identity. There are

no Maronites without a deep physical and spiritual bond with the Mountain and the land they live on.

The Mountain instills limits: terraces require patience, winters require perseverance, and caves teach silence. The valley makes the community small enough to keep its promises to each other and nimble enough to move on danger.

As the Maronites were facing extinction in the face of persecution, without the ability to flee or trade, they had to depend on the thin mountain soil and its wild trees and animals to provide all their needs. Socially, they only had each other. They had to apply Christ's golden rule of "Do to others what you would have them do to you," not just a spiritual ideal but as a technique of survival. They had to be dependent and reliable, honest with their word, immovable in their faith, offering everything they could to survive through centuries of struggle. In other words, this small Christian community had to fully embody its faith in action to endure.

The mountain became a sacred geography of terraces, springs, forests, ridges, ravines, caves, and monasteries anchored by the model of Kadisha.

The mountain geography also had a deep political and economic impact: the rugged ecology created a village-first system of self-governance. It embodied what we call today a bottom-up system. It also trained a practical local autonomy that became the foundation of self-determination for the entire nation.

The narrow arable strips on steep slopes required immense efforts to produce food and required discipline and

coordination across distant valleys and mountain peaks. Social historians have stressed how terrace agriculture and spring-sharing forced villages into cooperative compacts, creating a unified nation despite geographical dispersion.[41]

This ecology created a type of everyday federalism long before any constitutional formula: villages coordinated water and repairs, monasteries arbitrated disputes and managed intra-village coordination, and the Patriarchate acted as a strategic center of policy-making for the entire community.

The mountain rewarded communities that could self-organize and punished those that could not. In a region prone to imperial shock, that self-organization became the difference between remaining and being erased.

It's important to note here that the Maronite social structure never knew the same degree of feudalism that characterized this era. Most of the land was owned by the Church, and social relationships centered around the chapel, school, and clergy rather than feudal lords.

The "mountain habitus" also conditioned liturgical life: daily prayer and chanting ("Ramsho," "Safro," the *Hoosoyo* prayers) travel easily from church to cave and from grandmothers to grandkids. The Maronite Church wasn't a fixed place, but an unshakeable inner faith that survived the burning of villages and exile from monasteries.

It also affected the Maronite warrior ethos, as every Mountain man is also, by nature, a fighter. Narrow ravines and choke points multiplied the effects of few defenders, and cliff-paths favored those who knew them. This reality shaped a kind of Maronite defensive doctrine that proved its

effectiveness, and sometimes its shortcomings, in their conflicts.

2. THE DEEP IMPACT OF EDUCATION

The connections that Maronites had with the West enabled them to have a highly educated population, even while under siege. Once the Mamluk restrictions were lifted, this educational edge started paying off with the founding of Maronite College in Rome in 1584. It first produced a cadre of multilingual clergy who then established similar schools and institutions at home for their community. This focus on education produced laymen who translated, archived, argued, and learned complex crafts.

The flow of men, books, and knowledge between Rome and Lebanon equipped the community with scholarly self-consciousness, diplomatic vocabulary, and an early sense of modernity. Monasteries became schools for chanting and reading, but also for law, calculation, and different kinds of applied knowledge such as agriculture and construction[42].

Alumni of the Maronite College, such as Patriarch Estephan Douaihi, later established formal schools, like the Hawqa College (1624) and the ʿAyn Warqa School (1789). These schools offered both religious and secular subjects, including Western sciences and languages.

This network, developed and led by the Maronite Church and other Christian denominations, was ahead of its time, not only in the Mountain, but in the entirety of the Ottoman empire. This also meant that the average Maronite peasant had access to more education and economic opportunities than the average person in other parts of the Levant. This led

to the reputation captured by the phrase, "*Erudite like a Maronite*"[43].

In 1736, The Maronite Synod mandated education for Maronite youth, leading to increased school establishments and modernizing of educational practices.

Monastic orders also thrived and engaged in education, such as the Antonine and Lebanese Maronite Orders, who have been instrumental in founding schools across Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, Cyprus, and abroad. Many of these schools provided free education and were open to people of all religions.

The monastery of Saint Anthony (*Mar Antonios*) in Kozhaya brought the first printing press in the eastern part of the Ottoman Sultanate, where the Book of Psalms was printed in 1610 in Syriac and Garshuni letters. The arrival of printing significantly impacted the spread of knowledge and cultural revival.

Maronite scholars also developed and modernized Arabic as a scholarly language, aligning it with European academic standards. They also translated key literary and scientific European works into Arabic. They used new printing presses to spread knowledge, contributing to what was later known in the 19th century as the cultural revival (Nahda).

All this had a deep positive impact on Maronite society and the neighboring sects, but it also had far-reaching socio-political consequences. The high level of education made Maronite society more socially mobile and less feudal, making it comparable in its political dynamics to European nations at the time rather than local communities. It also helped Maronites acquire more advantageous economic positions in the Mountain and within Ottoman

administration. This was in contrast with the Druze, who were traditionally the feudal lords and main fighting army of the Empire in the Levant. This subtle shift of power in the Mountain nurtured many of the historical conflicts between the two communities.

The educational gap with the rest of the Ottoman Empire also inadvertently played a role in social and sectarian conflicts that would plague the Republic of Lebanon, established centuries later.

The high level of education also facilitated and nurtured the tendency of Maronite immigration, which started from the 19th century and continues to this day.

In the same context, one of the unexpected downsides of this educational advantage was that the Maronite contribution to the Arabic Nahda ended up feeding into the erasure of their own Syriac cultural identity. It nurtured the nationalistic Arabic and Islamic tendencies that would later attempt to eradicate them completely.

3. The Warrior Ethos

After the Mamluk persecution, the Maronites did not keep an official standing army, but they maintained seasonal musters and watch systems under notables (Moukaddam). This practice expanded under Ottoman suzerainty, where Moukaddams negotiated the tight line between imperial service and local protection.

A militant edge was kept within the monastic system: watchfulness, levies, and standing guard. The memory of the

Mardaites as an ancestral pattern of highland resistance was kept alive.

The mountain favored small clashes: ambushes, pass-holdings, and punitive raids in which knowledge of terrain multiplies the power of small bands. When Theodoret praised the open-air endurance of the monks, he was also describing a body of men that can stand for long periods, sleep little, and march with modest rations. The fitness of the Maronite warrior is spiritual and tactical.

This pattern did not make the Maronites a militarized nation, but it created a communal reflex: move the vulnerable, hold the pass, negotiate when you can, and fight when needed. This militant edge, largely unique among the Christians of the Levant, significantly helped the endurance of the Maronites.

Weapons at the time were domestic and primitive technology: slings and bows first, when the Christians were not allowed to brandish swords openly. Later came muskets, always stored in secrecy and with care. Defense remained public and local. Honor codes frowned on banditry but praised the man who could "hold the path" and then return to the plow.[44]

This might seem like a small, normal detail until we learn that Christians in the rest of the Ottoman empire were not allowed to own and store weapons. Most of the Christians in the rest of the Levant were not armed and suffered horrific massacres and forced conversions at every turbulent turn of history. The Christian communities that survived the Ottoman occupation with healthy numbers and intact cultures were the ones that were armed like the Lebanese, Bulgarians, Romanians, and Greeks.

This warrior ethos kept the Maronites vigilant and prepared them for the many conflicts that would later visit their land.

4. Faith and song

In the Syriac West-Antiochene tradition, the daily office (the *Shehimo*, "common" or "simple" prayer) and liturgical poetry (qolo, hymns) sew faith into memory.

With morning and evening prayer, penitential *Hoosoyo* rites of "forgiveness," and liturgical depth, small communities of Maronites were able to preserve their culture and establish a Mountain life discipline.[45]

The Maronite Qurbono and madrāshē (teaching hymns) structured their days: a bell for sunrise psalmody, a refrain over the terrace, and a kendēkē (short hymn) to mark the last row of olives. Old men taught boys two skills at once: sing and hoe[46].

These practices mattered because, through the centuries, Maronites required a portable identity; one that can fit into a rucksack, be whispered in a ravine, and survive the loss of a village or the immigration into a new world.

Long fasts were a spiritual discipline and ration logic. A valley surviving on lentils and dried fruits can outlast a punitive cordon for months. The fast ends with bread and oil blessed at a parish threshold, expressing strong communal bonds and an economy of celebration that trains the body and mind on endurance[47].

The monasteries themselves were institutions of survival and governance. Beyond liturgy, monasteries acted as schools, clinics, armories, courts, granaries, and scriptoria.

Most importantly, the Maronite community was, from the beginning, a legal culture that valued written records. Monasteries acted as the archives and the collective memory of the community. They stored the documents that proved land tenure and the books that taught the next generation its prayers and contracts. The monastery's abbot could mediate between the village and the tax-farmer as an authoritative, recognized figure.

Fasts and feasts synchronized villages across vast distances: song, saints, and shrines gathered the dispersed Maronites around a common identity despite geographic isolation.

Faith was interwoven with kinship and survival in such an intricate way that it's hard to separate one from the other. This is the secret ingredient that helped Maronites survive centuries of hardship, wars, famine, and exile. As Maronites expanded and became safer in the Mountain, these practices and their functions were gradually lost and largely disappeared from practice.

5. A Leadership that matters

The Maronites up to this point in history were still, without a doubt a patriarchal people. They were a polity capable of movement, bargaining, and rebuilding as one community, with Qannoubine as its fortified heart.

There were no divisions or competing centers of power or opposite political projects in the Maronite nation in the existential sense of the word. There was one major exception for a brief period in the 15th century (1445-1468) when Jacobites tried to establish a competing center of power in Lehfed; an attempt that ended in decisive defeat.

The leadership model was not absolute power or the tyranny of one man. It was more of a unity that respects and trusts the local autonomy of each village or cluster.

The Mountain's fractured topography seeds a habit of distributed leadership. Even before muqāṭaʿjī structures, villages coordinated defense and water; monasteries settled disputes, and hermitages served as beacons and refuges. Geography habituated a people to decentralized order.[48]

This mountain habitus produced a tripod of identity: land, faith, leadership. The land taught frugality and vigilance; the faith formed a common calendar and language; the patriarch's seat embodied unity.

At the time when Ottoman banners were flying above the Levant, the Maronites had already been surviving well and governing themselves in their mountains.

Their leaders knew that to stand in the face of death is sometimes to be carried by others into a cave and hidden, and at other times it is to walk downhill with dignity toward a burning stake. Their rank-and-file knew how to live on a handful of soaked legumes, sleep under a skin cloak, and keep the beat of a hymn while the watch passes from peak to peak.

These are not myths. They are the techniques of survival recorded in historic sources, repeated in local memory, and inscribed into the very stones of Mount Lebanon.

Table 1. Timeline of Mamluk Campaigns

Date	Event	Location	Outcome
1268	Initial Mamluk expeditions begin under Sultan Baybars, targeting remaining Crusader strongholds and allies in the region.	Coastal Lebanon (e.g., around Tripoli and Byblos)	Weakens Crusader presence; sets stage for later incursions into Mount Lebanon; Maronites viewed as Crusader allies.
1282	Patriarch Daniel Hadshiti organizes defense against Mamluk forces.	Jebbet Bsharri, Mount Lebanon	Holds off Mamluks for 40 days; Patriarch captured via ruse and executed; becomes a symbol of Maronite resistance.
1289	Mamluk conquest of Tripoli from the Crusaders under Sultan Qalawun.	Tripoli, Coastal Lebanon	End of Crusader control in northern coast; Buhtur chiefs submit to Mamluk service; opens path for inland campaigns.
1291	Mamluk conquest of Acre and Beirut,	Acre and Beirut, Coastal Lebanon	Incorporates Kisrawan into Mamluk administration;

	marking the end of major Crusader states.		viewed mountaineers as seditious.
1292	First punitive campaign led by Baydara, viceroy of Egypt, against Kisrawani chiefs.	Kisrawan, Mount Lebanon	Baydara defeated and withdraws after bribing local leaders; targets independent mountaineers blocking coastal roads.
1299	Battle of Wadi al-Khaznadar: Mamluks defeated by Mongols; Kisrawanis attack and rob fleeing Mamluk troops.	Near Homs, with repercussions in Kisrawan	Provokes Mamluk retaliation; highlights guerilla resistance by mountaineers.
1300	Campaign led by Damascus governor Aqqush al-Afram.	Kisrawan, Mount Lebanon	Routes Kisrawani warriors; imposes heavy penalties on inhabitants and leaders.
1305	Major campaign by Aqqush al-Afram; large-scale assault destroying villages,	Kisrawan and northern Mount Lebanon	Slays hundreds; massacres or displaces residents (mainly Maronites, but

	churches, and vineyards.		also Alawites and Shia); introduces Sunni Turkmen settlers.
1306	Establishment of Turkmen settlements as iqta to secure the region.	Coastal Kisrawan (Antelias to north of Jounieh Bay)	Aims to control coastal corridor; replaces displaced populations with Turkmen settlers.
1367	Execution of Maronite Patriarch Gabriel of Hjoula.	Tripoli, Coastal Lebanon	Burned alive in city square; part of ongoing repression against Maronite leadership in northern Mount Lebanon.
1422–1438	Druze Buhtur chiefs peak under Mamluk Sultan al-Ashraf Barsbay.	Beirut and surrounding areas	Indirect control; Iz al-Din Sidqa appointed governor of Beirut; reflects later Mamluk alliances with local groups.
1516	Ottoman conquest ends Mamluk rule.	Levant, including Lebanon	Reorders political landscape; Maronites gain

			relative autonomy under Ottomans.

Chapter 2

Under the Ottoman Shadow

A story of cooperation, conflict, and disaster (1516–1919)

From the Ottoman conquest (1516–17) to the collapse of their empire in World War I, Mount Lebanon learned to survive by negotiating suzerainty, instead of clashing with the empire directly.

During this period, the two wings of the Mountain, Druze and Maronites, discovered each other and sometimes clashed violently.

The appearance of Emir Fakhr al-Din II (r. intermittently 1590s–1635) anchors this period. Fakhr Al-Din articulated a proto-Lebanese project that enlisted Druze and Maronites together, expanded administration and trade, achieved independence, and tested the limits of Ottoman power.

Across the centuries, Ottoman politics revolved around incentives through the *iltizām* tax system, while relying on nobles and their local ambitions to rein in the local populations. The Ottomans only resorted to military punishment campaigns when everything else failed. They engineered politics in a way that ended up fanning sectarian tensions, using it to ensure the continuation of Istana's rule over the Mountain.

The eventual Mutasarrifate (1861/64–1915/18) established a "long peace" of self-rule under a Christian governor, but it showed both the promise and limits of partial autonomy.

I. Ottoman Conquest, Tax Farming, and a Managed Mountain

The Ottomans absorbed the Mamluk domains after Marj Dābiq (1516), inheriting a mountain they preferred to manage at arm's length.

Their main instrument was tax farming (iltizām): The High Porte auctioned fiscal rights to local notables. The notables kept order, remitted revenue to the imperial capital, and policed roads. In return, they received prerogatives and material advantages, and the incentive to discipline rivals[49].

The High Porte grouped all of Mount Lebanon from north to south under one Emir and tasked him with keeping the peace.

As Maronites in the northern range consolidated their villages and monasteries, they started rebuilding Keserwan and Jbeil and expanded south, where they encountered another mountain nation: The Druze.

Authoritative studies place the formation of the Druze religious community in the 11th century, during the Fatimid period, with early centers in Wādī al-Taym at the foot of Mount Hermon, and Shouf. That geography put the early Druze south of the main Maronite heartlands (Jubbet Bsharri, Byblos/Batrun hinterlands). Contact zones between Maronites and Druze along trade routes and seasonal

pastures were already five hundred years old on the eve of the Ottoman conquest.

The Druze also suffered several campaigns of persecution under early Mamluk rule, but this changed in later centuries. Before the Ottomans arrived, the Druze governed the southern mountain of Shouf and Gharb with relative autonomy, while acting as the retainers of the Islamic Caliphate in the region, with the role of keeping order and managing taxes.

As the Druze were skilled warriors, the Caliphate relied on them heavily to secure the southern coastal passes and the road to Damascus. Their warriors were also used as auxiliary forces that acted on his behalf in other parts of the empire when needed.

After the Ottoman conquest, the High Porte preserved this indirect architecture: the Maan emirs were confirmed as multāzim-style holders over Mount Lebanon and parts of the Sidon–Beirut hinterland. The Maan networks were already able to guarantee tax flows, secure the Damascus–coast corridors, and mobilize fast, terrain-adept fighters. Silk trade was also growing, with a lot of wealth and taxes moving through the mountain, so Istana preferred a single accountable strongman to manage exactions and limit smuggling[50].

This led to one of the first times in modern history in which the entirety of Mount Lebanon was under one political entity. The arrangement was functional rather than ideological for the Ottomans, and most importantly, it allowed The High Porte to balance and pit rival notables against each other while minimizing garrison costs. These

conditions later fanned the flames of conflict in the Mountain.[51]

The Mountain started thriving under this arrangement. Maronite expansion from the north brought working population and agricultural terraces the emirate needed. The monastery network grew with more schools, granaries, archives, and mediation forums.

However, this sudden shift of powers and demographics in the mountain did not go without trouble. On one hand, the Maronites suddenly found themselves without the autonomy they paid for so dearly, while the Druze found themselves for the first time governing a huge population of monks, farmers, and warriors from a different religion. The Maronites lost self-rule while the Druze lost their demographic majority in areas under their rule.

It did not help that confessional identities overlapped with fiscal-military roles: Druze chiefs were indispensable to the Porte, and were the governors, military, police, and tax collectors. Maronites were the farmers, educators, archivers, and workers. When the ruling class and the citizen class are of different religions, it is a recipe for conflict. The two communities were heading towards clashing if it was not for another giant who showed history what the mountain can be when left on its own.

II. Fakhr al-Dīn II (c. 1590s–1635): A Proto-Lebanese Experiment

Fakhr al-Dīn II al-Maanī, the last grand and true emir of the Mountain, fused Druze military traditions with Maronite state building and craftsmanship into a functioning

"mountain state." He provided a successful example of what Lebanon could be that inspired generations for centuries after him.

Administratively, he worked through the muqāṭaʿa/iltizām system of the Ottoman Empire, inheriting the Druze emirate of the Maan and expanding his domain and independence through military success, marriage, and patronage. Eventually, he became a threat to the empire itself.

He regularized dues and customs on the coast and stimulated the silk revenue engine by planting mulberries and drawing European merchants to Sidon–Beirut ports. In a short few years, he successfully channeled village labor into export circuits and built one of the strongest economies in the Sultanate[52].

Deir al-Qamar became a political hub as the capital for a large emirate that encompassed all of modern Lebanon's borders. These borders stretched from Latakia in today's Syria in the North, to Acre in the South, including Homs, Hama, and Salamiyah in the northeast, and Safad and Ajloun in today's Jordan in the southeast.

Contemporaries and later historians remark on his inclusive staffing: Druze cavalry and clan captains remained central to military power. Maronite warriors, village heads, monks, and merchants entered the army and government and became part of the administrative and fiscal apparatus[53]. This dual Druze Maronite core became the social chassis of Fakhr al-Dīn's mountain state.

Fakhr al-Dīn's ambition aligned with a European Mediterranean strategy at the time of having an ally on the Eastern shores. Tuscany's Medici allied with and supported the Emir. Tuscan trade and military experts visited;

fortification, gunnery, and contemporary military ideas followed.

Growing increasingly worried about his expansion and international relations, the Ottomans invaded Shouf with the intention of burning Deir Al Qamar. They achieved victory. Fakhreddin managed to narrowly escape while his family negotiated sparing the Mountain's capital.

During his Tuscan exile (1613-1618), Fakhreddin became more adept in statecraft. He learned about fortifying passes and ports, disciplined tax collection, diversifying revenue for his state, cultivating European markets, and navigating imperial politics rather than charging through them[54]. As political circumstances in the Mountain and Istana shifted, a more experienced Fakhreddin acquired a pardon from the Porte and returned home. He rebuilt the state and quickly pushed for expansion again.

This did not sit well with other local governors, especially in the neighboring Damascus. Yunus al-Harfush prohibited the Druze of Shouf from cultivating their lands in southern Beqaa in 1623, in an attempt to halt his expansion. Fakhreddin mobilized his army to Anjar, defeating the legions of Mustapha Pasha and succeeding in expanding his domain even further.

After defeating the Harfushes of Bekaa, Fakhreddin turned his attention to the Sayfas of the north. He defeated them in a decisive battle despite their superior numbers, expanding his domain into Tripoli, Akkar, Jableh, Latakia, Hama, Homs, and Salamiye, taking control over key fortresses and corridors.

By the early 1630s, Fakhr al-Din had captured many places around Damascus, controlled thirty fortresses, and commanded a large army of professional soldiers. Historians note that the "only thing left for him to do was to claim the Sultanate".[55]

Fakhr al-Din's growing army and power induced fear among the Ottomans. They worried that he would take over Damascus and challenge the Sultan himself.

The Ottomans answered decisively in 1633. They commissioned Küçük Ahmed Pasha to break the Maʿnids, which he proceeded to do in a series of military campaigns. After killing Fakhr al-Dīn's son ʿAlī near Khan Hasbaya (Wādī al-Taym), the emir's army was shattered, and he was pursued into the caves of Niha, where he was smoked out of his hideout and taken prisoner. The Ottomans strangled the Grand Emir, beheaded him, and tossed his body into the sea. They recovered the battered body and displayed it in the Hippodrome for everyone in the imperial capital to see.

After his execution, his wives, all of whom were imprisoned in the Citadel of Damascus, were hanged. His maternal kin, the Tanukh, were all killed. Only one son, who was deemed too young to be killed, survived the Ottoman revenge.[56]

Fakhr al-Dīn showed that a Maronite–Druze compact could staff a wider polity, modernize revenue and defense, link the Mountain to Mediterranean circuits, and provide a strong regional state.

The Ottoman lesson was also lasting: prevent another cross-confessional "mountain state" by balancing and hardening communal rivalries. Thereafter, imperial practice leaned on Qaysī–Yamanī Druze splits and sectarian administrative divides. They used a repertoire of divide-and-conquer that

kept Mount Lebanon subdued till the collapse of the sultanate in the 20th century.

III. The First Maronite – Druze Clash 1840-1860

By the 19th century, the Maronites and Druze had been living side by side for hundreds of years. The rapid Maronite expansion into the southern Mountain, along with the cultural and social upheaval brought by economic development at the time, created an explosive mix of sectarian conflict. This was exacerbated by a bitter power struggle between the Ma'n and Shihab lines, and by regional volatility caused by the rise of Mohammed Ali in Egypt and his invasion of the Levant.

Ottoman and European powers instrumentalized Druze and Maronites alternately to secure their own interests. The British supported the Druze and wanted to keep the Status-quo of the Sultanate, while the French supported the Maronites and the emerging influence of Mohammed Ali.

This was a time of social upheaval as well, where peasants were demanding a more just social and political order. With the spread of education, identities hardened around the idea of nations. As nations in the mountain were historically formed around different religions[57], and as the class divisions were often drawn along sectarian faultlines, any social conflict would soon become a sectarian clash.

Each Emir after Fakhreddin II sought further centralization of power, squeezing the domains of noble families, and clashing repeatedly with Maronite and Druze centers of influence.

With the Ma'an line extinguished in 1697, the Shihāb family (Sunni by confession, later some branches converted to Christianity) took the emirate. The internal Druze conflict between the Yaman and Qays factions culminated in ʿAyn Dārā (1711). This decisive battle near Aley saw the victory of the Qaysi alliance, supported by wide segments of Mount Lebanon's Maronites[58].

The outcome of the battle rebalanced settlement and reordered power: the Maronite population expanded in Metn and Gharb, while Druze predominance consolidated in Shouf.[59]

After 1711, the Maronite demographic weight translated into a greater administrative share in the emirate's councils and tax farms.[60]

Under Bashir II al-Shihābī (r. 1788–1840), the emirate reached a high watermark of centralization. Bashir was a brutal governor whose rule was characterized by constant wars and revolts. He played on Ottoman internal politics, then used Egyptian support during Ibrahim Pasha's occupation (1831–1840) to defeat rival Druze chiefs.[61]

The Prince faced peasant revolts in the Maronite mountain, which pushed him into politics that aligned more closely with Maronite interests out of fear. This tilt unbalanced the Druze–Maronite equation.

For 50 years, Bachir played on sectarian lines to strengthen his rule. His systematic elimination of rivals led to the near annihilation of the feudal authority of Druze and Maronite Muqata'jis[62]. He also increased taxes, which led him to clash with peasant masses, igniting the first revolts in the Mountain with Amiyit Antelias. He used Maronite fighters to quell Druze uprisings and later used Druze fighters to

suppress Maronite revolts towards the end of the Egyptian period.[63]

When the Ottomans, backed by Britain and Austria, ejected the Egyptians in 1840, they also deposed Bashir II and punished his network. Following their victory, they tilted the balance back toward the other side to the advantage of the Druze[64].

This policy led to a significant increase in sectarian violence that peaked in 1841-1842 with a Maronite-Druze armed clash. Maronites were defeated in mixed districts, but vengeful reprisals happened on both sides.

Following the civil war, the Ottoman and international response was to establish the Double Qaimaqamate in 1842. This new governance system was made of two administrative districts in the Mountain, each under a separate qaʾimmaqāms: one "Druze" (south/central), one "Maronite" (north/central), both under the governor of Sidon[65]. The Mountain basically immediately lost its limited autonomy after the first Maronite-Druze clash.

Designed as containment, the arrangement entrenched competition instead. It limited the powers of all political, legal, and economic Mountain institutions, and gave Istanbul the tools to arbitrate and punish as it pleased. Leila Fawaz emphasizes how local quarrels are now plugged directly into imperial and consular circuits, multiplying veto players and making a unified mountain policy impossible.[66]

As authority in the Mountain was disempowered and the political landscape became dysfunctional, tensions kept bubbling up till they erupted again in 1860 with a more brutal sectarian war. What began as a village-level skirmish

escalated quickly into a full-scale civil war that spread beyond the mountain.

Druze forces overran Maronite villages in Shouf and Gharb, committing massacres in mixed towns like Deir El Qamar, Hasbaya, and Rashaya. They also besieged and entered Zahle with the help of the Harfoush's Shiite army and Bedouin tribes. Druze and Muslims in Damascus seized the opportunity to attempt to exterminate Christians in the region. The Christians of Damascus were majority Orthodox and had nothing to do with the Maronite-Druze conflict. This didn't stop the Druze and Muslim population of Damascus from committing genocide: they entered the Christian quarter of Bab Touma and killed and burned their way through it for seven days. The massacre claimed the lives of 5,000 Damascene Christians, while the Mountain war claimed more than 20,000 lives, with 380 Christian villages completely destroyed[67].

The scale of destruction shocked European nations and provided them with a window of opportunity to gain a foothold inside the Ottoman Empire. The French state sponsored the Treaty of 1860 that protected Christians and restored order. This resulted in the Règlement Organique (1861/64): the Mount Lebanon Mutasarrifate.

The new system established a special autonomous district within the Sultanate, governed by a non-local Catholic Ottoman subject with a consultative Administrative Council roughly balanced by sect.[68]

Both Mount Lebanon and Syria changed forever by the impact of these events. The Christian quarter of Damascus was destroyed, and more than half of the 22,000 Damascene Christians were killed or displaced. This event transformed

the Syrian capital into a significantly less diverse city and contributed to a permanent Christian withdrawal from Syrian public life. This demographic change would later leave a deep negative impact on politics in all of the Levant. Interestingly, more than 150 years later, the Druze will pay a heavy price for a more Islamized Damascus in a terribly similar way to what happened to Christians in 1860.

The situation in Mount Lebanon was different, even with the heavy cost paid by the Maronites. The Christians, who are now an uncontested demographic majority, achieved a decisive political victory despite their military defeat.

The Mutasarifiya of 1860 did not deliver complete independence: it delivered a guaranteed administrative autonomy inside the empire that allowed Christians to govern themselves and keep their freedoms.

This relative autonomy, however, was tied to external factors and guarantees, showcasing that division in the mountain had a cost on self-determination.

IV. The Mutasarifiya and Kafno

For half a century, the Mutasarrifate created what historian Engin Akarlı calls "The Long Peace."[69] Its mechanics matter for us today because it established some things that simply worked. The Mutasarrifate was made of:

- The Governor: a non-Lebanese Catholic Ottoman subject (Austrian, Polish, Armenian Catholic, etc.), appointed by the Sultan with great-power assent.
- Administrative Council: elected through indirect mechanisms, apportioned among confessions

(Maronite plurality, Druze, Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholic, some Sunni and Shia seats).

- Security: local gendarmerie, no militias; The Ottoman regulars' presence was severely limited or non-existent.
- Justice and Finance: budgetary autonomy, local courts for civil matters.
- Economy: Farming and the silk export boom funded roads, public works, schools, and a modest system of welfare.

The outcome was striking: comparative stability, roads and schools, a literate clergy-led civil society, and an export-oriented silk economy hitched mainly to French markets.[70] Maronite demographic weight grew; missionary schools (Jesuit, Lazarist, American Protestant) multiplied; a Maronite professional stratum of teachers, craftsmen, and printers expanded.

Limits on autonomy were real: defense and foreign policy remained imperial. The governor's office balanced sects but also checked local sovereignty. Economic dependence on silk exposed the Mountain to global shocks (disease, prices) while the rising Arabist and Turkic currents re-politicized identities at the start of the 20th century[71].

Yet as a governance template, the Mutasarrifate is the closest historical model to what an independent Mount Lebanon looks like: enumerated competences, a civil gendarmerie and localized defense force, and international neutrality and focus on economic growth. It had a relatively homogenous population that was not tied to external forces or had an internal religious agenda. Federalized localities had proper

powers, and the council system turned sect co-existence into administration, instead of a perpetual conflict.

On the eve of World War I, the Imperial Ottoman rule showed its hand quickly and brought to light the fragility of such conditional independence.

Three elements came into play that ended up creating the worst act of genocide inflicted on Maronites in their history. During the first year of war, the mountain was subject to Jamal Pasha's militarized rule, the Allied naval blockade at sea, the Ottomans interdiction of grain and food on land, and a locust infestation of biblical proportions.

Between 1915 and 1918, the Mountain descended into Kafno: a famine in which village life collapsed into soup lines and mass graves. The scale of loss in the Mutasarrifate is estimated at ~200,000 dead out of a population of roughly 400,000, with Maronite districts hit the hardest[72].

Jamal Pasha's Fourth Army barred grain imports into Mount Lebanon, turning a food-poor upland into a sealed prison. Speculation by coastal merchants and official requisitions did the rest.

A vast locust swarm in 1915 devoured crops and mulberry leaves, crippling the silk economy that had underwritten rural incomes before the war. Relief breadlines in Beirut and the coastal skirts could not reach many highland hamlets; families boiled weeds and orange peels, then belts and leather; mothers bartered wedding gold for handfuls of flour; and the roads grew empty because people had no strength to walk.

Entire villages vanished slowly, with children and adults dying a slow, painful death of hunger and disease.

In 1915, the Ottomans suspended Mount Lebanon's special autonomous status, replacing it with direct military control; a bureaucratic fact that compounded the isolation and gave local commanders latitude to enforce movement and pricing with severity.

The Ottomans regularly raided villages for food and material requisitions. They also recruited any healthy adults left to their army and took them away in what became known in local folklore as Safar Barlik, which very few survived.

Those who were able to escape this nightmare did so to South America in a mass migration wave so intense that Lebanese descendants in those countries today count more than the entire population inside Lebanon.

The famine's images were dark: a skeletal child at the monastery gate, the carts that gathered the dead at dawn, the parish registers with whole pages crossed out. This tragedy traveled with those who escaped and burned into communal memory as a catastrophe not only of hunger but of abandonment. It was a stark reminder that the Caliphate and the surrounding region are willing to stand by and watch as an entire Mountain dies.

One institution did not abandon Maronites during this time: the Patriarchate. As the autonomous institutions of the Mutasarifiya were abolished by the Ottomans, the entire Maronite clergy mobilized to fill the role of the state and offer relief.

Patriarch Elias Peter Hoayek ordered every parish and monastery to share with the poor weekly, converting church lands, tithes, and cash reserves into rations. Priests and monks formed mule-path courier chains to move flour and

pulses from coastal caches up to Keserwān and the northern spurs.

Contemporary accounts describe the Patriarchate opening mills and issuing daily and weekly stipends recorded in diocesan ledgers. Parish houses and churches doubled as infirmaries for typhus and malaria. Records from the period show Patriarch Hoayek distributing bread himself when he was still a bishop, while Patriarch Antoine Arida pawned his gold cross to buy food.

All other Christian religious institutions contributed to relief, including missionary charities, like The Syrian Protestant College (AUB), that improvised soup kitchens and infirmaries in Beirut.

Because regular trade was throttled, a diaspora–Allied corridor was improvised around the French-held island of Arwad. Lebanese committees in Egypt and abroad funneled gold and provisions to the small island. Under the cover of night, small crafts (and at points swimmers for the last reach) brought consignments ashore to the Lebanese coast for onward distribution via the Patriarchate's convent network.

French officers sometimes facilitated transfers, while the Patriarchate envoys received the shipments and reallocated them to famished districts in the highlands. This Arwad bridge, though perilous and insufficient to meet need, became the Mountain's thin artery when official channels were shut[73].

This policy against the Maronites wasn't just a byproduct of circumstances but an intentional extermination at a time when the Ottoman Sultanate committed several ethnically and religiously motivated genocides. Ottoman genocides at

the time affected the Armenian, Assyrian, Greek, and other indigenous Christian people in Anatolia, Upper Mesopotamia, and the Urmia region of Iran.

Despite decimating more than half of Mount Lebanon's population, the modern Lebanese state does not recognize Kafno as a genocide at the date of writing these lines, showing how disconnected modern Lebanon is from its roots.

When the guns fell silent in late 1918, the Mountain emerged altered: a population decimated, and a land fragmented by distress sales with withered orchards, silent streets, and idle workshops. Trust in the coastal–imperial compact was shattered. The remaining Maronites became preoccupied with avoiding such a tragedy ever again, even at the expense of their own history and self-determination.

Kafno is more than a mourning wall: it is the hinge that explains why, a century later, Maronites still speak of security and autonomy.

V. What This Period Teaches Us

During the long night of Ottoman occupation, the Maronite Nation was maturing culturally, economically, and politically.

However, as centuries went by and Maronites felt safer in their stronghold, a lot of the features that defined them as one unified political group disappeared gradually.

During this era, the Maronite history came to be defined by clashes of interests between Muqata'jis and peasants, by power struggles between Emirs and notable families, and by

competition and clash with the Druze. Regionally, the era was defined by the plight of the mountain to establish self-rule among a struggle for influence between the wulat of Sidon, Damascus, and Tripoli. Internationally, it was caught between the conflicting European powers, especially France and Britain, and the increasingly weakened Ottoman Sultanate.

Across four centuries, Druze–Maronite relations were neither a permanent alliance nor existential hostility. They were structurally entangled, expanding the independence of the Mountain when cooperating and shrinking it when clashing.

- Cooperation: Under Fakhr al-Dīn II and later under the Mutasarrifiya, Druze military capacity, and Maronite clerical-commercial networks co-produced governance. Monastic estates stabilized silk and grain; Druze cavalry secured passes; Maronite scribes managed ledgers[74].

- Conflict: When imperial thresholds shifted (e.g., 1840, 1860), local disputes turned sectarian and became instruments of empire or of European politics. The Double Qaimaqamate formalized competition and ended with a disaster in 1840. The Mutasarifiya provided stability for 50 years, but its limited sovereignty ended with an unprecedented catastrophe.

The Ottoman power consistently benefited from every Druze–Maronite conflict. Factionalization kept the mountain from negotiating as one polity. Where the Mount was strongest - Fakhr al-Dīn II's heyday and the Mutasarrifate; it rested on rules that respected self-governance for each sect

and made their cooperation useful and imperial interference limited.

Just like the previous era, this period carries valuable lessons for the Maronite project that also shed some light on the structural roots of their modern troubles:

Some of these lessons are:

- *Cuius regio, eius religio*: The governor and the governed must be of the same religion. This is a Latin phrase that ended several centuries of religious wars between Catholics and Protestants in Europe when it was accepted as a principle for the emerging European states at the Peace of Augsburg in *1555*. The Mountain followed this principle for more than a thousand years, with the Maronites self-governing in the Northern range and the Druze doing the same in the Southern one. The moment this principle stopped being implemented, or lacked a proper institutional mechanism for conflict resolution, tensions and civil wars followed.

- Law and institutions beat charisma. Fakhr al-Dīn's charisma modernized the mountain but lacked legal guarantees, especially on the international front. His experiment did not survive his defeat. Later, there were two distinct regimes in the Mountain: The rule of Bashir Shehab II that lasted for fifty years, and the regime of Mutasarrifate that lasted for another fifty. These were completely opposite experiments, as the rule of Bashir was characterized by constant strife, revolutions, and war, while the Mutasarrifate produced fifty years of relative peace with its laws, council seats, courts, and gendarmerie.

- Shared stakes reduce violence. When Druze and Maronites shared revenue of the silk trade and had common institutions, conflict fell; when they were administratively separated (1842) or externally manipulated (1860), conflict ignited.

- External support is temporary. European patronage and markets can boost a program (silk, schools), but without internal mechanisms that build the Mountain State on solid foundations, the gains are reversible. During this period, France supported the Maronites while Britain supported the Druze; both countries dropped their promises to these two nations whenever their national interests dictated so. A sound foundation of foreign politics cannot be a complete reliance on any ally but should include strong political institutions with clear local and foreign policies. Everything should be based on good security and a vibrant economy back home, so when external shocks happen, the country can navigate through them.

- The wrong foreign policy can compromise the Mountain. As a small state with no significant offensive force, any policy of international or regional alignment during the never-ending conflicts can be very costly. During the Egyptian rebellion of Muhammed Ali, Bashir II chose to side with the Egyptians against the Ottomans and sent several military expeditions on their behalf to quell uprisings in Damascus, Acre, Bekaa, and others, exposing the Mountain to the ire and machinations of both Ottomans and local wulat. He was later given a choice to switch sides, which he refused, and the

Mountain paid the price for that choice with decades of blood. Of course, it might be challenging politically to pursue a total policy of neutrality, but the moment the Mountain stops being neutral in regional conflicts is the same moment that its independence is put on the chopping block.

- The Patriarchate matter. As in earlier centuries, monasteries under the Ottomans were schools, archives, and granaries. The Patriarchate functioned as a mediator and influencer that always looked out for the collective interest of the Maronites. This could not have been clearer than during Kafno where this Maronite body was the difference between life and death for countless people.

After centuries of struggle, the Mountain had a refined grammar of survival and a deep sense of identity. It was a land worked by stone and patience. It was a land of competent farmers on terraces and strong fighters in the ravines. This kind of natural village federation became political architecture by the eve of World War I. The Mountain was a nation with a grown spine: a sanctuary strong enough to bend without breaking, and a people knit by bells and hymns.

This unique history created a distinctive identity and a deep desire for self-rule, but this story was not shared in the areas that bordered the Mountain. Beirut always had a special status within the Islamic Caliphate. Tripoli and its wilaya that reached up to Aleppo had a completely different history and internal mechanics. The Bekaa was almost always a part

of Damascus, and Sidon Wilaya reached up to Acre and never struggled with the idea of self-rule or sectarian wars.

By the 20th century, the Mountain had all it needed to achieve independence, but the apocalyptic famine that devastated it upended most of those foundations. I personally think the effect of the famine on the Maronite nation is much stronger than we consider. When more than half of your community dies and emigrates, and the rest are left impoverished and starving, this is an extinction-level event. There is a wealth of knowledge, social mechanics, culture, and identity that was buried with Kafno. I think that this event was one of the main reasons why modern Maronites feel so disconnected from their roots and history: the people and institutions that could have transmitted our national culture were either buried with Kafno or changed forever by it.

Maronites went into modern Lebanon with a broken political will and without a unified vision about their future. Consequently, the Lebanese Republic came to be shaped mostly by the fear of repeating Kafno, rather than by political and cultural stability and viability.

As Kafno shattered people, villages, and institutions, The Mountain came into a new world order already broken.

Table 2. Rulers of Mount Lebanon 1516 – 1920

Period	Governor	Tenure	Summary of Policies or Conflicts
Ma'an Dynasty	Qurqumaz Ma'an	Early 16th century (c. 1516–1544)	Appointed chief of Chouf in 1517; resisted Ottoman tax collection and supported Bedouin rebellions, leading to arrests, fines, and conflicts with Ottoman forces; based in Baruk.
Ma'an Dynasty	Yunus Ma'an	Mid-16th century (c. 1544–1558)	Leading Druze emir; executed in Damascus in 1545 for insubordination. Under Ma'an leadership, Druze imported Venetian muskets and ambushed Ottoman sipahi in 1565.

Ma'an Dynasty	Fakhr al-Din II Ma'an	c. 1590–1635 (intermittent)	Expanded territorial control through alliances, capturing Damascus outskirts in 1623 Battle of Anjar; achieved semi-autonomy via European ties; faced Ottoman suppression, defeated internal opponents in the south, Bekaa and Akkar, modernized trade and agriculture. Executed in 1635.
Ma'an Dynasty	Mulhim Ma'an	1635–1658	Led Druze opposition to Alam al-Din (1635–1636); consolidated power amid internal rivalries.
Ma'an Dynasty	Ahmad Ma'an	1658–1697	Controlled Chouf and Kisrawan after 1667 power

			struggle; died heirless, leading to Shihab succession; faced Ottoman expeditions and Druze internal conflicts.
Shihab Dynasty	Bashir I Shihab	1697–1705	Regent for Haydar; mediated disputes, captured rebels, secured Sidon; poisoned amid succession intrigue.
Shihab Dynasty	Haydar Shihab	1705–1732	Ousted temporarily (1709); led Qaysi victory at Ain Dara (1711), eliminating Yamani rivals. Increased Maronite influence under Druze landlords.
Shihab Dynasty	Mulhim Shihab	1732–1753	Punitive expeditions against clans in Jabal Amil; added Beirut

			tax farm (1749); resigned amid brother rivalry; died after failed regains.
Shihab Dynasty	Mansur and Ahmad Shihab	1753–1760	Forced Mulhim's resignation; internal power struggles with Yazbaki Druze; reconciled with rivals but faced ongoing factionalism.
Shihab Dynasty	Qasim Shihab	1760 (brief)	Briefly appointed by Sidon's governor amid rivalries.
Shihab Dynasty	Mansur Shihab	1760–1770	Ruled alone; confiscated rivals' properties; allied with Jumblatti faction and Sidon's governor.
Shihab Dynasty	Yusuf Shihab	1770–1778; 1778–1789	Raised as Maronite but presented as Sunni; defeated Hamade sheikhs (1764),

			patronized Maronite clergy; ousted from Beirut (1775); regained Chouf via bribes and alliances.
Shihab Dynasty	Sayyid-Ahmad and Effendi Shihab	1778 (brief)	Sold Chouf tax farm; challenged Yusuf (1780) but failed, with Effendi killed.
Shihab Dynasty	Bashir II Shihab	1789–1794; 1795–1799; 1800–1819; 1820–1821; 1822–1840	Neutral in Napoleon's siege (1799); allied with Muhammad Ali (1831), aiding Acre/Damascus sieges; shifted to cash crops; exiled after British intervention (1840).
Shihab Dynasty	Husayn and Sa'ad ad-Din Shihab	1794–1795; 1799–1800	Young sons of Yusuf; real power with Maronite manager; brief regencies amid power shifts.

Shihab Dynasty	Hasan and Salman Shihab	1819–1820; 1821	Sunni branch; interim amid Bashir II's exiles.
Shihab Dynasty	Abbas Shihab	1821–1822	Sunni; brief rule before Bashir II's return.
Shihab Dynasty	Bashir III Shihab	1840–1842	Last emir; deposed by sultan (1842), leading to emirate's abrogation and direct Ottoman governance.
Egyptian Occupation	Ibrahim Pasha	1831–1840	Imposed high taxes, conscription, disarmament under Muhammad Ali; heightened sectarian tensions; retreated after British/Ottoman intervention.
Double Qaimaqamate	Christian and Druze Deputy Governors	1842–1861	Partitioned administration (northern Christian, southern Druze); exacerbated sectarian

			animosities; peasant revolts (1858) against feudal taxes; European backing (France for Maronites, Britain for Druze).
Mutasarrifate	Dawud Pasha (Garabet Artin Davoudian)	1861–1868	Armenian Catholic; organized government, elections, surveys; built army, schools, newspaper; achieved stability but opposed border expansions.
Mutasarrifate	Franko Pasha (Nasrallah Franco Coussa)	1868–1873	Melkite Greek Catholic; maintained justice; established schools, planted lands; ceded Bekaa tax, increasing bribery; died in office.
Mutasarrifate	Rüstem Pasha (Rüstem Mariani)	1873–1883	Roman Catholic Italian; enforced law,

			built infrastructure; disputed with clergy, leading to expulsions and persecutions.
Mutasarrifate	Wassa Pasha (Pashko Vasa Shkodrani)	1883–1892	Albanian Catholic; reformed administration; built hospitals, roads; introduced Ottoman judiciary (violating law); faced corruption in later years; died in office.
Mutasarrifate	Naoum Pasha (Na'oum Coussa)	1892–1902	Melkite Greek Catholic; dismissed corrupt employees; built roads, maintained equality; saw start of large emigration.
Mutasarrifate	Muzaffar Pasha (Władysław Czajkowski)	1902–1907	Polish Roman Catholic; imposed taxes, interfered with council; accused of

			corruption via family ties; died before term end.
Mutasarrifate	Yusuf Pasha (Yusuf Franco Coussa)	1907–1912	Melkite Greek Catholic; interfered in judiciary; made Ottoman ID mandatory (later optional); faced council conflicts and constitutional resistance.
Mutasarrifate	Ohannes Pasha (Ohannes Kouyoumdjian)	1912–1915	Armenian Catholic; improved conditions; amended statute for elections, expanded ports; resigned amid WWI Ottoman occupation.
WWI Ottoman Administration	Ali Münif Bey	1915–1917	Turkish Muslim; abolished privileges, reorganized districts; his policies led to famine, and executions

			(1916 Martyrs); transferred to Beirut.
WWI Ottoman Administration	Ismail Haqqi Bey	1917–1918	Turkish Muslim; lenient amid famine/epidemics; encouraged aid; positive public view despite crises.
WWI Ottoman Administration	Mumtaz Bey	1918	Turkish Muslim; brief rule; fled as Ottoman forces retreated before Allied victory, ending Ottoman control.
Allied/French Transition	French and British Forces	1918–1920	Post-WWI administration; French mandate established at San Remo (1920); suppressed dissent amid famine recovery.

Chapter 3

Maronites and the Birth of the Lebanese Republic

(1919–1943)

The collapse of Ottoman rule in 1918 left Mount Lebanon battered by famine and militarized administration. Politically, it concentrated around a Maronite-led vision of recovery. In this vacuum, Maronite institutions like parishes, monasteries, and the Patriarchate functioned as a proto-state. They accounted for the displaced, maintained charitable provisioning, and re-knit village economies.

Out of that relief culture emerged a clear strategic line: secure a political framework that would allow the Mountain to stand on its own and shield it from Imperial projects and regional majoritarianism. The moment had finally come for the mountain to become a fully sovereign state. Drawing its new map, however, proved difficult.

I. Drawing a New Map

In late 1919, Patriarch Elias Peter Hoayek led a Lebanese delegation to the Paris Peace Conference. This was one of the rare instances where a representative from the Mountain had

a seat at an international table that discussed the future of the region and the Mount[75].

The mandate of the Patriarch was to establish an independent Lebanon under French guarantee, with expanded frontiers that would spare it another Kafno.

The exact borders were subject to many discussions. There were several opposing points of view on how they should look. Should they add the landlocked Christian area of Wadi Al-Nasara in Homs? Or the Sunni majority ports of Tripoli and Sidon?

Patriarch Elias Peter Hoayek's delegation in Paris pressed for an enlarged Lebanon that includes ports (Beirut, Tripoli), the Bekaa "breadbasket," and Akkar. It argued for viability after the famine, even though Christians would not be a clear majority inside the new frame.[76] Others like Émile Eddé favored a tighter Christian-majority entity. Some even backed joining Syria in a unified Arab kingdom – an idea floated by the French themselves after their agreement with King Faisal. On the regional side of the equation, dozens of delegations sought to absorb the Mountain into a pan-arab state. The King-Crane Commission recorded over a thousand protests from other Arab delegations against an independent Lebanese republic.

Bekaa was also another point of dispute, given the long history of animosity between its Shiite clans and the Mountain. Southward, the original plan for Lebanon extended 2000 square meters into Galilee and the coast, encompassing Christians of the region and Shiites of Jabal Amel. When the Franco-British boundary agreements were finalized in the Paulet-Newcombie line in 1923, the Lebanese

border was shrunk to what it is today. It removed the lands further south and kept only Jabal Amel.

At San Remo (April 1920), the global powers assigned the Mandate for Syria and Lebanon to France. The official text tasked the Mandatory with guaranteeing the territory, building institutions, and protecting religious communities and personal-status systems[77]. It was the legal wrapper within which Lebanese state-building proceeded.

On 31 August 1920, High Commissioner Henri Gouraud signed *Arrêté 318*, delimiting the State of Greater Lebanon (État du Grand Liban). The next day, he proclaimed the new state on the steps of the Pine Residence in Beirut, announcing borders that joined the Mountain to Beirut, Tripoli, Sidon, Tyre, Akkar, and the Beqaa.

For Maronite leaders and the Patriarchate, the move answered two imperatives: economic viability like ports and arable hinterland to end the isolation that had magnified Kafno; and international political guarantees for a state where Christian communities could keep their independence and rule their own state. It was assumed that such an arrangement would protect freedom of conscience, liberties, and the rights of Christians in the Mountain.

The Maronite authorities at the time, however, made the mistake of trusting international guarantees and assuming they would be enough to offset an imbalanced and dysfunctional entity. The Lebanese Republic was viable on paper, but in reality, it was just created from disparate and conflicting components.

The ports and Bekaa addition solved the Mutasarrifate's structural weakness of having no coastline or mass arable land, but added several structural weaknesses in the form of

populations that do not want to be part of Lebanon or don't accept its Christian rule.

While trying to correct the economic geography, Maronite diplomacy blundered demographic coherence and assumed that other communities that do not share the same history or culture would just accept the vision without objection.

The most explicit refusal appeared in what came to be known as the Conference of the Coast in March 1920, and the conference of Hujeir Valley in April of the same year. These two gatherings included, respectively, Sunni and Shiite politicians, merchants, clans, and notables from Beirut, Tripoli, Sidon, Tyre, and Jabal Amel, who rejected the republic and called instead for union with Damascus. They saw the republic as a blatant colonial partition, while they also opposed Christian rule and foreign occupation.

Their argument fused economics and identity: the coastal cities traded through Syria as much as across the sea; their schools and press and family ties faced inland; and their political culture had been formed in the larger Bilād al-Shām. To them, the new line severed markets and memory at once. The conferences' resolutions were not a sideshow. They crystallized a live current in the Muslim elite and signaled that a nontrivial share of the future country's population did not want to be part of it.

The attempt of establishing a greater Syria reached its end at the Battle of Maysalun in July 1920. French troops crushed the small army led by Yusuf al Azama in the Anti-Lebanon mountains range near the current Lebanon-Syria border. It ended the short-lived Arab Kingdom of Syria and consolidated the French Mandate.

It is notable that some Maronite Lebanese reportedly fought on the French side, while the Arab Army had volunteers from Sidon, Bekaa, and Tripoli.

South of the mountain, the dislocation took a rougher form. In Jabal Amel and the border districts, the shock of the 1920 proclamation and the arrival of French troops collided with older frictions over land, tax, and authority. In the turbulence that followed, Shiite militias and clan bands attacked nearby Maronite villages. The offensive focused on the Bint Jbeil ridge and the frontier hilltops. The assault wasn't aimed at the French, but at the Maronite communities considered to belong to an unwanted Lebanese Republic. Villages such as Ain Ebel, Rmeish, Debel, and Qaouzah were attacked by what history books describe as "hundreds of gangs."

The village of Ain Ebel was completely destroyed, including its school, convent, and two churches. Reports from the time, including documents from the Franciscan Order, describe extreme brutality by Shiite militias towards civilians. It included the killing of children and the elderly, sexual violence, and the burning of individuals alive[78]. The resulting death toll was in the hundreds, while thousands fled their homes towards cities like Haifa and Acre.

The French suppression that followed was decisive and swift. Columns moved south; posts were established, and punitive expeditions and aerial intimidation restored order. The tactical success carried a strategic cost. As the Mandate imposed pacification, it also exposed a lack of legitimacy: security did not arise from an agreed domestic compact, but from a temporary equilibrium enforced by a foreign power. The lesson learned in the south echoed the lesson of the coast: Lebanon's map does not have the consent of its different peoples.

Taken together, these episodes were a glimpse of the country to come. First, they revealed a structural mismatch between the economic circuits and political borders. The coast lived in commercial symbiosis with Syria; the south's horizons faced both Damascus and Jerusalem. Second, they exposed the confessional asymmetry baked into the project: a Christian plurality backed by the Mandate at the center, with large Sunni coastal blocs and Shiite agrarian districts feeling either annexed or administered from above. Third, they set the habit of relying on an arbitrating outsider to settle domestic quarrels; a habit that, once entrenched, weakened the incentive to build a single, trusted chain of coercion under local law. Finally, they seeded a politics of grievance that would ripen in later crises. The coastal cities railed against tariff walls and "artificial" frontiers, while southern villagers always remembered that the state came late and spoke French. Lebanese communities quickly concluded that without their own disciplined networks and foreign backing, the line on the map would always be one incident away from irrelevance.

For Maronites, these early refusals were not a brief prelude but a structural problem. They suggested that the republic, as assembled, would struggle to convert territorial inclusion into political belonging. The new state inherited fragility at birth: a chronic deficit of consent, patched by patronage and policed by outside guarantees.

The Christian bet on Greater Lebanon seemed rational in 1920 after devastating wars and famine. Only a sovereign construct could protect Christian freedoms after centuries of hard neighbors. The way they came to accomplish that, though, was deeply flawed. Later generations paid the price twice and thrice for such hubris.

Without a shared will to inhabit the frame of a unified state, the republic would go from war to war and crisis to crisis, with peace times being a rare exception.

II. A Limp from the Start

The Mandate administration moved from provisional Organic Law to a full Constitution in 1926, declaring the Lebanese Republic.

The constitution at the time established a strong presidency with powers to promulgate laws, request reconsideration, and dissolve the Chamber under certain conditions. It also established a representative Chamber of Deputies and initially a Senate that was abolished in October 1927.

The biggest mistake of that constitution was establishing a centralized state based on the European mono-ethnic and mono-religious model in its texts. The constitution was in mismatch with the Lebanese reality, made up of distinct cultural nations that are often at odds with each other.

The new republic was marred by political conflict from the beginning. After the Constitution, the first president was Charles Debbas (a Greek Orthodox). In 1932, the parliament split between Bechara al-Khoury and Émile Eddé as presidential candidates. Some deputies floated Shaykh Muḥammad al-Jisr (a leading Sunni from Tripoli) as a compromise for the presidency. Rather than allow the chamber to elect a Muslim president, High Commissioner Henri Ponsot suspended the constitution and extended Debbas's term. This was an early proof that the new republic's political mechanisms can already be gridlocked in conflict.

In January 1934, Paris directly appointed Habib Pacha Es-Saad (a Maronite), further underscoring that presidential succession was being managed from above. The political system was unable to resolve such a conflict on its own.

The turbulence returned in 1941, when the Vichy/Free French struggle toppled Émile Eddé, who was elected in 1936. High Commissioner Henri Dentz appointed Alfred Naqqache during wartime.

In 1943, within months of independence, Lebanon cycled through Ayoub Tabet (acting), Petro Trad (short-term), and finally Bechara al-Khoury.

Taken together, 1920–43 reads like a continuous presidential crisis seminar: the constitution was suspended several times, acting heads were installed from above, and elections stalled until an external power moved the pieces.

Lebanon was born with a political system beset by structural vetoes and outside arbitration. It foreshadowed the later pattern where leadership turnovers are less about constitutional legitimacy and more about tests of factional balance and foreign leverage.

Even at this early stage in the life of the new state, Maronites were already split along two major schools of thought, represented politically by Émile Eddé and Béchara el-Khoury.

Eddé leaned more towards a country that is essentially Christian, with close alignment with France. In contrast, El-Khoury cultivated a Sunni coalition that envisions Lebanon as a partnership between the two main components of the new country.

The Franco-Lebanese Treaty of Friendship and Alliance (13 November 1936) briefly promised a path to treaty-based independence, but was never ratified by the French Parliament[79]. This weakened the position of Eddé and legitimized other Maronite leaders like El-Khoury, who proposed a domestic formula for independence.

III. A New Lebanese Formula: The Handshake that Set the Rules

The Second World War (1939-1945) brought immense economic and socio-political changes. National independence movements swept the planet from India to South America, passing through the Near East.

The weakened French and British empires signaled the time for making political moves on the local scene. In November 1943, the Lebanese Parliament Chamber passed amendments removing French Mandate prerogatives.

The French arrested President Béchara el-Khoury, Prime Minister Riad al-Solh, and other ministers, detaining them at Rashaya. Mass domestic pressure, coupled with international signals, forced their release on 22 November 1943, the day memorialized as Independence Day. Formal recognition of the independence followed in 1944, and in 1946, the last French troops completed their withdrawal from the country.

The agreement known as "The National Pact" الميثاق الوطني , forged between Maronite President Béchara el-Khoury and Sunni Prime Minister Riad Al-Solh, is credited with enabling a domestic cross-sectarian consensus that achieved independence. This unwritten understanding later became

the foundation of the Lebanese political system for several decades.

The National Pact was a set of reciprocal pledges that were agreed upon, not just between Al-Khoury and Al-Solh, but between the two major communities of Lebanon at the time: Christians and Sunnis.

The Christians, according to the last consensus in 1932, were 52% of the population, and Muslims were 41%, and Druze were around 7%. The Pact made sense for most Maronite elites at the time. It was often summarized with the phrase: *No East, No West*, and it included:

- Christian/Maronite pledge: renounce foreign protection; accept Lebanon's Arab face.
- Sunni/Muslim pledge: renounce plans to unite with Syria; accept Lebanese independence.
- Office allocation by confession (unwritten custom): President (Maronite), Prime Minister (Sunni), Speaker of the Chamber (Shiite). The Parliament was set in a ratio of 6 Christians to 5 Muslim representatives, while most of the executive power stayed in the hands of the President.

The international guarantee for what was originally envisioned as a safe refuge for Christians in the East was replaced by an internal guarantee for what is now a Sunni-Christian partnership.

The confessional distribution of political decisions across the state was seen as a guarantee of just representation for all sects. Given that the Pact was never ratified in text, the

political system relied entirely on the behavior of political elites.

The Pact aimed to legitimize the new Lebanese state across Muslim communities because, up to this point in history, they still saw the republic as a Christian project enabled by imperialist powers. As the Christians gave up on external guarantees and turned their backs on France, it was expected that the Pact would make Muslims do the same and give up on joining greater Syria or establishing a unified Arab state. That second part of the Pact was never followed.

Because the Pact was unwritten, it offered no hard protection for the local competences and defensible governance that the Mountain historically had relied on. The Pact was a modus operandi that depended on elite self-restraint and favorable regional winds, and was shattered by the first regional hurricane that blew our way.

IV. A Deeper Christian Transformation

It is important to note here that after Kafno and the establishment of Greater Lebanon, a great cultural transformation among the Christians of the Levant was taking place.

Their status as an educated minority enabled them to be instrumental in establishing and shaping what was known as the cultural revival النهضة. They contributed heavily to the fields of Arabic literature, politics, business, philosophy, music, theatre and cinema, medicine, and science. The moment that Ottoman restrictions on Christians in the Levant were lifted, they were eager to share their knowledge and contribute to building their countries.

This awakening later led to the emergence of nationalist and leftist political movements and to the birth of Arab nationalism, modeled on the nation-states of Europe.

The Pen League was the first Arabic-language literary society in North America, formed initially by Syrians Nasib Arida and Abd al-Masih Haddad. Members of the Pen League included: Kahlil Gibran, Elia Abu Madi, Mikhail Naimy, and Ameen Rihani. All Christians[80].

On the literary level, it can be argued that the Lebanese core of the Nahda was a romantic movement reflecting on the paradoxes of modernity. It aligned more with its European counterpart at the time than with an imagined Arab nationalism, as argued by Iyad Boustany[81]. However, in the early 20th century, many prominent Arab nationalists were Christians who put significant theoretical and political efforts into building this ideology.

This includes the Syrian intellectual Constantin Zureiq, who is considered the intellectual godfather of Arabic nationalism and the teacher of George Habash. Habash, a Palestinian Christian, later founded The Arab Nationalists Movement in 1951 (حركة القوميين العرب), followed by the Popular Front of the Liberation of Palestine with Wadi' Haddad – also a Christian.

Lebanese Christian Jurji Zaydan is reputed to be the first Arab nationalist[82]. The founder of Ba'athism in 1947, the party that ended up governing Syria and Iraq for decades, was Michel Aflaq. The Founder of the Syrian National Socialist Party in 1932, which aimed to achieve a Greater Syria, was Antun Saade from Shweir of Mount Lebanon. Khalil al-Sakakini, a prominent Palestinian Jerusalemite and Arab nationalist influencer, was Orthodox, as was George Antonius, Lebanese author of *The Arab Awakening*.[83]

The Syrian–Lebanese Communist Party , operating in Syria and Lebanon till today, was founded in 1924 by Lebanese and Armenian Christians Fuad al-Shamali, Yusuf Yazbek, and Artin Madoyan.[84]

It is safe to say that Arab nationalism in its modern form was a Christian movement that believed in secularizing the Islamic masses and building modern nation-states. This adoption of Arabism, however, meant that most Christians in the Near East and Lebanon shifted their cause from self-determination and preservation to other causes that were often at odds with their collective interest. Lebanese Christians came to see Lebanon less as a fortress of freedom and more as a beacon of enlightenment they hoped would shine on all the region.

The idea of an independent Christian Nation became lost to history. Even those who believed in the uniqueness of the Lebanese project with no Arab nationalist leanings, framed their outlook in a pluralistic country with a message of coexistence. This was, for example, the position of Michel Chiha[85], who supplied much of the new republic's intellectual scaffolding and was the counselor of Béchara el-Khoury. Even what was classified as Far Right at the time, The Phalanges Party, founded in 1936, was firmly rooted in the "finality" of this multi-national Lebanese Republic.

The problem is that this noble message was always one-sided: as Christians embraced secularism and Lebanonism and slowly let go of their own heritage, the majority of Muslims in the Near East held on to Islam as the central pillar of politics and daily life. This cultural misstep would later decimate the number of Christians in the Levant. While they were pioneering the ideas of equality and secularism, their countries never accepted them as equals and actively

adopted policies that led to decades of mass immigration, persecution, and exclusion from public life.

In contrast with pre-republic history, the Christians entered the era of the Republic fragmented and detached from their heritage and plagued with conflicting centers of power and ideologies.

V. A broken Pact

The cultural enlightenment that was pioneered by Lebanese Christians enabled the country to build a modernized state despite political instability. This also meant that the Patriarchate had a weakened political authority while pan-arabist politics gained influence among Maronite political circles.

This would later complicate things because many Maronite elites now align with Arabist policies, instead of the historical political thought of self-determination. This ideological shift also disabled the ability of the Republic to deal with structural problems, because this ideological and political split reached the highest echelons of the state.

The Mutasarrifate (1861-1915) had textual guarantees that preserved the rights of Christians: a statute specifying executive identity, council composition, and fiscal remits. In contrast, the early Lebanese Republic relied on oral custom: repartition of top offices and informal confessional balances in civil service and security.

Over time, patronage confessionalism displaced codified protections for local land, water, education, and services, and

displaced the parish–district matrix forged over centuries, replacing it with a dysfunctional government network.

Many of the previous Christian autonomy mechanics were lost and replaced by defective institutions. The sanctuary operating system with local self-sufficiency, local defense, a parish-laity network, and a protected governance seat like Kadisha, was never written into republican law. The new republic had a gimped executive power, a confused foreign policy, a paralyzed army, and a corrupt services network. The substitution of an effective self-governance infrastructure with a dysfunctional republic left a negative long-term impact on Christians within its borders.

The lessons from the long history of Maronite survival were not integrated into the new state, and the Pact's guardrails relied entirely on the whims of political elites. This reality left the Mountain exposed when politics turned hard.

After the independence, the Christians were relying on the Presidency and state institutions to ensure their interests. The Constitution at the time indeed made the President a strong executive on paper. In reality and by custom, presidential capacity depended on inter-sect bargaining, which crippled the political system and disabled most meaningful decisions.

This also meant that during the entire lifetime of the Republic, the President was almost always a result of compromise and therefore came from outside traditional Maronite political thought. Most presidents of the Republic from the moment of its inception till today didn't have political teeth or legitimate popular support.

These circumstances meant that the Pact was broken within two years of its lifespan. The Republic of Lebanon joined the

Arab League in 1945 and then participated in the first Arab-Israeli war in 1948. Joining the Arab League led the Maronite Patriarch Antonios Arida to excommunicate President El-khoury from the Church[86]. This did little to stop the continuous tilt of the Republic and its Christian elites towards Arab and Islamic integration.

From this point onwards, and without a neutrality charter in the constitution, Lebanon swayed with the regional currents. Despite the "No East no West" Pact, the Republic always put itself in the heart of conflicts bigger than its ability to handle, and mostly aligned itself with "The East."

It seems that Christian elites saw such alignment as a show of goodwill. Maybe they hoped to restrain the spillover of regional conflicts into the country. Maybe they wanted to legitimize the Lebanese state in the eyes of its Muslim citizens. And maybe it was just a blind hunger for more power as they entrenched into their positions through cross-sectarian coalitions.

Whatever the reasons, these politics plunged the country further leftward soon after independence. With the influx of Palestinian refugees after the defeat of the Arabs in 1948, and the rise of charismatic authoritarian dictators such as Abed Al Nasser, the Pact unraveled and emboldened Muslim elites to abandon it completely. They would soon attempt to dissolve the Lebanese state and unify it with Syria and Egypt in 1958.

After Kafno, the Maronites built a state that they thought would protect them. But the nature of the new country itself and its demographic realities imposed a tenuous practice of political consensus and diluted the very guarantees the community sought to entrench.

In the decades ahead, this would matter greatly: as regional militarization and ideological projects gained force, a system born of trauma-management and bargain, proved vulnerable to coercion and collapse.

The Maronites had to learn the hard way again, that freedom requires more than noble sentiments.

Table 3. A timeline of Events 1919-1957

Date	Event	Description
1919	Maronite Patriarch Elias Peter Hoyek leads delegation to Paris Peace Conference	Hoyek advocates for an independent Lebanon with expanded borders under French protection, emphasizing economic viability post-famine; faces opposition from Arab delegations favoring Syrian unity.
April 1920	San Remo Conference assigns Mandate to France	Allied powers grant France the mandate over Lebanon and Syria, setting the stage for state-building.
September 1, 1920	Proclamation of the State of Greater Lebanon by General Henri Gouraud	France establishes Greater Lebanon, incorporating Mount Lebanon with Beirut, Tripoli, Sidon, Tyre, and the Bekaa Valley; aims for economic self-sufficiency but sparks protests from Sunni and Shia communities seeking Arab unity.
1923	Paulet-Newcombe Agreement finalizes borders	Defines Lebanon's southern border with British Mandate Palestine, incorporating Jabal Amel but excluding parts of Galilee.

May 23, 1926	Adoption of the Lebanese Constitution	Establishes a centralized political system with confessional division of power among religious groups; modeled on the French Third Republic, it creates a parliamentary democracy with sectarian representation.
1932	National Census conducted	Last official census shows Christians as a slight majority (about 53%); the results are used to allocate parliamentary seats to a 6:5 ratio that guarantees a Christian majority; fuels debates on just representation for Muslims in the republic.
1936	Franco-Lebanese Treaty signed (but not ratified)	Promises independence but maintains French military presence; unratified due to French parliamentary opposition, leading to continued Mandate rule.
November 26, 1941	Free French forces proclaim Lebanon's independence	General Catroux declares independence from Vichy France amid WWII; Bechara al-Khouri is elected president, but full

		sovereignty is delayed until French troop withdrawal.
September 1943	National Pact agreed upon	Unwritten agreement between Maronite President Khouri and Sunni Prime Minister Riad al-Solh; allocates power based on the 1932 census; commits to Arab identity with Western ties.
November 1943	Lebanon achieves de facto independence	Parliament amends the constitution to transfer powers from France; the French arrest government leaders, sparking protests; full transfer to independence by the end of the year.
March 22, 1945	Lebanon joins the Arab League	Lebanon becomes a founding member of the Arab League, signaling a foreign policy aligned with the Islamic world.
1946	French and British troops withdraw	Complete evacuation marks full sovereignty; Lebanon joins the UN.
1948	Arab-Israeli War; Palestinian refugees arrive	Lebanon participates in a limited way; the influx of ~100,000 refugees strains

		resources and alters demographics.
1949	Armistice with Israel	Establishes the Blue Line border; begins a period of short stability.
September 1952	Camille Chamoun elected president	Succeeds Khouri; adopts a pro-Western stance, leading to tensions with Nasserist Arabs.
1956	Suez Crisis impacts Lebanon	Chamoun maintains neutrality during the regional conflict; the crisis exacerbates internal divisions.
1957	Parliamentary elections and the Eisenhower Doctrine	Chamoun accepts US aid to Lebanon under the Eisenhower Doctrine; parliamentary elections result in gains for pro-government candidates amid allegations of irregularities, leading to opposition protests and tensions prelude to the 1958 crisis.

Part II

The Long Collapse of the Lebanese Republic

Chapter 4

The Lebanese Dream Broken

(1958–1975)

On paper, Lebanon in the 1960s looked like a success: growth, banks, and a liberal press. In practice, the state's operating system was always lacking, and the Republic was unraveling at an accelerated rate.

Lebanon's National Pact (1943) enabled the Republic to stand on its own away from foreign protection, but the Pact itself meant that the entire country was built on a fragile compromise.

As Michel Chiha framed it, the Pact was not a metaphysical charter but a "*modus operandi*." It was a method to "re-interpret and adapt the formal Constitution" in a permanently agitated environment[1]. In other words, it was a technique of adapting to crisis, and not an ironclad guarantee.

The problem was that the Pact never succeeded in doing its intended job. At every regional shift in politics, Muslim elites refused to commit to the "No East" part of it. In 1958, a short civil war erupted that led to more political compromise towards the "East" under Shehabism, and then a fragile financial core was exposed by the Intra Bank collapse in 1966. In 1969, the Cairo Agreement hollowed out state sovereignty and formalized armed Palestinian presence on Lebanese soil.

The republic quickly became a mosaic of clientelist fiefdoms, armed militias, and foreign vectors before celebrating its 30th Independence Day. For the Maronite cause, this proved disastrous. Guarantees evaporated and the enemies of a free Lebanon were already inside the country, armed and ready.

I. The 1958 Crisis and The Shehabi Compromise

Under what was known as "Political Maronism" from 1943 to 1975, Lebanon made remarkable economic strides. This earned Beirut its twin nicknames: the "Switzerland of the East" for financial stability and discretion, and the "Paris of the East" for culture, fashion, and tourism.

With a liberal economy, a stable currency, and the 1956 banking-secrecy law, Beirut turned into a regional capital of finance where Arab capital sought safety and services unavailable elsewhere.

The port and international airport functioned as Levantine gateways. MEA connected Beirut to Africa and Europe. Insurers, shipping agents, and trading houses clustered along the waterfront and Hamra. Health and education led the Arab world: AUB and USJ anchored a dense network of hospitals like AUBMC, Hôtel-Dieu, Rizk and others, which trained physicians and nurses for the region and introduced modern specialties and standards.

The press and publishing sectors flourished, making Beirut the Arab world's newsroom and bookshop. Infrastructure, often forgotten in nostalgia, was real: railways linked Tripoli–Beirut–Sidon and the Bekaa, carrying freight and passengers until the mid-1970s. Beirut's tramways served the capital well into the 1960s. Oil refineries at Tripoli and

Zahrani processed crude for local consumption and export; and free-zone logistics amplified the maritime economy.

Tourism and hospitality, with mountain resorts, seaside hotels and festival culture, completed a diversified service hub. By the early 1970s, Lebanon's GDP per capita was well above much of the Arab world[87], despite having no oil or natural resources.

This was not a perfect paradise though. As the Christian elites were turning the country into the Middle East's clinic, classroom, bank, newsroom, and port all at once, Muslim political elites had different plans.

In 1952, Egyptian officer Gamal Abdel Nasser Hussein led a revolution that toppled the Western-friendly monarchy of King Farouk. A wave of Arab nationalism and leftist sentiments swept through the entire Arab world.

This was also during the height of the Cold War between Communist USSR and Capitalist USA. Many Third World countries at the time aligned with the rising red giant against Western nations who were historically their occupying colonial powers.

After consolidating his power in Cairo and nationalizing the Suez Canal, Nasser won a three-day war against the combined forces of the British, French and Israelis. His popularity in the Arab world soared, allowing him to pursue an expansion strategy under the slogan of pan-Arabism and Arab unity.

As his power grew, Nasser exerted influence in Lebanon and Iraq, sent his army to Yemen, interfered in Oman and Jordan, and clashed with other Arab monarchies. He annexed Syria

in 1958, establishing The United Arab Republic (UAR), that now borders the Lebanese state.

Lebanese President Camille Chamoun (1952–58), who sought continued Lebanese independence, faced mounting internal opposition as Egypt and Syria merged. The UAR energized Nasserist networks in Lebanon as Syrian authorities started providing them with direct aid of money, weapons, and military training[88]. Internally, Lebanese Muslims saw in Abed Al-Nasser a liberator from colonial legacies. They looked at pan-Arabism as an equalizer that addresses confessional inequalities in the Lebanese state, where they felt underrepresented and marginalized.

Seeking to expand his influence into Lebanon, Nasser sought to prevent Chamoun from a second presidential term. The Lebanese arabo-leftist movement led by Sunni figures like Rashid Karami, believed that Lebanon is inseparable from the Arab unification project and sought joining Egypt and Syria. Some opposition figures like Sheikh Nadim El-Jisr of Tripoli, publicly called for a "geographic solution": the detachment of Northern Lebanon and joining it to the United Arab Republic.[89]

On 8 May 1958, the assassination of opposition journalist Nasib al-Matni triggered street battles in Beirut and Tripoli. With the shadow of an imminent Nasserist military intervention from the way of Syria looming over the country, Chamoun ordered the army to protect the republic. The army refused the order.

Fouad Shehab (1902-1973) was the Commander of the Lebanese Army at the time. He declined to interfere during the uprising as he had his own ambitions for the presidency and wanted Chamoun out. His refusal to use the army to

protect Lebanese independence set the dangerous precedent of voiding the Lebanese state of its power and sidelining the army to achieve personal gains.

This act puts Shehab on the map as a consensus candidate with cross-sectarian support. He was subsequently rewarded with the Presidency in September 1958, but it left Chamoun no choice but to seek the help of Washington.

On 15 July 1958, the United States launched Operation BLUE BAT, landing Marines at Beirut airport and securing the port to deter regime collapse and broader spillover[4].

A Marine Corps official history calls the operation a "successful show of force" designed to stabilize the capital and create space for a political settlement[6].

The landing was the first practical application of the Eisenhower Doctrine in the Levant. This foreign policy principle enabled any country to request US aid when it was under threat by foreign states aligned with the USSR.

It was also a sign that the Lebanese presidency could not rely on domestic force and the republic's own institutions, including its own army and government. It signaled that the Maronite Presidency is unable to keep the order, maintain independence or weather regional storms without external support.

When Fouad Shehab was elected, he immediately met with Abdel Nasser and compromised on an end to the Lebanese crisis. He quickly announced that "The revolution has no winners and no losers," while U.S forces withdrew.

Shehab formed the Cabinet with Sunni opposition heavyweights like Saeb Salam, who expressed during the crisis that "Our admiration for President Nasser knows no

bounds"[90], and Rashid Karami who did not even believe that Lebanon should exist.

The crisis revealed "a presidency beset by vetoes and outside arbitration," and an opposition that "instrumentalized regional ideology to unsettle the domestic bargain."[91] In other words, it showed that the state doesn't rule, and that relying on foreign backers is the most effective way to move the needle of internal politics. The gradual collapse of the Lebanese state that followed these events was the natural result of such realities.

The centrist reset attempted by Shehab succeeded in providing a few years of stability but set a precedent of defanging the Lebanese state and exposing it to external coercion. It also revealed the true limits of Maronite authority in the new republic.

II. State-building in a Confessional Frame

President Fouad Chehab attempted to reform the Lebanese state as a rules-based administration. He established several modern institutions, such as The Civil Service Board (CSB) to recruit state employees based on merit, and The Central Inspection Burau (CIB) that audits and improves public administration and municipalities.

Up to that point in history, the old notables and muqata'ji system had left its mark on the new republic with a sect-based spoils system. Patronage and sectarian affiliation were key to government and administrative positions.

Shehabism tried to shift the reality from clientelism to merit and official procedures. His policies established recruitment

by exam, inspections, and a Court of Accounts with teeth. It put significant investment in infrastructure and economic development programs that reached neglected districts.

In trying to make the state effective, Shehab also expanded and invested in the security apparatus and especially in military intelligence that became known as "The Second Bureau." These efforts accelerated into transforming the Republic into a pseudo-military junta regime for some time. This was especially true after the attempt of SSNP to seize power in a failed Coup attempt in 1961, spearheaded by two company commanders in the Lebanese army.

Given the nature of the country, and since Shehabism was founded on political compromise, most reforms got quickly re-absorbed and coopted by the political marketplace. At the same time, Palestinian military expansion was increasingly eroding the state's sovereignty.

The difficulty was structural. While Chehab's reforms modernized ministries and widened welfare, they ran through, and sometimes reinforced, the same confessional conduits that had long mediated access to jobs, credit, and police power. In short: the state grew, but the local za'im system grew with it.[92]

The economic model followed a similar trajectory: an attempt at modernization that hit hard limits against a dysfunctional confessional system. The economy quickly became dependent on external factors like foreign capital, to keep it afloat. This manifested in the Intra Bank crisis in October 1966 that hit the country's largest bank.

Lebanon's post-war model leaned on banking liberalism with notable banking secrecy and open capital accounts. Beirut became a regional clearing house and a tax-free haven

for money, including political capital. This arrangement amplified growth, but it was bound to collapse with thin regulation and unsupervised links between banks, politics, and media.

As the Central Bank struggled to contain the liquidity crisis of Intra, and several smaller banks failed or merged, the crisis exposed poor economic policies and the increased reliance on external – and often politicized – capital.

The outcome of Shehabism by the mid-1960s was paradoxical. In Beirut and along the coast, services improved and the economy boomed. In the mountain and periphery, citizens still experienced the state as an intermittent presence filtered through local notables. The republic edged towards a stable clientelist equilibrium, so long as external conflicts stayed beneath a threshold, but they did not.

Amid Lebanon's economic boom in the 1960s and early 1970s, profound social transformations reshaped society, often amplifying underlying tensions. Rapid urbanization drew rural populations to Beirut and coastal cities, eroding traditional kinship ties and fostering a cosmopolitan and politically active middle class. Education expanded dramatically while literacy rates climbed from around 60% in 1960 to over 80% by 1975. Women's roles evolved amid liberal influences; increasing workforce participation (from 15% to 25%) and access to higher education challenged traditional norms, though confined largely to urban elites. Cultural flourishing, through cinema, music, and festivals, promoted a vibrant, Western-oriented youth culture. This rapid social transformation also masked growing inequalities and sectarian divides. Student protests in the late 1960s against inflation and socioeconomic disparities

reflected leftist and pan-Arab sentiments, intersecting with Cold War ideologies. The influx of Palestinian refugees after 1967 and Black September in 1970 militarized society, heightening communal fears. These shifts fragmented the social fabric, turning prosperity into a veneer over deepening polarization that contributed to the 1975 civil war outbreak.

This social upheaval, coupled with fragile state-building and misguided foreign policy, showed its limits quickly after the Arab defeat in 1967. What followed was the subsequent radicalization and militarization of Palestinian guerrillas and large parts of the Lebanese Muslim population, setting the stage for an unprecedented clash.

III. The Cairo Agreement and the Path to Civil War

Palestinian guerrilla operations from southern Lebanon escalated after 1967: Israeli reprisals intensified; clashes between the Lebanese Army (LAF) and Palestinian fedayeen multiplied around camps and border villages. The country was boiling.

Political pressure rose within Lebanon's Sunni leadership, who considered the fedayeen to be the vanguards of Arab dignity after defeat.

Palestinian and Lebanese Islamic leadership were itching to dedicate the entire country to armed conflict with Israel. It considered the Lebanese State and its Maronite core as traitors to the cause and tools of the imperial West.

As support in the form of money, weapons, and volunteers flowed from many Arab capitals into Lebanon, the State

found it extremely difficult to contain the Palestinian militias or curb their operations against Israel. Palestinian armed organizations led by the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), expanded their area of control inside Lebanon and came to rule several regions directly, especially in the South.

Lebanon began paying a heavier price for the escalating conflict. In 1968, an Israeli raid on its only airport destroyed its national passenger airplane fleet. The attack was done in retaliation for the hijacking of two Israeli airliners by the Lebanon-based Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine.

As the Lebanese economy started crumbling and the state's authority eroded, Lebanese Islamic leaders such as Prime Minister Rashid Karami and Kamal Jumblat, were openly talking about overthrowing "The Maronite Rule" and fully committing Lebanon to the Palestinian cause.

When the Lebanese Army clashed heavily with Palestinian militants to limit their expansion, Prime Minister Rashid Karami ceased performing his government duties and organized anti-government protests. In 1969, following violent clashes between the Army and PLO, Muslim leaders held a meeting chaired by Grand Mufti Sheikh Hassan Khaled, and suspended their participation in power, insisting that it could only be discussed after giving Palestinian militants full freedom of military operation.[93]

Following the crisis, Egyptian President Nasser mediated talks in Cairo between Yasser Arafat and the LAF commander General Emile Boustani. On 3 November 1969, they signed what became known as the Cairo Agreement.[94]

The agreement, later ratified by Shehabist President Charles Helou under international and local pressure, acknowledged an independent Palestinian State within the Lebanese State:

- It moved governance inside the major 16 Palestinian camps from Lebanese military intelligence (Deuxième Bureau) to Palestinian committees[95]. It was a de facto jurisdictional carve-out from the state.
- It normalized cross-border paramilitary activity from the South and transformed it into a military conflict zone outside the sovereignty of the state.
- It allowed Palestinians the freedom of movement and work in the country. In practice, this was used to expand Palestinian military operations and presence beyond the areas that were originally agreed upon.
- It codified an exception to the state by allowing armed actors on Lebanese soil, giving them political protection, and allowing them to have external patrons and do as they please without consequence.

This pact of shame established a dual security regime within the state and announced a total alignment of the Republic with the Palestinian side in an armed conflict. It stated that "The Palestinian armed struggle is in the interest of Lebanon as well as… all Arabs"[96]. This made Lebanon's foreign policy the most extreme in its Palestinian support, compared with any other Arab country at the time.

It is noteworthy that the signing of the Cairo Agreement allowed the formation of a new government under the premiership of Rashid Karami again, seven months after his resignation.

By tolerating and regulating an armed non-state presence, the Agreement punctured the state's monopoly on force. Entire districts soon came to be known as "Fatahland"—operated and governed entirely by the PLO. Palestinian camps transformed into no-go zones and became military barracks with ammo dumps and tunnels. This was the case even in areas as far from the South as Dekwaneh and Karantina in East Beirut.

Even sympathetic leftist scholars like Fawaz Traboulsi concede that jurisdictional ambiguity and the ensuing unlawfulness outpaced any political benefit.

Sectarian polarization deepened. Many Sunni leaders treated support for the fedayeen as a pan-Arab obligation, but most Christian leaders considered the Cairo agreement a Pact breach. Some Maronite leadership was in disbelief: Muslim leaders claimed they accepted a "No Winner" outcome in 1958's conflict, so how could they now endorse, again, an non-Lebanese armed agenda on Lebanese soil? The old procedural trust shrank, and local militias multiplied.

Every border clash or reprisal raid now fed a loop Lebanon could not police. The LAF's room for maneuver was narrowed to doing nothing to avoid a domestic showdown. This avoidance would no longer be possible after 1975.

The Cairo agreement was a constitutional event imposed through military force that changed the shape and function of the Lebanese Republic. Even though it happened at the height of what was known as "Political Maronism," it shows that the Lebanese Republic was never a Maronite state or had Christian interests at its core.

Legitimizing Palestinian militias allowed every Arab, Islamic, and Communist country in the world to throw money and weapons into Lebanon to show their support of the Palestinian cause. It was a risk-free method for these regimes to gain global and local legitimacy without compromising their own rule or security at home.

In just a few years, The Republic was transformed into an international platform for the Arab-Israeli conflict. It put the country under a torrent of interventions from every regime and political party in the world, and transformed it into a regional and international problem. The Christians who wanted nothing to do with this conflict, and who wanted this Republic to protect their existence, suddenly found themselves sacrificed on the altar of regional politics. They are now second-class citizens in their own country, betrayed by their own countrymen, and under occupation from a foreign force.

As the State failed its Christians, the opposition at the time, made up of the Phalanges, National Liberal Party, and National Bloc, read the cards and started preparing for the inevitable clash.

IV. 1975 in Sight: Why the System Failed the Christians

From the moment of its creation up to 1975, the Lebanese Republic suffered from crippling dysfunction. The National Pact, which aimed to resynthesize the state from a Christian project into a multi-sectarian republic, failed shortly after its inception.

From independence onwards, the country went from crisis to crisis, with each tilting the alignment further towards Arab and Islamic causes.

The 1958 U.S Marines landing saved the centrist presidency of Camil Shamoun and stopped the country from falling under Abdel Nasser's rule. This small intervention, though, could not save it from the Shehabi compromise that turned it leftwards.

The "No East" side of The National Pact was clearly broken by Lebanese Sunni parties in 1958. Despite the slogan of "No winner, no loser" that was supposed to reassert the Pact's essence after that crisis, the Muslim elites broke the Pact again in 1969. Shehabism pushed the country further east, establishing closer relations with Egypt and pursuing a pro-Palestinian foreign policy that allowed for military buildup on Lebanese soil. This appeasement did not stop Muslim leadership and masses from breaking the Pact again from 1967 onwards, opening the country to sovereign exemptions and paving the road to civil war.

In the 1960s, the State capacity grew, but clientelist and sectarian filters persisted. Veto points multiplied to the extent that the state could barely take any meaningful action in any domain.

When Palestinian armed occupation became a real problem, the central state was unable to manage. Sunni and Islamic components of both the Army and government, used their political weight and threatened retaliation whenever a decisive state action was taken.

In 1969, the State conceded dual authority in the name of Arab solidarity and internal peace[97]. The placation of

Palestinians and Lebanese Muslims at the expense of the State did not temper the crisis but only made it worse. By 1975, the security map belonged to whoever could coerce on the ground with weapons. Cabinet crises became tests of popular and military muscle. When the starting whistle was finally struck in April 1975, the republic was already a quarry of armed fiefs.

Of course, many social and economic stressors contributed to the explosion of violence, but it was preceded by a dysfunctional state.

Several dynamics fed this dysfunction:

(a) A State crippled by sectarian vetoes. The Pact's unwritten ratios, like dividing top offices by confession and the implicit distribution of senior civil-service posts, became hard practice. The model managed differences and ensured representation for different sects, but it made veto points abundant and policy coherence difficult.[98] Even as it was sometimes "effective in defusing open conflict", it "proved to be an *unstable* mode when external shocks and armed actors multiplied".[99]

(b) Sectarian clientelism. Ministries and state corporations increasingly functioned as sect portfolios. Access to utilities, public contracts, and public-sector jobs tracked factional loyalties. Procurement and public-works spending flowed through patronage channels more than transparent tenders. This led to many social and geographic imbalances and reinforced large-scale corruption. Shehabist technocracy did set new bureaucratic standards, but without a neutral enforcement spine, the center brokered more than it governed. Economic growth masked a regressive

distribution of state benefits and fed local grievances that later found paramilitary forms.[100]

(c) Foreign dependency as local political leverage. Parties and leaders acquired external backers to offset domestic rivals, especially on the Left side of the political spectrum. The Lebanese Sunni political class used Palestinian organizations and Arab states like Egypt, Syria, and Libya to expand its influence. This made cabinet bargaining internationalized by default. After 1967, the Palestinian question introduced an explosive variable: armed formations on Lebanese soil, justified by Arab duty and "the right of resistance" outside the state's chain of command.[101]

(d) A state without authority. By the early 1970s, the south became a central stage in the Arab–Israeli conflict. As the Cairo Agreement took hold and regional polarization grew, foreign dependency shifted from economy to security. The state started relying heavily on external factors to achieve that security instead of using its own apparatus.

The Lebanese Army was increasingly sidelined, following the same policy established in 1958. This time, such an avoidant policy came with a high cost for the entire country. The inability of the state to act led to a multiplication of crises and the rise of local militias that aimed to resolve what the state couldn't.

Even though the political system at the time was described as "Political Maronism," with Maronites holding many decisive positions in the state, the system could not ensure the interests or the security of the Maronites. In fact, it could not secure the interests of anyone in the Republic, nor was it able to defend its own existence.

Three major crises before 1975 showed the limit of power in this system:

a) The inability to produce a president locally. During the French Mandate years, we already saw how High Commissioners suspended the constitution to resolve several presidential deadlocks. The post-independence rhyme was different in shape but similar in essence: the Pact often could not generate a consensual arbiter for the position of president. Foreign powers had to play the tiebreaker. Historically, the republic only elected a few presidents on its own, while the rest were consensual, low-risk, foreign-endorsed candidates. This habit created weak presidents who governed through constant compromise and took no decisive actions.

b) A president who needed Marines. The crisis of 1958 showed that the Maronite presidency, despite being a strong office on paper, was without teeth. The Maronite president, even when he had full constitutional powers, lacked self-sufficient means to face a multi-sect revolt tuned to regional ideology. The president was unable to even command the army to defend the Republic from clear external or internal dangers. This impotence was proved again from 1967 onwards. With the absence of a reliable coercive force to defend them, the Christians of Mount Lebanon were stripped of a crucial survival element they maintained since the time of the Maradaites. Today, some people think that restoring the president's powers is the equivalent of restoring Christian rights in the Republic, but history shows that this assumption isn't true.

c) A treaty that changed the regime. The 1969 Cairo Agreement showed Lebanese Christians that internal guarantees with their compatriots can easily disappear.

> Muslim partners broke the National Pact several times in a few decades, adopted foreign causes, and established armed militias. The state, even under political Maronism, was pressured into a situation that changed the identity of the country and weaponized it against Christians.

This goes to show that even if Lebanon was conceived originally as a Christian-led state, the Lebanese Republic was never one in practice. It failed to defend the existence of Christians and their freedoms from the beginning.

By 1975, the Mountain's historical sanctuary logic had no legal room to operate and wasn't present in memory. Despite the cultural drift, Christian parties at the time set to reclaim some of it on their own by building protected and capable centers, revitalizing the parish-school networks, and building geography-aware local defenses. The war that followed would test every autonomy mechanic that Christians had perfected across centuries and would put their very existence on the line.

Table 4. Timeline of Events 1958-1975

Date	Event	Description
July 1958	1958 Lebanon Crisis (Mini Civil War)	Political tensions erupt into violence between pro-Western government under President Camille Chamoun and pan-Arab opposition; U.S. intervenes with Operation Blue Bat, deploying 14,000 troops to stabilize; ends with Chamoun's term completion and the election of Fuad Chehab.
September 1958	Fuad Chehab elected President	Chehab assumes office, initiating reforms to modernize administration, expand welfare, and balance sectarian representation; aims to reduce inequalities but faces resistance.
1960	Parliamentary Elections	Elections under Chehab led to more balanced representation, but underlying sectarian and ideological divides persist amid economic growth.
1961	Failed SSNP Coup Attempt	A failed coup attempt by the Syrian Social Nationalist Party against Chehab's government,

		highlights pan-Syrian nationalist threats.
September 1964	Charles Helou elected President	Helou succeeds Chehab; continues reforms but oversees growing economic disparities and political polarization.
October 1966	Intra Bank Crisis	Collapse of Lebanon's largest bank triggers financial panic; government intervention stabilizes economy but exposes vulnerabilities in the banking sector.
June 1967	Six-Day War Impact	Israel's victory over Arab states leads to an influx of Palestinian fighters into Lebanon; heightens border tensions and internal debates on Arab nationalism.
November 1967–1968	Initial Clashes Between Lebanese Army and Palestinian Militants	Post-Six-Day War, sporadic confrontations occur as Palestinian fedayeen establish bases in southern Lebanon; Lebanese army attempts to curb militant activities, leading to skirmishes.
November 1968	Israeli Raid on Beirut Airport	Israel destroys 13 Lebanese aircraft in retaliation for PFLP attack; exposes Lebanese

		military weaknesses and fuels calls for stronger defense.
May 1969	Clashes in Southern Lebanon	Lebanese army engages Palestinian militants in the south amid growing fedayeen operations; includes sieges of army positions, such as in Bent Jbeil area, where militants surround LAF barracks.
October 1969	Cairo Agreement Signed	Accord between the Lebanese government and PLO allows armed Palestinian presence in refugee camps; it cedes control over southern areas, eroding state sovereignty.
September 1970	Black September Spillover	Jordan's expulsion of PLO leads to their relocation to Lebanon; increases militarization and sectarian fears among Christians.
September 1970	Suleiman Frangieh elected President	Frangieh wins the presidency; his term sees escalating tensions with Palestinians and internal divisions.
April 1973	Israeli Raid on Beirut (Operation Spring of Youth)	Israeli commandos assassinate PLO leaders in Beirut; leads to Lebanese government resignation and highlighting

		the state's inability to protect territory.
February 1975	Fishermen's Strike in Sidon	Clashes between the army and protesters over the fishing monopoly escalate into sectarian violence; PLO involvement worsens the crisis.
April 13, 1975	Ain el-Rummaneh Bus Massacre	Gunmen from PFLP open fire on a church in Ein El Remmeneh during a Baptism killing four Christians. Phalangists retaliate by ambushing a Palestinian bus in Christian areas, killing 27 militants, sparking widespread fighting; this marks the start of the Lebanese Civil War.

Chapter 5

Civil War and the Maronite Struggle (1975–1990)

A lot can be said about the civil war that swept through Lebanon from 1975 to 1990, but in the end, it was not different for Lebanese Christians from what they had been through before. It was a struggle to defend their homeland, preserve their existence, keep their freedoms, and exercise their right of self-determination.

Lebanon's civil war unfolded as competing sovereignties under foreign umbrellas clashed. The war had many internal political and socio-economic factors that led to it, but the role of Palestinian militant organizations was the trigger. Simply speaking, Palestinian organizations and their Lebanese Islamo-leftist allies tried to take over the entire country with the blessing and support of many Arab and international powers.

Christian and Maronite organizations and their political leaders oscillated between three strategies that sometimes conflicted with each other:

(1) Empower the Lebanese Republic to be strong enough to protect and provide for all its people, including Muslims.

(2) Carve a separate self-governed Christian canton when the center failed, and

(3) Leverage external powers to deter existential threats.

That triangle produced moments of consolidation and legendary heroism, like in the battles of Zahle and Achrafieh. It also led to catastrophic displacement when external powers withdrew their support, like in the War of the Mountain in 1983. And finally, it was also marred by bloody splits like in the intra-Christian war of 1990.

The war ended with what can be considered a major Christian defeat. One that put them outside the decision-making positions in the country for the next four decades.

The guiding lesson for the Maronite Cause here is stark: if you do not commit to one clear project and fight each other or rely on foreign security guarantees, our enemies will win and decide our destiny for several generations after our failure.

As this is not a history book, we will highlight some of the key moments in the war that teach us important lessons about our cause.

I. The Two-Year War and Syria's Entry (1975–1977)

The war's conventional start is April 13, 1975, after an attack by Palestinians on a Maronite church. Christian militants retaliated by ambushing a bus carrying Palestinians in Ein al-Remmene. Street fighting widened into front lines and sieges across Beirut and in the north within hours.

The conflict rapidly systematized into coalitions: The pan-Arab leftist Lebanese National Movement, made up of Islamic majority parties and Palestinian formations on one

side; and The Lebanese Front, made up of Christian militias on the other. The state institutions receded to the sidelines.

The amount of funds and support that Palestinians received from the Arab world to overtake Lebanon was limitless. For example, Libyan dictator Muammar Al Qaddafi alone transferred tens of millions of dollars in the first six months of the war to support armed Islamic militias. These sums of money allowed them to acquire three of Beirut's newspapers and give sizeable bribes to other Lebanese politicians[102]. This was just one leader among dozens who supported and funded the war against Lebanese Christians for fifteen years.

When the war started, Palestinian and Lebanese Islamo-leftist organizations had spent years training and stockpiling arms and heavy weaponry. They had wide Arab and international support with funds, men, and intelligence. Volunteers from all around the world bolstered their ranks, including those who came from unexpected regions like Sudan and Somalia. Given the power balance, and after ensuring that the Lebanese Army would not interfere, they thought they would march on the capital and end the war in a few days.

Facing them were civilian Christian men with little training, and who were generally considered by their Muslim fellows as "soft." The reality, however, was different: the Christians held their ground, some using only their hunting rifles, and the war dragged.

As soon as the war erupted, Palestinian and Islamo-leftist militias started committing massacres against the Christians of the country that welcomed them. They enacted dozens of massacres whenever they stepped foot in a Christian village,

as they advanced from their southern and northern strongholds towards the Capital.

These massacres include the Damour massacre in the south on 20 January 1976. The PLO and its Lebanese allies killed more than five hundred civilians including children and women and elderly and displaced 15,000 Christians. Chekka and Hamat witnessed another massacre as the Lebanese National Movement approached from the North. Palestinians and their Lebanese allies killed two hundred civilians and even blocked a tunnel to Batroun that residents were using trying to flee. Christian civilians burned and suffocated to death inside their cars with their families[103].

Aishiyeh was also another village that suffered a similar fate, where PLO massacred 70 Lebanese Christian civilians including children. In Shouf, Druze fighters loyal to Kamal Jumblatt attacked Christian villages, killing hundreds of Maronites.

This included the towns of Moukhtara and Barouk, and the villages of Mazraat el-Chouf, Maaser el-Chouf, Botmeh, Kfar Nabrakh, Machghara[104]. In the village of Brih, they attacked St George's Church during prayers on Sunday with automatic gunfire killing dozens of worshipers[105].

Through 1976, the east Beirut front was marked by the long siege and fall of Tall al-Zaʿtar camp. It was a Palestinian military camp that terrorized and murdered the surrounding civilian population for years. Its fall, alongside Jisr al-Basha and Karantina camps, became a grim emblem of the war's early brutality and showed that Christians are willing to and capable of committing atrocities themselves in defense of their existence.

The devastating war opened the country to more foreign interventions, this time from neighboring Syria. Damascus at the time was looking to regain and expand its regional status after its defeat against Israel in 1973.

In January 1976, Syria proposed to restore the limits to Palestinian guerrilla presence in Lebanon to what it had been prior to the outbreak of the civil war. Christian leaders welcomed the proposal, but Palestinian militias rejected it.

Syria's political interventions became more frequent towards the end of Suleiman Frangieh's presidency. He ended up inviting and legitimizing their direct military intervention under an Arab League mandate known as the Arab Deterrent Force (ADF). This move was supposed to end the civil war and enforce a cease-fire, and it came with the approval of other Christian leaders at the time. This was a strategic mistake with long term implications that would soon cost the Maronites more than they have ever imagined.

On May 31, 1976, the Syrian Army invaded Lebanon with infantry, tanks, and air support, in a three-pronged offensive from the South, Bekaa and North. By mid-October 1976, The Syrian army succeeded at capturing all central Lebanon as well as some of the country's most important urban centers.

It did not take long for the Syrian occupation of Lebanon to show its true face and expansionist mindset. Right after the invasion started, Hafez al-Assad espoused the notion of a "Greater Syria" in a speech about Lebanon, stating: "Syria and Lebanon were one state and one people... and have shared interests and a common history"[106].

The occupation mindset of the Syrian army clashed immediately with the Christian struggle for independence. The relationship between the Syrian forces and Maronite

leadership deteriorated. In 1977, tensions turned into hostility then ignited an open conflict.

II. The Syrian Siege on Lebanon's Christians and Bashir's Dream

As the relations between Lebanese Christians and Hafez Al Assad's regime collapsed, Syria attempted to break and occupy Mount Lebanon and Christian-controlled areas. They shelled civilian centers and besieged major cities, cutting off water, food, and resources, for months on end.

In July–October 1978, the "Hundred Days' War" pitted Syrian Army units against the Christian quarters of East Beirut, mainly Ashrafiyeh. Heavy bombardment devastated the neighborhood and surrounding districts; systematic shelling and sniping compressed civilian life into basements and corridors. The goal of the Syrian army was clear: punish the civilian population to impose political terms. For Christian neighborhoods, it was a primer in siege survival, civil defense and inter-militia coordination that brought back their defiant survivalist spirit.

As 15,000 Syrian troops besieged the few city blocks of Ashrafiyeh, The Lebanese Front united its leadership under Bashir Gemayel at the cost of internal fighting. The fragmentation that plagued Maronites since the formation of the Republic, eventually extracted a cost of blood.

Successive counterattack operations against Syrian brigades led to more devastating responses from the occupation army. Syrians bombed the city savagely at a heavy rate, reaching sometimes 100 shells per minute. The final stage of the war culminated with the humiliating surrender of entire brigades

of Syrian special forces to Christian fighters after days of encirclement. This event caused a massive collapse in Syrian morale, and its leadership started to question the ability of their army to take Lebanon.

The USSR rushed to defend Damascus and save its face by calling a meeting with the UN security council on 7th October 1978. A decision was enacted that forced an end to the Syrian operation in East Beirut. Christian resistance was victorious and the Capital remained free.

Despite the victory, this was also one of the first times in the history of Maronites that they fight an existential war divided. The Christian map of power included the Marada in the North, affiliated with former president Suleiman Frangieh, who were pro-Syrian and helped and facilitated the occupation of the country. The Islamo-leftist front was also full of Christian leaders and members, with thousands of Christian militants fighting their own people instead of fighting for them. Secularism and Arabist-leftist affiliations reached a critical level in the Christian community before 1975 and allowed the Islamo-leftists to prop up entire militant organizations made of Christian fighters.

That was the case for example, of the Lebanese Armed Revolutionary Faction (LARF), led by George Abdallah. It was composed entirely of Maronites trained by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine[107]. It conducted several terrorist attacks in France and at home[108]. In the meantime, the Lebanese Army was on the sidelines as it always was in every existential crisis before.

The Battle of Zahle in spring 1981 was another attempt to break the Christians of the mountain and exemplified ridge-town resilience. Lebanese Forces (LF) units held out against

Syrian encirclement for months. The Syrian army besieged the town with artillery, tanks, and helicopters while the defenders only had light infantry and limited artillery. When the armored brigades of the Syrian army tried to take the city in a massive attack in April, Christian warriors engaged them ferociously and destroyed more than twenty tanks in two days. Zahle's fighters battled so effectively that they made Syrians assume Israeli commando units were fighting against them[109]. When Syrian attacks kept failing, the occupation retaliated by kidnapping civilians and torturing them, then they shelled the city for hours, reaching sometimes sixteen continuous hours of bombing[110].

Eventually, the Syrian attack on Zahle failed, and an agreement was reached that withdrew the Syrian positions from around Zahle and ended the siege. Lebanese Internal Security Forces entered the city to replace the Lebanese Forces militia in what was considered another decisive victory for Christians.

In June 1982, Israel invaded Lebanon, besieging West Beirut to expel the PLO. They succeeded in achieving their goal in less than two months. As the PLO withdrew most of its forces from Beirut in August 1982, the era of Palestinian armed occupation of Lebanon began to end. The battlefield was rearranged and became more internally complicated.

Bashir Gemayel, who was credited with several military victories, had succeeded in folding most Christian militias into the Lebanese Forces at this point. He was elected president on 23 August 1982.

Despite his Christian militancy, Bashir deeply believed in the Lebanese Republic and sought to reunite it rather than build a Christian state. This was clear in his slogan of 10,452 SQM,

encompassing the entirety of the Lebanese Republic. Once elected, he refused to promise to sign a peace treaty with Israel without the approval of Lebanese Muslims.[111] Contemporaries of Bashir cite that he planned to centralize and modernize the state, disarm Palestinian camps, and kick out the Syrian occupation. He wanted to then use his relations with the Americans to pressure the Israelis into withdrawing from Lebanese territory[112].

He was assassinated on 14 September 1982 in East Beirut, before taking office, by a Christian from the Syrian Social Nationalist Party. The death of Bashir was a tragedy for an entire nation and marked the date for many as the end of the Christian dream of a free and prosperous republic.

III. The Mountain War and The Wound that Never Healed

The period that followed the assassination of President Bashir Gemayel saw the worst days for Christians in the Lebanese Republic. Most of their historical endurance mechanisms had already been absent by the time the civil war erupted, but the institutions they built and the tendencies they acquired under the Republic only magnified their suffering. During this period, they were plagued by indecisive leaders, political division, corruption, political inheritance mechanisms, and leadership that prioritized the interests of an imagined multi-cultural entity over those of Christians.

These trends led to a series of disasters between 1982 and 1991 that undid all the victories accomplished under Bashir. These defeats caused the displacement of hundreds of

thousands of Christians from their homes, deeply changing the fabric of Mount Lebanon and the republic.

Amine Gemayel was elected president after Bashir in 1982. In form, it seemed that he tried to continue Bashir's project of centralizing the State and imposing peace. In practice, his presidential era was characterized by incompetence, inaction, and contradictory policies. He tried to impose the State's authority over Shouf and Southern Mount by force, then abandoned the project and let native Christians pay the price. He signed an agreement with Israel in 1983, then abrogated it in 1984. He faced the Syrians then welcomed them in. He tried to make economic reforms but ended up with one of the biggest financial and economic crises during the civil war.

As a result of these policies, the war got bloodier and more destructive. Fighting intensified on all fronts.

As Israel withdrew from Southern Mount Lebanon in 1983, the region was set up to explode. Gemayel and The Lebanese Forces tried to expand their areas of control using force. On the other side, Walid Jumblatt, leader of Druze and a decision maker in the Islamo-leftist faction, sought to use the momentum of Israeli withdrawal to achieve his agenda. That agenda was none other than eliminating all and any existence of Christians in Shouf and Alley.

During the next two years, The War of The Mountain pitted Druze PSP and allied forces against Lebanese Forces militias and allied Lebanese Army Divisions.

At the time, Amine Gemayel was making his push to implement The May 17 Agreement with Israel. He was backed by a reorganized Lebanese Army and supported by

a newly deployed US Marines peace-keeping force in Beirut. The Lebanese Army, commanded at the time by Ibrahim Tannous, re-entered West Beirut and tried to assert its authority in Aley and Shouf. The Islamo-leftist alliance, backed by Syria, wanted to fail this attempt and regain their standing after the withdrawal of the PLO.

The events that followed saw retributions and large-scale massacres on both sides. The LF and Lebanese Army presence in Shouf and Alley was symbolic, without large forces or heavy equipment. They were heavily outnumbered by the PSP and its allies.

When fighting broke, Christian fighters were told to hold for a day until reinforcements from the Lebanese Army and LF arrive. These reinforcements never materialized. As the Republic abandoned the Christians of Shouf and Alley, the LF quickly learned the limits of its power outside its core strongholds. As a result of these reckless policies, Christians suffered the biggest genocide and displacement in their modern history, perpetrated by Jumblatt and his PSP militia.

Whenever they entered a village, even those without any LF presence, Druze fighters implemented a 'territorial cleansing' policy to wipe the Christian population entirely[113]. In one offensive alone between 31 August and 13 September 1983, Jumblatt's militia forces overran thirty-two villages, killing 1,500 civilians and displacing all the remaining inhabitants. PSP and Islamic militias emptied entire towns and villages of their Christian population, burned their churches, and looted their houses. Historical sources estimate that the massacres and ethnic cleansing ultimately led to the displacement of 20,000 Druze and 163,670 Christian villagers from Shouf.[114]

Once the dust from the Mountain War settled, and with the sole exception of Deir El Qamar and a couple of villages, The Shouf was empty of its Christians and Church bells fell silent for the first time in seven hundred years.

The following years saw more military setbacks for Christian militias. US Marines pulled out of the country after getting their headquarters blown up by Hezbollah, and Israel withdrew further south. The Lebanese Forces suffered several strategic defeats in the South and withdrew from Jezzine and Saida, where another mass displacement of Christians took place.

In the North and Bekaa, Syrian forces were making progress, closing in on Tripoli, expanding in Koura, and tightening up their control over several areas. The 17 May agreement was canceled, and the LAF was reorganized to become more Syrian-friendly. Tannous was removed from leadership and command was handed to a sympathizer with Syria and the Islamo-left, called Michel Aoun.

The numbers of Christians in Lebanon were dwindling fast during this time. From 1975 to 1984, between 600,000 and 900,000 Lebanese fled the country, 80 percent of them were Christians. Christians percentage of the population declined from around 54% in 1965[115] to 25% in 1985.

In many ways it seemed that Christians were on the brink of total annihilation during the mid-eighties. The situation on the ground made some of their leaders seek agreements with their opponents. This is what prompted Elie Hobeika, the leader of the security division in the Lebanese forces, to sign an agreement with Walid Jumblatt and Nabih Berri in 1985. The accord was signed under Syrian supervision and with

the support of LAF commander Aoun, who proposed and planned the military details of the settlement[116].

The deal included surrendering Christian positions and privileges in the Republic and legitimizing the Syrian occupation of Lebanon. The logic of the agreement was one of defeat, as expressed by Hobeika telling the clergy in Bkerki before signing it: "The Christians today are still wearing the uniform and holding their guns, but I'm afraid a worse day might come, in which we have to sign a treaty without our guns and uniforms".[117]

It's interesting to note that this agreement is almost identical to the Taif Accord that Christian leaders had to sign 5 years later after a worse defeat.

The military commander of the Lebanese Forces at the time, Samir Geagea, had the opposite opinion to Hobeika. His stance was more in line with the heritage of Christian resistance, positing that "we were once confined to a single valley and still managed to resist. It is better to keep our freedoms, even with their hefty cost, than surrendering them."

The agreement was negated and abandoned shortly after ousting Hobeika by force from the LF, but the troubles of the Christians were far from over.

IV. The Fall of the First Republic

During the next few years, for the first time since the creation of the Republic, Christian leadership pivoted its policies and turned its attention into establishing a proper state administration in Christian areas.

After the PLO and Israeli withdrawal from most of Lebanon, the warring factions competed for resources and control, with internal fighting breaking on both sides of the war.

The War of the Camps (1985–87) saw prolonged sieges by Amal and its allies of Palestinian camps in Beirut, inflicting famine and heavy casualties and further curbing the influence of Palestinian militias. In the meantime, Syrians were fighting Islamist factions in the North, leftist SSNP was clashing with Islamic Mourabitoun in Beirut, and Jumblatt's PSP were warring with Amal.

A new factor in the war was Hezbollah; a newly created Shiite religious militia, backed by Iran and aiming to overthrow the Lebanese government and establish an Islamic Republic. During this stage of the war, Hezbollah's main mode of operation was establishing domination inside the Shiite sect. It conducted a series of assassinations that targeted the Shiite members of leftist national parties like the SSNP and Communist Party, then clashed with the Syrian backed Amal. "The War of Brothers" as it became known in history, left thousands of dead on both sides and reached West Beirut, South and Bekaa. The Amal-Hezbollah war only ended when the civil war concluded. The agreement gave Hezbollah a free military reign while Amal abandoned its military role and got all the political spoils and positions in the reformed republic.

The Christian side was also on a collision course towards its own War of Brothers with one of the worst leaders to have emerged in Maronite history.

From September 22, 1988, when President Amine Gemayel appointed the Army Commander to lead a military government, to October 13, 1990, when that commander fled

to the French Embassy as the Syrian army overran Baabda, the arc of Michel Aoun is one of failed adventurism followed by collapse.

On March 14, 1989, Aoun declared a "War of Liberation" against the Syrian Army who occupied two thirds of the country at the time and was backed by dozens of Lebanese and Palestinian militias. Aoun's war declaration echoed with the sentiment of a Christian population exhausted by Damascus' bombardments and incursions. The problem though, is that it was not preceded by proper preparations for the Lebanese Army or government institutions, and it did not take into consideration the balance of power or international politics.

His attempt didn't move the needle on the military level but unleashed months of Syrian indiscriminate shelling and economic strangulation that devastated Christian districts. Syrian forces imposed a siege on East Beirut, cutting off medicine and food on 500,000 inhabitants, and heavily shelling the district. In just two days in August 1989 for example, The Syrian Army shelled East Beirut with 20,000 bombs, leaving hundreds of dead and wounded.[118]

The Port and East Beirut neighborhoods absorbed artillery punishment without strategic gain. Aoun's radio boasts and maximalist speeches were matched by the absence of a coalition, a plan, or a ceiling. His "liberation" was war by press releases, while the Christian heartland paid the price in blood, displacement, and wrecked infrastructure.[119]

Over 1,000 Christian civilians were killed in the first six months of Aoun's campaign, with thousands more wounded and an economy shuddering under blockade.

Having failed to eject Syria and ending up losing hundreds of soldiers and several key strategic positions to the Syrian Army in Metn and Baabda, Aoun suddenly turned his guns inward. In January 1990, he declared the "War of Elimination" against the Lebanese Forces (LF) in East Beirut and Mount Lebanon.

During his previous campaign, Aoun gathered public support in Christian areas from people who believed he will free them from Syrian occupation. With this new war, he received the backing of large segments of a Christian population that was eager for an era of a lawful state and stability, instead of militias and war.

The result was catastrophic. Over 1,000 dead and thousands injured in the months that followed. The weeks of fighting between the LAF and LF, inflicted "destruction and casualties…that East Beirut had not seen before." Families were broken apart by the rivalry, military positions that never fell during the war got exposed to Syrian occupation, and the mass of Christians of Lebanon lost faith in the outcome of the civil war.

Aoun did not achieve much with this new war either, except breaking apart the free area that Christians had established. His offensive stalled: the LF kept the port, Keserwan, and Jbeil, while Christian districts were cratered by Aounist Army Divisions and Syrian shells alike.

The man who had promised national "liberation" delivered instead intra-Christian fratricide. He amputated the last leverage of the Christian enclave and showed Damascus and its allies that the Christian front was broken from within.[120]

In the name of restoring sovereignty of the state, Aoun managed to break the Christian self-rule in Mount Lebanon and expose it to defeat and foreign occupation. This episode embodied a form of ultimate treason against Maronites and Christians.

As Metn, Baabda and several strategic areas and mountain peaks became exposed by Aoun's adventure, the military advantage of Mount Lebanon fortress was lost before the advancing Syrian troops.

International context sealed the fate he had invited. In August 1990, Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait and geopolitics shifted. Hafez al-Assad joined the U.S.-led coalition in exchange of gaining international recognition for his occupation of Lebanon.

That bargain "green-lighted" a decisive Syrian move against the remaining Aoun enclave in Baabda. Aoun himself railed that the United States "has sold Lebanon to Syria," but his complaint only underlined his strategic failure: he had squandered Christian strength in unwinnable gambles, leaving his people exposed precisely in an extremely delicate international moment.[121]

The end came with sordid speed. On October 13, 1990, Syrian Sukhoi jets bombed Yarzeh at dawn. Syrian armor and infantry divisions moved on Baabda and Metn. That morning, Aoun slipped out from the Presidential Palace and sought refuge in the French Embassy, without ordering his troops to stop fighting, giving himself enough time to leave the country while they held the line.

The next day recorded the humiliating scene at the Defense Ministry: surrender being offered not by Aoun but by Col. Michel Abu Rizk, commander of the presidential guard, as

Émile Lahoud's pro-Syrian Lebanese Army units entered the grounds. When the Syrian Army was rounding up and executing the brave soldiers and officers who defended their ground till the end, the general who declared two wars in two years was no longer at his post.

His rank-and-file faced airstrikes and field executions without trial in a rout many in the community still call "al-khamīs al-aswad" (Black Thursday)[122].

By 1990, Hafez Al-Assad had 30,000 troops occupying Lebanese territory while the central state folded into Syrian security control. The Aoun–LF war and the October 13 offensive formed the terminal shock in Christian areas: thousands killed and wounded, the military ability of both Lebanese Army and Lebanese Forces diminished severely, Christian civilian neighborhoods were pulverized, and the last semblance of autonomous Christian security architecture collapsed.

In the Syrian assault's wake, the occupation seized all government positions, Aoun was sent to exile in France, and Dany Chamoun, a prominent Christian leader, was murdered with his family a week later in an unmistakable message about who owns the capital now[123].

The defeat paved the way for the Syrian regime to impose the Taif agreement. The new accord minimized Christian role in the government and divided the power on three presidential positions. It also put the country under Syrian occupation for an undefined date.

A defender of Aoun might plead that Taif (1989) betrayed Christian prerogatives and that his war was a desperate bid to avoid codified diminishment. The truth says otherwise.

First, the "War of Liberation" never had a viable coalition, neither internally nor internationally. It bled Christian districts while leaving Damascus in place.

Second, the "War of Elimination" converted what remained of Christian leverage into rubble and funerals. It delegitimized the claim that "the army" could stand as a national instrument and weakened the two main fighting forces that the Christians depended on.

Third, on October 13 he fled, and whatever his embassy broadcast said after the fact, he was not with his soldiers when Syrian troops and allied militiamen stormed the ministry and presidential palace and executed the bravest Christian men on the spot. That order of battle matters in a community whose memory canonizes Patriarchs who were burned at the stake, and officers who died at their posts in fronts like Tal Al Za'atar, Achrafieh, Zahle and Souk el-Gharb. Against that canon, the image of the "liberator" hiding in an embassy while his men are being butchered is, in moral terms, a verdict in itself.

Both wars that Aoun declared failed to shift a single strategic parameter and made things much worse for the Christians: Syria consolidated its occupation and Taif proceeded after a total Christian defeat.

When Assad secured U.S. support in 1990 as the price of his participation in the Gulf War coalition, the general's fantasy strategy yielded its realistic end: Syrian aircraft over Baabda, Syrian armor in Yarzeh, and Christian leaders in exile or prison. From the standpoint of Christian survival, the conclusion is brutal: these "wars" did not defend the Christians; they exhausted them, divided them, and delivered them to their enemies.

In the Maronite repertoire, heroism is measured by endurance under siege and refusal to surrender the ridge. Aoun's war record inverts that ethic: he shelled his own quarter, split his own camp, misread the world, and then ran, leaving the rank-and-file and civilian neighborhoods to absorb the consequences.

That is why, in a book that insists on learning from success and failure alike, Aoun's 1988–1991 adventure is evaluated in brutal honesty, not as tragic heroism but as a syllabus in failure and treason.

The price of Aoun's adventures was paid by the dead and maimed. It was followed by the disarmament and imprisonment of key Christian commanders, and the erasure of autonomous Christian security capacity for the next four decades.

The Christians of Lebanon endured 15 years of war in which dozens of countries, armies and leaders and millions of people attempted to erase them. When the dust cleared, they stayed and endured in the Mountain while all the others left defeated and broken. But the last few chapters of military losses and political division and treason, especially between 1983 and 1990, cost them the war.

By the time the war ended, the modern Lebanese Republic that had a Christian heart, had now fallen.

V. Christian Heroism and Resilience During the Civil War

In the popular memory of the Mountain and coast alike, the Christian experience of the war is written less as a tale of

sweeping offensives than as a chain of sieges endured and towns held against numerically superior armies.

Despite the attempts of the Islamo-Leftist coalition and their allies, and despite being displaced from many historical cities and villages, the Christians survived.

The 1976 episode of Tal al-Zaʿtar, a brutal siege and its aftermath, sits inside this matrix of attrition and corridor warfare. For months, urban combat in and around the Dekwaneh–Nabaʿa perimeter turned apartment lines into front lines. Evacuation missions by the International Committee of the Red Cross had to negotiate narrow humanitarian openings amidst a killing field.

The ICRC's own review, sober and spare, records that 11,000–15,000 civilians were evacuated from the surrounding camp area before and after its fall, with hundreds of dead and wounded.[124] For many Maronite families who lived the 1976–78 East Beirut arc, including my own family on my mother's side, the experience of shell-split boulevards, corridor fights, and living in basements for weeks on end under shelling, revealed the true heart of Christian endurance. This war turned neighbors into co-survivors and strengthened the will to hold lines later at Zahlé and the Mountain.

In East Beirut's Ashrafieh during the Hundred Days' War (July–October 1978), Christian neighborhoods clung to shattered apartment blocks and sandbagged intersections while Syrian Army units pounded the city's apartments and main arteries. The Lebanese Front's sector commanders, coordinating Kataeb, Tigers, and allied units, stood with a few volunteers of young Christian men and women against

an entire state army that had infinite numbers and air and artillery support.

The Maronites staged a rolling defense that moved quickly between the streets to keep corridors open between Sassine, Sodeco and the port. They improvised stockpiles and makeshift basements and rotated small assault teams in and out of buildings cratered by artillery.

One contemporary account distilled the logic of the fight: if Ashrafieh fell, East Beirut would split, and the political center of gravity within Christian zones would collapse. If it held, Damascus would be forced to lift the siege and accept an Arab League rearrangement of the "deterrent" forces inside the capital. That is indeed what followed: after months of shelling and close-quarters fights, Syrians withdrew from East Beirut, and Arab Deterrent Force contingents from Saudi Arabia and Sudan took their place. This outcome is proof that a disciplined urban defense could blunt a superior army and preserve the Christian heartland's continuity.

In this memory, the "heroism" is not abstract, it is the visibility of civilian endurance: families sheltering in stairwells while volunteers ferried water under fire; parish kitchens ladling lentils for fighters coming off the line; a neighborhood that refused to abandon its freedom even as shells rained by the minute, and the fact that, in the end, the area was still lived on.

What Ashrafieh represented in the city, Zahlé came to symbolize for the interior: a mountain town that decided to hold. From December 1980 to June 1981, the Zahlawi garrison of The Lebanese Forces along with town volunteers, absorbed and repelled the pressure of the entire Syrian

Army, supported by brigades of the PLO and other local militias.

The siege logic in Zahle was also merciless: roads cut, food restricted, and airspace dominated by Syrian aircraft. The defenders' advantage, if any, lay in terrain familiarity, short tactical lines, and the townspeople's will. Eyewitness journalism at the time caught the texture of the ordeal: "artillery fire on Christian inhabitants," civilians dead and wounded in the streets as blocks shook from bombing. Women organized food rotations and church halls became clinics[125], helping the civilian population endure whatever the occupation threw at them. On the military side, whenever the occupation army tried to advance, small anti-armor teams chewed at tank columns at the city's approaches and bridges, buying time for second lines of defense.

At some point during the siege of Zahle, the Syrian army was very close to cutting off all entrances and taking control of the surrounding hills, isolating the defenders entirely from outside support.

On the night of April 10–11, Bashir called the fighters in Zahle and told them: "Because the road is still open for a few hours only ... if you leave, you will save your lives and the fall of the city will be certain, and this will be the end of our resistance ... if you stay, you will find yourselves without ammunition, without medicine, without bread, and maybe without water; your task will be to coordinate the internal resistance and defend the identity of the Lebanese Bekaa and the identity of Lebanon, and by that you will give a meaning to our six year war. If you decide to stay, know one thing, that heroes die and they don't surrender." Joe Edde, the man in charge in Zahle, looked at the faces of the fighters and

immediately knew the answer. He replied to Bashir "We are staying".[126]

The siege of Zahle became sealed, and it was impossible to even send a piece of bread into the city. But the occupying army did not learn yet that these warriors will not abandon their homes. When the Syrian army tried to advance, history cites the “massacre of tanks” where a small division held the entrance till the end, blowing up tanks left and right, with some fighters getting up on tanks on foot, opening its hatches and throwing grenades inside. In another daring counterattack, Christian warriors retook Jeha hill, saving the city from being completely surrounded by Syrian artillery, and keeping the mountain resupply path open.

When international pressure crested in June 1981, the settlement was considered a moral victory: the people of Zahle had outlasted the siege and kept their city free.

Zahle matters as proof that terrain mastery, local logistics and communications redundancy can hold a corridor, even in the absence of external support. Both Ashrafieh and Zahle honored the memory of Qannoubine valley in Maronite history with a similar tenacity of survival.

The significance of these events is that they reveal a mechanic that will be important for the survival of the new Mountain state: ridge towns can be defended by light infantry supported by local networks, without the need for huge standing armies.

Between those two anchor memories, Ashrafieh 1978 and Zahlé 1981, stretch dozens of smaller actions that made the Christian uphill war winnable day by day.

On the coast, East Beirut's defense depended on keeping Achrafieh–Bawchrieh–Dekwaneh threaded despite interdiction; in the interior, the Metn front required holding hills that were tactically minor but logistically decisive.

If the city and the interior supplied the symbols, the Mountain provided the crucible of Christian endurance. The Mountain War of 1983–84 in the Shouf–Aley belt was a chapter of immense loss and betrayal.

Politically, the government at the time tried to expand its reach to areas that aren't under its control, but strategically, the Christian objective was modest and existential: keep Christian towns from being erased, hold Souk el-Gharb's ridge to prevent a march on East Beirut, and evacuate civilians when all else fails.

Tactically, the ratio of forces was unforgiving: a Druze PSP core, reinforced by SSNP, Communist, Nasserist and Palestinian units with Syrian backing and artillery, could amass thousands of fighters locally. In contrast, the local LF garrisons were made of a few dozen fighters at most in small towns and villages like Bhamdoun, Kfar Matta, Kabr Chmoun and Deir el-Qamar.[127]

In September 1983, a PSP offensive rolled at dawn across the ridges, and several LF positions were told to hold for 12 hours until army relief arrives. Some garrisons held for three days, some for a week, but the reinforcements never came. Christian militias then fought towards retreat as Deir el-Qamar became a funnel for thousands of evacuees, including fighters now tasked with escorting their own families out[128].

By December, a negotiated evacuation pulled ~2,500 fighters and ~5,000 civilians from Deir el-Qamar and Souk el-Gharb; an ending that registered in Christian memory as both rescue

and exile. The cost was terrible: the Mountain War ended in near-total eviction of Christians from Shouf, with Deir el-Qamar an embattled exception[129].

This left a scar in Maronite memory that didn't heal till today, with a feeling of betrayal especially from their fellow Druze with whom they lived peacefully in the Mountain for hundreds of years. It is not easy to see people you have known your entire life, pointing guns to kill you and your children, evicting you from your home just because you are Christian. It is no wonder that very few Christians came back to their homes in Shouf, decades after the war ended. The well of trust and goodness between neighbors in the same village was poisoned by an Islamo-leftist ideology that scarred the Mountain forever.

After the war, the Ministry of the Immigrants and Displaced, responsible for handing compensation to displaced citizens to help them go back to their villages, was handed over to the one responsible for genocide and displacement, Walid Jumblatt. For the next fifteen years of peace, Jumblatt made sure that the Shouf stays without its Christians.

It's true that The LF also committed massacres and horrors during this war, but the uneven results of this clash that ended with the complete eradication of Christians from the Mountain, followed by decades years of continued displacement policies during peacetime, triggered a deep distrust between Maronites and Druze that persists today. It is an episode that will need to be addressed and criticized courageously by both Maronites and Druze for the Mountain to be whole again.

Within this same theater sits Souk el-Gharb, a ridge whose defense in 1983 became a test, not just of Christian grit but of the Lebanese Army's ability to fight as a national instrument.

As the ridge tilted, U.S. policy moved from mere "presence" to using naval gunfire and air strikes to prevent its fall. U.S President Ronald Reagan later cited the Lebanese army's performance "in the hills and around Souq al-Gharb" as evidence of a partner worth backing.[130]

Whatever one's view of the international intervention that followed, the fact remains that Souk el-Gharb did not fall; and East Beirut did not see a column of Islamo-leftist militias descending on it that autumn, and a Lebanese flag, not a faction's banner, remained over the guns that Maronite families in the capital desperately wanted to trust.

Across these episodes, a song repeats. First, the defensive perimeter: a street in Ashrafieh, a ridge at Zahlé, a hill over Souk el-Gharb, becomes a moral perimeter; to hold it was to claim a right to continue existing in our own homes.

Second, civil infrastructure and solidarity became key to survival: parish halls, monasteries, and school basements were repurposed as logistics while women's kitchens, church stores, and youth courier lines fed and supplied fighters.

Third, small-unit innovation: two or four-man anti-armor teams; shoot-and-scoot mortar crews; night infiltration to retake a hill, all based on a balanced asymmetry that's more effective than any notional strategic alliance. When Zahlé's bridge was held, it was because a few dozen brave men with RPGs made armor pay for every inch. When Ashrafieh did not break, it was because blocks were defended as people's homes.

And finally, evacuation under fire, so often the quiet afterword in war histories, became its own form of heroism: columns of civilians sneaked out of Shouf in December 1983 under mixed flags and the glare of enemies. The enemies did not differentiate between Christian civilians and fighters, but Christians also knew that their community and the people defending it are one.

This is not to romanticize a war whose record includes atrocities and massacres on all sides. But in the register of Maronite survival, the through-line is unmistakable: a minority community, convinced by Kafno and by earlier imperial lessons that it must hold its own ridges, chose to stand, in a city quarter, in a small town, on a mountain crest, against larger, better-supplied forces, and endured long enough for politics to catch up with facts on the ground.

Our book argues that sanctuary mechanics, like lines of access to ports and grain, local defense and policing, and a protected governance seat, are non-negotiables of future freedom. These episodes are the historical proof for such mechanics: Ashrafieh shows that urban sanctuaries can be defended; Zahlé, that a small town can outlast a siege by an entire army; and Shouf shows that evacuation can be salvation rather than surrender.

The civil war's Christian memory canonizes commanders and fighters, but its deeper lesson is that communities fight as ecosystems: parish, family, and platoon. The engineering of survival for Christians in the East is as much about bread lines and political rights as it is about guns and uniforms.

VI. Maronite Leaders and their Wartime Doctrines

The war was the clearest indication that Christians, and especially Maronites, should reconsider the project of Greater Lebanon.

The Republic may have started with a Christian heart, but it soon became an unbalanced partnership, with a "National Pact" that was never respected.

The first breaking of the Pact in 1945 was followed by another in 1948, then another in 1958, and another in 1969 and 1975. Even as Christians were being massacred by their own neighbors, and even as they repaid the brutality in kind, and even when the Army splintered and the state disintegrated, all Christian and Maronite leaders still believed in the project of the Lebanese Republic. They always sought security and political solutions through the central state, and never outside of it. Despite occasionally speaking about federalism, like how Camille Chamoun suggested in 1978, federalist and partitionist approaches stayed shy. Even when Christian parties signed war-ending agreements, first in 1985, then in 1989, federalism or partition was never proposed during negotiations.

Here is an overview of each leader's strategy and doctrine:

- Bashir Gemayel (1957–1982). Doctrine: a unitary sovereignty under the Lebanese state, restored by force.
  He believed in a fully independent and sovereign Lebanese Republic on the entire 10,452 square kilometers of its surface – the slogan that became synonymous with Bashir's dream.

He consolidated Christian arms into one chain of command (Lebanese Forces), then imposed order on the capital. He treated alliances (including the one with Israel) as temporary tools that should follow the logic of the State, instead of the interests of Christians only. His election signaled a moment when centralization seemed within reach, but his assassination erased that window and unleashed consequences.

It is easy today to think that Bashir's dream could have been accomplished if he lived to rule, and the Christians of Lebanon would without a doubt be in a much better situation today if he had. But the dream of Lebanon as a harmonious country free of foreign influence would still been impossible to achieve, especially as the other communities, including Druze, Sunnis, and Shiites, were not interested in the success of such a project at the time.

- Amine Gemayel (1982–88). Doctrine: presidential institutionalism, diplomacy, and a treaty-anchored attempt to establish state authority over the entire country (the bet on the success of the May 17 agreement). The wager failed; abrogation underlined the limits of externalized guarantees when Syria held the veto on the ground.

- Samir Geagea (1986–1994). The Lebanese Forces under Geagea suffered strategic defeats in the Mountain War and the South. These defeats caused the death and displacement of hundreds of thousands of Christians. His doctrine post-Mountain War was different. He consolidated the LF as a quasi-administration in Christian areas with taxes, policing, and services. He

bargained hard against both Syrian and rival Maronite claims, then pivoted to political normalization with Taif in 1990. Geagea had an almost impossible task of softening the failures of Amine Gemayel, dealing with the internal coups of 1985–86, and then facing the decisive 1990 intra-Christian fight. When the free Christian region was exposed militarily after Aoun's adventure, Geagea signed the Taif Agreement that ended the war at the expense of the Christian role in government. Contrary to Aoun, he chose to stay with his fighters in the country and tried to survive as a political opposition to the Syrian occupation. Assad, however, did not want any kind of opposition to his rule in Lebanon, so The State and Syrian occupation collaborated to send him to prison and dismantle and outlaw the LF.

- Michel Aoun (1988–1990). Doctrine: state-first, attempted to expel Syrian forces ("War of Liberation"), shut illicit ports, and disarm militias to restore a single chain of command. Strategically coherent for sovereignty, but Aoun tried to apply this strategy exclusively in Christian areas while leaving the Islamo-leftist militias on their own. His strategy became ruinous for Christians once it mutated into a war with the LF (1990). Michel Aoun's actions ended up costing Christians the fruits of fifteen years of blood and struggle.

During this time, one of the most interesting things that happened was the pivot of Christian militias towards self-governance in the years of 1985-1990, and the restoration of

the Maronite parish matrix as a political and civilian infrastructure.

Across Christian East Beirut and the Mountain, the LF built shadow administrations during that period: municipal sanitation and clinics; fuel and flour distribution; and lower school fees supported with Church networks. While under-documented in formal literature, the self-governed Christian areas had a better economy and lower crime rate than the rest of Lebanon, and the "statelet" function was crucial in civilian endurance during the trials that followed.

In fifteen years of conflict, Christians of Lebanon displayed the same tenacity and heroism as their ancestors, refusing to surrender their homes or their freedoms. On the political and military front, however, they were not aligned with their heritage. Some extremely valuable lessons can be learned from this long struggle:

- Unity of thought and cause. Maronites entered this war fragmented into opposing ideologies that often turned into bloody disagreements. While Christian leaders were busy trying to make a dysfunctional republic work, the Christian masses were also divided and neutered by different ideologies. During the war, many Christians were tricked by Arabist and leftist ideologies and ended up pointing their guns against their own people. Many Christian individuals participated in besieging, bombing, and starving their own cities, tagging along with militias and comrades who were butchering Christians indiscriminately.

  This was a failure of morality, culture, and education over several generations since the establishment of

the Republic. It is as if the Maronites' memory and unique identity were gradually erased. Maronites came to believe in the republic religiously, even when this republic was exterminating them. In future Mount Lebanon, education and culture should be coherent and grounded in Christian ideals and the history of resistance. It should provide a common framework and reference for all its inhabitants to guarantee that this kind of cultural betrayal and political drift never happens again.

- Unity of command. This fragmentation of thought translated into splintered command. In contrast with Maronite history, where the Patriarchate was the unified center of command and control, Maronites in this war had dozens, if not hundreds, of competing power centers. Different militias, local notables, current and former presidents, Army leaders, and government figures all wanted a say in Christian decisions and ended up fighting over it. Every time the command fractured (1976, 1985, 1990), Christians paid the price. In 1976, the price was Syrian intervention; in 1984-85, the price was contraction, displacement, and stalemate; and in 1990, the price was strategic defeat.

- Foreign guarantees only work when there's internal deterrence. Achrafieh and Zahle precedents confirm that local resilience is the condition for external guarantees. Only when the cost of escalation becomes prohibitive for the besieger do international arbitration protocols come into effect. This proves the importance of endurance, continuity-of-government, supply lanes, and reserve stocks, all designed to raise

the cost of trying to coerce the Mountain under a foreign will. Resilience means that regional and international players cannot override the facts on the ground when it is time to make their move.

- Write what was once custom. The war proved that "customary balances" like the flimsy National Pact collapse under stress. The lesson here is that guarantees must always be put in statute: Constitution, Local Competences Charter, Port Access Compact, Finance and Accountability Laws and proper civil and judicial procedures, and hard rules for national legitimacy.

- Never again a "special zone" or armed exceptions. From the Cairo Agreement to the "resistance exception," the habit of the Lebanese Republic of making exceptions under sectarian pressure produced permanent dual authority and ended up disintegrating the state. These exceptions persisted after 1990 and led to Hezbollah governing and transforming the country into a failed state. Any future Mountain state would outlaw parallel arms, unify the chain of commands, and channel internal security into the police instead of armies.

The Lebanese Civil War from 1975 to 1990 inflicted profound suffering on all sects and not just Christians. It left a legacy of trauma that underscores the fragility of the confessional system. An estimated 200,000 people were killed, with another 200,000 wounded and 17,000 disappeared or forcibly abducted, their fates unresolved to this day[131]. Nearly one

million were displaced or emigrated, fracturing families and communities across Maronite, Sunni, Shiite, and Druze sects.

Massacres like Damour (Christian victims), and Sabra-Shatila (Palestinian) exemplified mutual atrocities, breeding intergenerational resentment and psychological scars. This devastation was the price of a dysfunctional republic marred by confessional imbalances and external interferences. The system's majoritarian flaws and centralized power amplified sectarian rivalries, turning diversity into division, and division into tragedy.

To prevent the repetition of such a fate, it is the duty of every Lebanese today to look into solutions like decentralization, federalism, or partition, which allow communities to self-govern themselves, and ensure that no group faces existential threats again.

As the civil war drew its closing chapter, the Christians of Lebanon were displaced, exhausted, and impoverished. Their political parties were outlawed and disbanded, and their leaders exiled and imprisoned. The Syrian army occupied two-thirds of the country while the Israeli army occupied the remaining third. What they envisioned once as a Republic that preserves their freedoms and rights, now became their prison.

Chapter 6

After the War: Decline and Marginalization

(1990–2025)

At the time of finalizing this chapter in March 2026, the Christians of Lebanon were still grappling with the profound realization that they had been defeated in the civil war. The long-term consequences of surrendering constitutional power in the Second Republic have become painfully clear, manifesting in systemic exclusion, demographic erosion, and a state teetering on failure. This chapter chronicles the 35-year arc of missed opportunities and deepening crises, divided into interconnected parts to illuminate the trajectory of Christian decline.

We examine the foundational architecture of the Taif Agreement and the Syrian occupation, which neutralized Christian leverage through constitutional downgrading, selective disarmament, and brutal suppression of leaders. We then explore the "Republic of Missed Opportunities," from the Israeli withdrawal in the year 2000 to the 2006 war and the wave of assassinations that eviscerated opposition voices. Later, we delve into what we call the "second treason" of Michel Aoun, whose alliance with Hezbollah entrenched a cartelized system of corruption and institutional paralysis. Finally, we analyze Lebanon under Hezbollah's dominance, highlighting its parallel state structures, illicit activities, and

the perpetual crises culminating in economic collapse and the 2023-24 war.

The Taif agreement in 1989 ended the war but institutionalized a tradeoff: Christians surrendered constitutional leverage and their leading role in the political system, in exchange for an end to war and a promise of a unified state under the rule of law.

The newly built Lebanese State and Syrian occupation enforced the first part quickly and brutally. Christian leaders were exiled (Amine Gemayel & Michel Aoun), imprisoned (Samir Geaga), or assassinated (Dany Chamoun). Their political parties and organizations were outlawed, dismantled, and persecuted. A puppet was installed as the President of the Republic, and Sunni and Shiite powers split the spoils of government and post-war economy. The second part of the Taif accord about building a lawful state without militias never materialized.

Christian and Sunni militias were disarmed. The Lebanese Army and Security forces were put under Syria's tutelage. From now on, every officer in every position was screened and appointed by the occupation. The Taif political system included permanent armed exceptions for Hezbollah. Consequently, the Shiite sect kept its armies and weapons under the guise of resisting Israeli occupation, while everyone else disarmed.

The Syrian regime of Hafez Al-Assad, succeeded by his son Bashar, occupied and ruled Lebanon as its own backyard province from 1990 till 2005. Post-war reconstruction deepened debt dependence while sectarian patronage re-emerged under new brokers.

The suppression of Christian parties hollowed out their political presence and influence. Apart from a few Christian families and public servants who made fortunes during the post-war corruption, most Christian areas were excluded from post-war development projects.

New waves of emigration further thinned the Christian presence in public life and dwindled their numbers and influence.

Eventually, the 2006 war, followed by the Doha bargain in 2008, converted the Shiite armed exception into political power and handed the country implicitly to Hezbollah. This path culminated with the great financial collapse of 2019, then the wars of 2023-24 and 2026. At the time of writing this section, the Republic was wasting another opportunity at reforming itself despite the international support, while undergoing a second and more destructive round of war.

Through this lens, the chapter renews the timeless lesson of the Maronite cause: true freedom and prosperity lie not in flawed partnerships within a dysfunctional state, but in self-determination and self-rule.

I. Taif's Architecture and the Neutralization of Christian Leverage

The Taif Agreement (1989) rebalanced the 1943 formula. Executive power shifted from a presidential model to a cabinet-centered system led by the Sunni prime minister. Maronite prerogatives were narrowed, and the Parliament's speaker (Shiite) gained agenda-setting weight.

On paper, Taif mandated: (a) disbanding and disarming "all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias," (b) redeploying and then withdrawing Syrian forces in stages, and (c) extending state authority over all territory.[132] The agreement also promised to abolish "political confessionalism" from government positions.

The text's generalities were soon interpreted through the reality of Syrian power on the ground. Damascus "supervised" implementation and preserved one armed exception — the "resistance" in the south — on the argument of ongoing Israeli occupation (1978–2000).[133] The ruling powers decided that any sign or talk about withdrawing Syrian forces is treason. The Syrian occupation legitimized itself for what seemed to be forever.

Proponents of the Taif accord argued that it promoted equality among sects, but in practice, it entrenched veto powers for Sunnis and Shiites while stripping the Christians of theirs. For Christians, the implications were deep and structural:

- Constitutional downgrading: the presidency retained symbolism but lost decisive control over cabinet formation and policy arbitration. It lost its commander-in-chief power over the army, which is now commanded by the cabinet as a whole.[134] In practice, Sunnis and Shiites now have more executive and legislative powers. Most importantly, they now have several ways to veto any legislation or executive policy, while the president does not have the same capacity.
- Security dualism: the "resistance" exception, not explicit in Taif's text, became the rule in practice. It allowed the Shiite sect to keep its own army and state-

like institutions, with direct foreign backing and funding from Syria and Iran[135]. This repeated the same mistake that led to the 1975 conflict. It also showed that the end of the civil war was more about one side being victorious, instead of a desire for lasting peace.

- Administrative continuity of patronage: oversight bodies created in the 1960s resurfaced, but without budgetary or prosecutorial teeth. Appointments flowed through post-war coalitions under Syrian oversight. Corruption became even worse than before.

The period between 1990 and 1994 witnessed the accelerated efforts of Damascus to disarm and dissolve the autonomous Christian security architecture and to police political life through a joint Syrian–Lebanese security system.

While Michel Aoun and many other Christian leaders were in exile and their followers persecuted, the Syrian occupation moved quickly to fabricate accusations and ban and disband the Lebanese Forces (LF). The LF was the largest and most organized Christian militia, but it had already disarmed and agreed to the Taif, transforming itself into a political party. The LF leader Samir Geagea was prosecuted in trials that Amnesty International described as "seriously flawed[136]." He was issued a life-sentence and imprisoned underground without visitors or appeal, in a clear message to Christian constituencies that opposition organizations would be criminalized.

No warlords from other sects were prosecuted or held accountable. No militias from other sects were banned or disbanded. The political repression was only directed against Christians.

Meanwhile, Syrian military intelligence under Ghazi Kanaan ran Lebanon from Anjar and Beau Rivage as a dictatorship. It chose election candidates, interfered with security and judicial postings and distributed state contracts and benefits as rewards to its allies. Detention and disappearances of opposition cadres, often seized by plainclothes officers and transferred across the border[137], set the political tone of the decade.

The 1992 parliamentary elections, the first after the war, took place in this climate. Major Christian parties and bishops called for a boycott, arguing that the election law and security interference denied fair representation. Turnout in Christian areas collapsed, producing a chamber that formally included Christians but functionally diluted their agency. From this election onwards, the majority of Christian representation in the state was made of weak figures acceptable to Anjar, rather than leaders rooted in Christian interests.[138]

For the first time in more than a thousand years, Mount Lebanon and the rest of the republic was governed directly by an external occupation force.

II. The Syrian Order (1990-2005): Assad First, Christians Last

By the time Rafik Hariri emerged as prime minister in late 1992, the rules of the game were set: Damascus held the hard power, and independent free Christians have no place in this new republic. Their quota in the state was filtered through allies and appointees rather than chosen by their own people.

From October 1990 until April 2005, Syrian military and intelligence apparatus dominated Lebanon's decisions, foreign policy, and key judicial files. It also siphoned the lion's share of investments and development projects through corrupt channels.

Contemporary human rights reporting spanning this period documents enforced disappearances, torture, and political repression. It characterizes the arrangement bluntly as "Syrian-occupied Lebanon."[139]

At the core of the occupation sat two men: Ghazi Kanaan (1982–2002), then Rustum Ghazaleh (2002–2005), the heads of Syrian Military Intelligence in Lebanon. Their rulebook was simple: engineer elections to deliver pro-Syrian majorities; vet security and judicial appointments at Anjar (the Syrian headquarters on the Damascus road) and the Beau Rivage (the infamous intelligence compound in West Beirut); surveil, jail and ruin political opponents, and cut down any autonomous Christian power center by force.

The political persecution was extreme, especially in the early years. If a school student listened to Lebanese Forces songs in his own home, armed thugs in plain clothes will come and kidnap him the next day. If a passerby honked what was famously known as "Aoun's car honk," he will be jailed and tortured.

Human Rights Watch documented thousands of cases of detention and torture in Syrian-run or Syrian-supervised facilities. Lebanese detainees described abuse, beatings, blindfolding, and unacknowledged detention that their own government would not challenge.[140]

These incidents were not small exceptions but the entire operating system of Lebanon at the time. Scholars and seasoned journalists describe Kanaan as the man who "ran Lebanon" for Hafez al-Assad. He shaped districts, election lists, and political careers, and vetoed candidates and ruled Lebanon with an iron fist. He later passed the file to Ghazaleh, who "held court" at Beau Rivage and kept a heavy hand on Christian politics.[141]

The electoral sequence of 1992, 1996 and 2000 became the legal façade and legitimization of the occupation.

Kanaan and Ghazaleh even micromanaged security and judicial placements. Lebanon's General Security under Jamil al-Sayyed reported straight to them, as did the other heads of the Army, Internal Security Forces, and Customs[142].

Kanaan and Ghazaleh also distributed the financial spoils. Major state contracts in the airport, port, construction, infrastructure, electricity, telecommunications, garbage management, in addition to the monopolies of imports and exports, were mostly distributed as political rewards for collaborating and facilitating the occupation. The major economic sectors were split among the warlords in charge, but especially rewarded Nabih Berri, Walid Jumblatt, and Rafik Hariri, all of whom became billionaires along with several members of their families and entourage.

The message to Maronites (and Christians more broadly) was consistent: you may hold nominal offices and portfolios, but you will not hold any decisive say in the affairs of this Republic. The Christians balked, boycotting the 1992 election, then tried to regroup and establish an effective resistance despite the odds.

Where the bench and ballot did not suffice, the occupation used blunt force. The abduction and disappearance of Boutros Khawand (senior Kataeb figure) in 1992 in East Beirut became the Christian shorthand for the era's impunity. By 1996, the number of political prisoners from Christian youth, according to the Maronite Patriarchate, was 1,200[143]. This number doesn't include the thousands of undocumented detainees who got arrested and released within a few days or weeks.

The Christian resistance kept stirring and culminated in the resumption of the political role of the Maronite Patriarchate under Mar Nasrallah Boutros Sfeir. Patriarch Sfeir believed in the traditional Maronite cause of freedom, with a famous quote where he says: "We are a nation that loved freedom […], if we have to choose between freedom and coexistence, we choose freedom."[144]

In the year 2000, the Maronite Patriarchate did a master move by initiating "The Reconciliation of the Mountain". It started a long-awaited settlement process between Maronites and Druze and enabled many displaced Christians to return to their properties in Shouf and Alley.

At the time, Geagea was still in jail and Aoun in exile. Christian parties like the LF, Kataeb, Ahrar, and Guardians of the Cedars were subject to a constant atmosphere of political persecution and harassment. A new generation of Christian activists, made up of Aounists, National Liberals, LF cadres, and more, were ramping up their resistance. The occupation used its Lebanese tools to silence opposition.

In August 2001, the Lebanese Army under Syrian command, along with Syrian intelligence agents, beat and arrested hundreds of protesters in what signaled a political turning

point in the confrontation between Christian opposition and Assad's rule.

In September 2002, the state shut down an opposition-aligned TV station (MTV) by court order. Officially, the accusation was violating election-laws and "harming relations with Syria." The true reason, though, is that the occupation simply wanted to silence all opposition media.[145]

The Syrian regime's logic was ensuring that its rule remains unchallenged, no matter the cost. Yet the order broke.

The attempt in 2004 to renew for President Emile Lahoud against a broad domestic current triggered UNSCR 1559. The resolution demanded Syrian withdrawal and Hezbollah disarmament,[146] and was a testament to the growing influence of the Christian opposition at home and abroad.

When Rafik Al-Hariri was assassinated on 14 February 2005, a public avalanche followed. The Cedar Revolution filled Martyrs' Square, and a wave of international and regional pressure forced Bashar al-Assad to announce a pullout. The last Syrian troops left Lebanon on 26 April 2005, marking the end of 30 years of military occupation.

The image Christians remember of that time is April's sunlight on empty barracks, Geagea walking out of jail, and Aoun coming back from exile to a huge popular welcome.

The security state receded, but it left behind infrastructures and allies. Its most significant instrument was an armed religious organization that would quickly inherit the functions of the occupation.

III. Reconstruction without Consolidation: The Hariri Formula (1992–2004)

With Rafik Hariri's first premiership (late 1992), a tacit division of labor settled in: Damascus and allies such as Amal and Hezbollah held the security and political file, while Hariri's cabinets and networks drove finance, reconstruction, and the downtown project (Solidere).

This arrangement was the de-facto post-war operating system of the Second Republic. Security and strategic cards stayed with Syria and its local partners; the economy and international capital were with Hariri[147].

The system did not work: the dissociation of politics from the economy meant that there was no real plan for either. As repression grew on the political front, Hariri's methods soon plunged the country into unprecedented debt. The International Monetary Fund review in 1999 captured the cost: gross public debt climbed from ~49% of GDP (1993) to ~103% (1997) in just 4 years of Hariri's rule. Persistent primary deficits and high interest burdens entrenched a fiscal trap that the Republic has not recovered from to this day[148].

Usually, a country coming out of a 15-year-long war will experience a construction and economic boom that lasts decades. That did not happen in Lebanon.

Economically, the "reconstruction boom" proved short-lived. As Ghassan Dibeh shows, Lebanon entered a growth trap by the late 1990s: high-interest financing and a fiscal-monetary mix that favored debt accumulation, real estate-led recovery, and currency stability over productivity. By 1998, the model was in a cyclical crisis. Rising public debt and a

consumption-heavy recovery undermined economic long-term viability[149]. Solidere reconstruction reshaped Beirut into a hollowed-out real-estate center. Hariri's strategy reordered the political economy around services, banking, and construction. Corruption existed at every level in all sectors of the economy, entrenching crony interlocks in every joint of the Lebanese system. Such architecture was unquestioned for the thirty years that followed and eventually led to the financial collapse of 2019[150].

The economy suffered from over-reliance on capital inflows from the outside, especially from the Lebanese diaspora, and in the form of foreign investments. The latter were, in many cases, political in nature and fed the corrupt core of the system.

Patronage and cartelized procurement emerged at scale, undermining the merit-and-inspection spine we traced in a previous chapter. The effect in Christian areas, especially Mount Lebanon, was paradoxical: visible reconstruction without reliable state services. It pushed families to self-provision (schools, health, water, and electricity) or emigrate for stability and career paths. Lebanese migration post-war became more permanent after 1990[151], and Lebanon was now a country with the majority of its people residing abroad.

On the structural side, Hariri was instrumental in demographic engineering policies that tipped the scales against Christians in historical Mountain districts such as Baabda, Zahle, and Metn. We will discuss these policies in more detail in volume II of our work, but what we can say here is that the naturalization and resettlement policies of Hariri were never reversed or challenged by later governments and presidents who claimed to oppose his policies.

Politically, the formula at the time depended on Hariri–Damascus concord. As long as Syria managed the security sphere, including the growing influence of Hezbollah's arms, and Hariri managed revenues and reconstruction, the system ticked. But it could not survive hard strategic divergence. The 2004 push by Damascus to extend the term of President Émile Lahoud shattered the bargain and pushed Hariri into the opposition.

He resigned from his position in October 2004 and started working on a large political coalition to oppose Syrian rule in Lebanon. Four months later, on 14 February 2005, Hariri was assassinated by a massive truck bomb. International probes and the Special Tribunal for Lebanon later convicted Hezbollah operatives for the killing, after years of investigations[152].

The Hariri era shows a sobering truth important for Lebanese Christians now more than ever: trading sovereignty for "security" and dissociating the economy from politics, in the hope of building a viable country, does not deliver sustainable growth nor durable balance. Once Hariri refused the Lahoud extension and pivoted to sovereignty, the pact snapped, but the bomb finished the sentence.

The Hariri assassination triggered a big change in Lebanese politics. The Christians and their leaders, however, did not learn the right lessons. Michel Aoun soon repeated the same failed experiment of Hariri in a worse way, handing over the country's security and stability keys to Hezbollah in exchange for economic and governmental spoils for his party.

IV. The Republic of Missed Opportunities

On 24 May 2000, Israel fully withdrew from South Lebanon in compliance with UNSC 425 (1978), with the Blue Line demarcated by the UN in verification.[153] This should have been the opening to normalize the monopoly of force in the Lebanese Republic. It was an opportunity to integrate Hezbollah and its former "resistance" fighters into the national chain of command, and withdraw Syrian troops, ending the other occupation for good.

Instead, national elites avoided a doctrinal reset. They fabricated the Shebaa Farms issue, positing that Israel hasn't fully withdrawn from Lebanese territory – and therefore nothing has changed. The "resistance" remained autonomous, now with upgraded prestige and more freedom of movement. Damascus' grip remained in place, now ready to swallow the entire country without a regional check.

The precedent of armed exception that was supposed to be temporary under Israeli occupation became the new normal, and the country missed a historical chance at reform.

After the Israeli withdrawal and the reconciliation of the Mountain between Druze and Christians in the year 2000, the opposition to Syrian occupation kept growing. In 2005, it reached an inflection point: The assassination of Rafik Hariri mobilized mass protests and ignited the "Cedar Revolution". It set in motion UNSCR 1559 core demands: foreign troop withdrawal and disarmament of militias. Under insurmountable local pressure, Syrian units started withdrawing from Lebanon in March of the same year and left completely on 27 April 2005.

The international interest in Lebanon surged while the American administration under George W. Bush was reshaping the region from Afghanistan to Iraq. This manifested in a series of international resolutions supporting core Lebanese demands at the time: UNSCR 1636 (2005) demanded Syrian cooperation with the international investigation into Hariri's murder; UNSCR 1757 (2007) created the Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL), which later convicted Hezbollah members in absentia[154].

For Maronites, 2005 briefly reopened their political space. Aoun returned from exile; Geagea was given amnesty and released, and the international atmosphere seemed to promise a return to a single sovereign state. But under the surface, the security regime did not change. The role of governance was handed over from the Assad regime to its allies inside, especially Nabih Berri and Hezbollah. The armed exception prepared itself to take over the country and ensure it would not be ruled by the opposition.

As the state was trying to rearrange itself around the new March 14 alliance, and as Christians of Lebanon were now reorganizing and preparing to re-enter a decisive role in politics, Hezbollah's military adventures in the south triggered a 33-day war with Israel in July 2006.

The conflict caused the death of 1,300 Lebanese people[155], severely damaging civilian infrastructure, including electricity, telecommunications, and roads. It displaced approximately one million Lebanese and wrecked the economy.

The fighting resulted in a huge financial setback for Lebanon, with an official estimate of growth declining from 6 to 2%, in addition to 5 billion USD in losses (22% of GDP)[156]. The war

ended with UNSC 1701 in August. The new resolution called for cessation of hostilities, Israeli withdrawal, the deployment of the Lebanese Army and a reinforced UNIFIL south of the Litani, and the disarmament of all armed groups in Lebanon, including Hezbollah.[157]

The moment the war stopped, however, Hezbollah started rearming, rendering the 1701 useless. The war gave renewed international and local legitimacy to Hezbollah, making it appear as a parallel deterrence force more capable than the state. The party started presenting itself as a higher political entity with a role above Lebanese politics, justifying keeping itself armed indefinitely. The 2006 war also marked a strategic shift in the party that started demanding special privileges in the political system.

After the Syrian withdrawal and Israeli war, Hezbollah became more involved in internal politics. It mutated further into a parallel state with its own army, banks, policing, education institutions, media channels, and social services. This expansion clashed with and corroded the state significantly, compromising judicial independence, security, and the very fabric of Lebanese society.

Immediately after the ceasefire, Hezbollah moved to paralyze the 14 March government. It staged a sitting protest in Downtown Beirut, shutting down the Capital and crippling the entire country for two years. Hezbollah-led opposition demanded a national unity government, in which it wanted to hold a decisive veto power of one-third of the Cabinet. This coalition did not have a parliamentary majority at the time[158], but was emboldened by its new alliance with none other than Michel Aoun. Aoun, leader of the Free Patriotic Movement, turned against his March 14 allies and joined Hezbollah's opposition. This pivot gave the Shiite

party an overwhelming Christian legitimacy, as Aoun had just won about 70% of the Christian vote in 2005's parliamentary elections[159].

As fears grew from the possibility of Hezbollah using its arms to break the political gridlock, its leader Hassan Nasrallah vowed that his party would never use violence to start a civil war and impose its political will[160]. A promise he broke soon after, as political protests failed to achieve their goal.

Under the pretext of a government decision to remove an illegal Hezbollah communications network in the airport, Nasrallah and his allies used their sectarian army to invade the Capital and several other Lebanese areas on 8 May 2008. The clash caused the death of more than one hundred civilians and forced the signing of the Doha Agreement on 21 May 2008. Hezbollah has now officially acquired a veto power inside the government and ensured they rule the country unchallenged.

The Doha agreement delivered three decisive provisions[161]:

(1) Immediate election of a consensus president. In Lebanese politics, this means a president who is not opposed to Hezbollah in Lebanon and is allied with Bashar Al-Assad.

(2) A 30-member "national unity" cabinet allocated sixteen ministers to the 14 March majority, eleven to the Hezbollah opposition, and three to the president (who is pro-Hezbollah) — thereby granting the Hezbollah-led opposition a one-third blocking minority. In practice, the party gained veto power over all government decisions.

(3) A return to the 1960 electoral law (qadāʾ-based) that ensures Hezbollah and its allies regain the majority in parliament.[162]

The political consequences of the Doha Accord were long-lived and lasted for almost two decades:

- The blocking third converted veto into a governing instrument.
- The 1960 districts projected brokerage cartography into the parliament.
- The incident established a precedent that the national order can be reset and imposed by force, not by democratic politics.

For Christian communities, the signal was devastating: veto power existed outside the presidency and outside formal institutions. It was held by the actor who was also armed, giving the Shiite sect an unprecedented level of power that no other sect had in the history of the First Republic.

The opportunity created by the blood and sweat of fifty years of struggle against Syrian occupation has now officially been lost. The country plunged into two decades of Hassan Nasrallah ruling it from the shadows.

Beyond missed reforms, the era's suppression took a darker form through targeted violence.

V. "Glory to the Suppressor": The Doctrine of Assassinations (2003-2021)

Around 2021, on a crumbled wall in Southern Beirut, passersby would read a phrase written hastily with graffiti that said: "Glory to the Suppressor" – المجد لكاتم الصوت.

This slogan, scrawled amid rubble, symbolized how suppression became glorified in Hezbollah strongholds, echoing the civil war's scars. The chilling phrase captured the essence of Hezbollah's true nature in Lebanese politics, especially from 2003 till the start of its decline in 2025.

In the early 2000s, Syria and Hezbollah starting using political assassination as a tool to suppress the growing opposition to their rule.

The Assad regime and Hezbollah are not new to this tactic, as they both used it extensively during the Lebanese civil war. Hezbollah allegedly assassinated dozens of Communists, Amal, and SSNP members from the Shiite community in previous years. That includes, for example, the thinker Mahdi Amel (1987) and the author Mustapha Jeha (1992).

From 2003 onwards, any actual or potential opposition figure that might stir trouble for the Syrian regime was assassinated or put under threat of death. It started with the assassination of Christian leader Elie Hobeika in 2002. It was followed by the kidnapping and assassination of the head of the student organization in the Lebanese Forces, Ramzi Irani, in May of the same year. A few months later, in October, the attempted assassination of Marwan Hamadeh took place. Eventually, the most dangerous and impactful assassination was that of Rafik Hariri on 14 February 2005.

Lebanon had entered a long season of political killings that would remove an entire generation of journalists, MPs, ministers, investigators, and generals from the equation. March 14 Alliance and international investigative bodies blamed the Assad regime and Hezbollah, who were later indicted by local and international tribunals.

The Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL) convicted three Hezbollah members of Hariri's murder in 2020. It stopped short of a formal ruling on the chain-of-command that ordered the assassination.

As dozens of politicians, journalists, and army generals were killed, there was a constant political theme: the targets were overwhelmingly from the anti-Syrian camp or threatened to expose Syrian/Hezbollah operations. Christian figures were the majority among the dead. In a way, the assassination wave during these two decades targeted the Christian elite of Mount Lebanon. It severely curbed the influence of Christians in the country and harmed their ability to produce political leaders.

The run of killings in 2005 alone sets the tone. On June 2, a car bomb killed Samir Kassir, a Christian journalist-intellectual whose essays cut at the security state and its Syrian patrons. Opposition leaders blamed "the remnants of the security agencies," i.e., the network allied to Damascus.[163] On June 21, another car bomb took the life of George Hawi, the ex-Communist leader (Greek Orthodox) turned critic of Syrian interference. A decade later, Lebanon's press and Hawi's family were told by Tribunal officials of links between the Hariri and Hawi cases at the level of operational cells. In other words, Hawi was assassinated by the same people who killed Hariri.[164]

In July, an assassination attempt against Deputy Prime Minister Elias Murr (Greek Orthodox) failed. He disclosed later that he was threatened by Syria's intelligence chief in Lebanon.[165] On Sept. 25, television anchor May Chidiac (Maronite) lost limbs to a bomb under her car. On Dec. 12, Gebran Tueni (Maronite), *An-Nahar* publisher and MP, and the face of the Cedar Revolution, was assassinated upon returning from exile after receiving threats.[166] Together with Hariri's murder, these blasts effectively decapitated the press-and-ideas wing of the new anti-Syrian coalition, particularly on the Christian side.

The 2006–08 phase shifted to parliamentary arithmetic and the security services. On Nov. 21, 2006, Pierre Gemayel (Maronite), industry minister and a prominent face in the Maronite community, was shot dead with suppressed firearms. The opposition saw the assassination as part of Hezbollah's effort to topple the government by eliminating ministers.[167] Anti-Syrian politician and close associate of Hariri, MP Walid Eido, was assassinated in June 2007. Antoine Ghanem (Maronite MP, Kataeb) was assassinated by a car bomb on Sept. 19, 2007, days before a presidential vote. Reuters called him the seventh anti-Syrian MP killed since Hariri.[168]

On Dec. 12, 2007, a car bomb killed Brigadier General François al-Hajj (Maronite), the army's operations chief. U.S. State Department and intelligence roundups counted it as part of a string of anti-sovereignty killings.[169] In January 2008, a huge IED killed Wissam Eid (Maronite), the ISF engineer whose cellphone-mapping work was central to the Hariri case. Open sources and the STL record later framed his findings as the technical spine of the Hezbollah link.[170] In Oct. 2012, a large-scale blast killed Wissam al-Hassan (Sunni,

head of ISF Intelligence), the officer who busted Michel Smeha for transporting Syrian-made explosives set for political bombings. Investigative reports pointed squarely at Syrian authorship[171]. In Dec. 2013, a downtown car bomb killed Mohamad Chatah (Sunni), a Hariri adviser and public critic of Hezbollah and Damascus.[172]

In 2012, the Lebanese Security Forces arrested former minister Michel Smeha and exposed a level of unprecedented treason among the political class. During investigations, Smeha admitted to having received money from Syrian Intelligence officers to "transport explosives from Syria to Lebanon with the intention of using it to assassinate Lebanese politicians, clergy, and other personalities." The list Smeha had included Khaled Daher, a Lebanese parliamentary member opposed to Assad.[173]

Interestingly, no politicians or journalists from the Hezbollah-led coalition, including Aoun's FPM, were assassinated or threatened. Hezbollah's media was claiming that Israel was behind all these assassinations. At the same time, the same media used to accuse most of the assassinated of being Israeli agents themselves, with defamation campaigns ramping up a few weeks before every assassination like clockwork. Hezb and Aoun convinced their audience that Israel, which was considered to be aligned with the March 14 Coalition, was the one assassinating its friends and allies for decades.

Despite the propaganda campaigns, the accusatory finger has long pointed at the Assad regime and its Lebanese arm, Hezbollah. In addition to Smeha's indictment in 2015, the STL's 2020 judgment found Salim Ayyash (a Hezbollah operative) guilty beyond a reasonable doubt of conspiring to

kill Hariri. Subsequent appeals added Hezbollah operatives Merhi and Oneissi[174].

Wissam Eid's analytical work (and death) sits inside that narrative: his phone-network analysis built the chain tying Hezbollah cells to the plot[175]. For other killings, the accusation sits within solid facts: anti-Syrian figures were targeted, and each blast rebalanced politics in favor of the pro-Damascus axis[176].

Read as a campaign, the pattern is chillingly coherent. The 2005–07 wave removed Christian editorialists and MPs. The 2007–08 murders targeted the army's operational core and the Hariri-trial brain. The 2012–13 bombs struck the intelligence chief who had traced an Assad minister's bomb plot and a policy strategist aligned with March 14.

The human cost here is not abstract. In addition to thousands of collateral civilian casualties from the assassinations, the roll of the dead reads like a who's who of Christian intellectual and political life. The wave of assassinations decapitated the strategic leadership of the March 14 Alliance and shattered the possibility of a competent post-occupation governance.

The result by 2020 was an eviscerated bench in the anti-Assad / anti-Hezbollah camp. A whole generation of potential Christian elite like publishers, jurists, lawmakers, staffers, and leaders, either died, left the country, or learned silence and compromise. The killers accomplished their mission.

The assassination wave stopped as Hezbollah tightened its grip on the government and gained unchallenged power in the Parliament, Cabinet, and Presidency.

The pattern resumed after the Beirut Port explosion in 2020, when Hezbollah's power was threatened again through public anger and investigations. Soon after the blast destroyed half the capital, several Christian figures who came close to exposing Hezbollah's role in the explosion were assassinated. This includes journalist Joe Bejjani and the Head of the anti-smuggling unit in Lebanese Customs, Mounir Abou Rjeily, both killed in December 2020. It also includes Colonel Joseph Skaf, Chief of the drug control division at the Lebanese Customs, who was killed in 2017 for opposing Ammonium Nitrate smuggling and storage in the Port.

Hashem Al-Salman and Lokman Slim, both anti-Hezbollah Shiite figures, were assassinated in 2013 and 2021, respectively. Several local leaders in the Lebanese Forces suffered the same fate between 2020 and 2025.

If you set the names against the political reality of Lebanon at the time, the meaning is stark: to lock in post-2005 dominance, you remove the people most capable of articulating and organizing anti-occupation politics. This was especially devastating on the Christian side, where an entire literati-political class (publishers, MPs, party organizers) that gave our community voice and leverage was silenced.

The assassins did not need to kill "everyone" to achieve their goal. They needed to scramble succession and intimidate the bench to make the rest fall in line. They succeeded. This doctrine of fear paved the way for the economic and security collapses of the next decade.

VI. The Second Treason of Michel Aoun

When Michel Aoun returned from exile, and Samir Geagea got out of prison, it renewed the hope of Christians in a country that respects laws, seeks prosperity instead of wars, and doesn't try to silence them anymore.

In 2005, the aspirations of building a just and thriving Lebanese Republic were through the roof. This was mostly represented by Aoun, who won the most votes in Christian areas by a large margin in 2005's elections.

For many Christians, the Free Patriotic Movement of Aoun was clean from corruption and represented a more modern and less sectarian option than the Lebanese Forces. Up to that point, Aoun had built his support base on the promise of fighting corruption, establishing the rule of law, and disarming militias, including Hezbollah. This discourse resonated with a Christian public that was impoverished and exhausted after fifteen years of occupation. The FPM was firmly rooted in the March 14 alliance at the time. It was known as the most radical and vocal critic of Hezbollah among the opposition. During the 2005 electoral campaign, Aoun accused other 14 March parties, like Saad al-Hariri and Walid Jumblatt, of cooperating with pro-Syrian parties. He denounced them for not being true enough to the Lebanese cause[177].

Christian voters saw FPM as an honest and patriotic political party and rewarded it with the largest Christian parliamentary bloc after Taif, made up of fifteen seats. In comparison, Hezbollah and Amal got fourteen seats each, and the Lebanese Forces only got six. With Aoun, the March 14 Alliance was supposed to have 84 seats out of 128 in the Parliament – a majority unprecedented in Lebanese history.

Such a majority was supposed to allow the March 14 Alliance to elect a President, choose a Prime Minister, and run the country according to their agenda. The time was ripe to achieve complete independence, regain state sovereignty, and tackle corruption.

What the 14 March Alliance was not willing to do, however, was to hand over the Presidency to Aoun, given his volatile and radical leanings. Aoun considered the presidency was his by right as the representative of the largest Christian bloc. Instead of compromising to keep the momentum of the Cedar Revolution going, the old general suddenly switched sides completely. A few months after the election, he announced his alignment with Hezbollah, which he previously considered to be a terrorist anti-Lebanese party. Aoun wanted the presidential seat in Baabda, no matter the cost.

FPM and Hezbollah signed the Mar Mikhael Memorandum of Understanding in 2006. This alliance became the hinge that reconfigured Christian leverage after the 2006 war, and Hezbollah used it relentlessly to legitimize itself and grow its power inside the state. While Aoun's shift appealed to some Christians seeking representation, it ultimately diluted collective leverage against armed dominance. Aoun's initial anti-corruption stance won genuine support, but this alliance ended up prioritizing personal ambition over communal reform.

The text, explicitly framed as a "national dialogue" platform, offered Hezbollah crucial cross-sectarian legitimation at a moment when the party confronted domestic pushback and international pressure to disarm. In exchange, Aoun secured a strategic ally for his long-declared bid for the presidency. The MoU's clauses invoked a "national defense strategy"

without committing to disarmament, normalizing the armed exception within a consensual wrapper.[178]

From 2006 onward, Hezbollah and FPM coordinated parliamentary tactics and cabinet leverage to prevent the March 14 Alliance from ruling the country. This culminated in Hezbollah's invasion of the Capital and the southern Mountain in 2008.

As we already discussed[179], the Doha Accord, signed in the aftermath of Hezbollah's attack, constitutionalized a new equilibrium. It effectively changed the Lebanese Constitution to ratify and legitimize a Shiite-centered system. The opposition (Hezbollah and allies) obtained a "blocking third" in the cabinet, made of one-third plus one of ministers. This was a de facto veto over key decisions. The Hezbollah/FPM alliance also fixed putting the Ministry of Finance in the hands of a Shiite minister. The signature of the finance minister was deemed essential for most executive decisions, rendering the Finance minister position to be more important than that of the President of the Republic. This position was used to block any opposing decisions and facilitate funding for Hezbollah's axis. From 2008 to 2025, Hezbollah and its partners had a historically unprecedented veto power in the Lebanese cabinet, ensuring that no government could move against their core interests.

Once Hezbollah imposed its power through government institutions, it installed a Hezbollah-Syrian puppet at the Presidential Palace with the election of Lebanese Army commander Michel Sulaiman. The next step was for them to deliver Aoun to Baabda, but this proved to be a harder mission.

The following years were characterized by paralysis and crisis, as Hezbollah and Aoun obstructed the institutions and slowly tightened their grip over government assets, including sensitive public amenities like the Airport and Port.

After the wave of assassinations and under permanent political gridlock, the Cedar Revolution completely lost momentum and has now become a memory without an anniversary. From the moment Hezbollah took power in 2008, three patterns came to define the next 16 years:

1. Chronic constitutional vacuums. The country spent lengthy periods without presidents or functioning cabinets, during which policy drift favored actors with extra-institutional leverage.

2. Debt-deflation and patronage finance. Debt stocks remained among the highest in the world relative to GDP. Interest service crowded out investment, while patronage networks siphoned off rents.[180] Public development and infrastructure projects during this time were almost completely absent. The 2006 war was devastating, but no real policies were implemented to weather the inflation and economic damage the country suffered. The economy stumbled and receded. This led to renewed waves of emigration.

3. Emigration and thinning of Christian cadres. As public-sector credibility fell and private-sector dynamism slowed (especially after 2011), highly educated youth, disproportionately from Christian schools and universities, left the country for good. Many studies capture the permanence of post-war emigration patterns.[181]

Aoun and Hezbollah repeated the script several times, using armed violence to bludgeon the country into obedience. After Hezbollah and its allies toppled Hariri's unity cabinet in January 2011 by mass resignation, Najib Mikati needed five months to form a government dominated by Hezbollah and allies. The May 2018 elections brought new parliamentary balances that Hezbollah refused to admit, and Lebanon went nine months without a cabinet. When the January 2019 government was spun, it was a relief that a cabinet existed at all.

Executive vacuum became normal while each delay shifted policy initiatives toward actors with extra-institutional leverage. This allowed Hezbollah to regain more power over state institutions through appointments, bribes, and intimidation. The state was slowly transformed into an extension of what calls itself the Party of God.

After President Michel Suleiman's term ended in 2014, Michel Aoun and Hezbollah refused to attend parliamentary sessions unless Aoun was the agreed candidate. They denied quorum through dozens of rounds, stretching the vacuum to 29 months - a modern record. Only on 31 October 2016 did the parliament finally elect Aoun, after 2 years-long presidential vacuum. The bargain that brought Aoun to Baabda also saw the return of Saad Hariri to the premiership[182].

The deal closed the vacancy but confirmed the method: leverage the quorum rule and cabinet veto until rivals submit and pay the price.

Within this environment, Hezbollah significantly expanded its power, not just at home but also abroad. It participated directly in regional civil wars and conflicts in Iraq (from 2006), Syria (from 2013), and Yemen (2014). This involvement happened under the silence and sometimes encouragement of official Lebanese authorities. These policies isolated Lebanon on the international stage and transformed it into a regional problem and a source of instability.

The vacuum–veto regime had material costs. With the presidency empty (2014–2016), the parliament extending itself (2013, 2014), and governments forming at glacial speed (2011: five months; 2018–19: nine months), the center of gravity slipped away from institutions and toward armed actors and external guarantors.

Under Aoun's presidency, the state eroded at an unprecedented pace. While veto-based policy was still paralyzing the country, Aoun never took any serious steps to fight or limit corruption. What happened was the opposite, and many prominent FPM leaders became suspected of corruption themselves.

Security policy under Aoun sat with forces that retained arms or enjoyed Syrian–Iranian cover. In parallel, economic policy drifted into stop-gap budgets, arrears, and debt service. For several years, the State did not even have a ratified public budget.

Even when cabinets existed, the blocking third meant that any policy with distributional consequences could be stalled, re-priced, delayed, watered-down, or swapped in exchange for appointing cronies in government positions. This was classic patronage politics with high interest costs and low reform content. Three years into Aoun's presidency, debt

reached 150% of GDP, and the country was in economic freefall.[183]

The decade ended with the October 2019 street uprising that lasted several months. The movement was a society-wide repudiation of debt-patronage and the confessional cartel. It was also a sign that, for the young generation, the Lebanese state lost its claim as the protector of livelihoods and freedoms.

In response to the mass discontent of Lebanese youth and especially Christians, Aoun went on TV and told protesters: "if they don't think anyone in power is clean, they should emigrate (leave the country)"[184]. This phrase summarizes an entire political class that just does not care about the lives of its people.

For Christians, this era of paralysis translated into three attritions:

1. Representation by proxy. Post-Doha cabinets filtered Christian portfolios through parties aligned with the "resistance" axis, instead of choosing those aligned with the interests of their community. In other times, Christian representation was chosen through bargains struck to end a vacuum, and never to execute a program.

The Aoun-or-no-quorum stance (2014–2016) turned the Maronite presidency into a hostage role. The office was won, but only after accepting a cabinet geometry that preserved the blocking third and Hezbollah's power. These policies voided the weight of Christian representation throughout the republic.

2. The rise of the parallel state. Where the cabinet could not move (defense, foreign policy), policy bent to those with

guns or patrons. Hezbollah got free rein in areas that were previously reserved to the government. The Shiite party was free to pursue its own foreign policy with no checks or accountability. It established an international drug trading network and sent thousands of fighters to defend the regime of Bashar al-Assad in Damascus, and to help Houthis take over power in Yemen.

Where government could move (economy), deadlock delayed budgets and reforms, culminating in a slow-motion crisis and financial collapse.

3. Electoral erosion. Parliamentary self-extensions (2013, 2014 by 31 months) and electoral laws were designed to favor one side over the other, and undercut the premise that voting matters. It hollowed out political participation and made parliamentary representation pointless. Almost two-thirds of seats are already decided before the elections take place. With elections delayed and districts engineered, gatekeepers and sectarian-financial patrons are the ones who choose who gets the power.

The cumulative effect on Christians was corrosive: when the presidency became hostage to a single candidacy and cabinets to a blocking third, Christian actors without a separate street force or foreign patrons found themselves over-represented in protocol, under-represented in power. In short: Doha traded bullets for vetoes, and vetoes proved a quieter, longer blockade.[185]

By the end of Aoun's term (Oct. 30–31, 2022), The Republic had no presidential successor, the state institutions had disintegrated, the economy had collapsed, and the country was rampant with poverty and high unemployment and crime rates.

As official institutions corroded, the state that Aoun left had no monopoly of force, no predictable cabinet formation, no judicial independence, and no rule of law. The republic became a cartelized state stripped and sold for parts, while its people were left to find a decent life elsewhere.

In June 2023, as Aoun concluded his presidency, he chose to end his political career by visiting the Syrian dictator, Bashar Al-Assad, who was engaged in a bloody civil war in Syria. Symbolically, this was a fitting end to a president that turned his back on his soldiers once, then turned his back on the entire country. Aoun's presidency not only betrayed Christian aspirations but also entrenched a cartelized system that we'll explore next.

VII. The Cartelized Republic: Rents, Monopolies, and a Failed State

Lebanon's post-civil-war economy operated like a cartelized republic: a small circle of factional bosses divided the spoils — electricity, airport and ports, telecom, banking, customs, public transport, imports, garbage collection and real estate — and ran them as rent-extraction and enrichment machines.

The emblem case is Electricité du Liban (EDL). Between 1992–2018, budget transfers to keep EDL afloat exceeded $40 billion, averaging ~3.8% of GDP per year and consuming almost half of the fiscal deficit. These huge sums of money bought neither 24/7 power nor an efficient grid[186]. By the end of 2018, EDL's cumulative transfers were so large that one policy brief estimated they accounted for ~45% of public debt[187].

Telecom was the mirror image: a state-run duopoly (Alfa/Touch) that once gushed cash but became a byword for crony contracting and leakage. A 2022 Court of Audit-based analysis summarized "billions in squandered funds" in the sector. Civil-society research in 2024 chronicled "persistent malpractice and corruption" that left users staring at EDGE-era speeds, decades after promises of 5G.[188]

Customs and tax evasion were the third spigot. IMF technical work and watchdogs put annual losses in the billions. A pre-crisis banking paper cites ~$5 billion (≈10% of GDP in 2017) bleeding out via evasion and under-collection[189].

The World Bank labeled the Lebanese system as "elite capture," in which the rich get richer, and the poor become poorer.

Transparency assessments show a sharp deterioration in control of corruption metrics in the past two decades,[190] as Hezbollah and Aoun rose to power.

Parallel to sectoral rents, patronage finance hollowed out social provision. The Public Corporation for Housing — a lifeline for lower- and middle-income buyers — stopped accepting new subsidized housing loans in July 2018 for lack of funding.

All of this sat atop monopolies and cartels embedded in politics: fuel import cartels, generator mafias, and port/airport lanes where insiders extracted rents and outsiders paid the cost.

The mafia economy reached its predictable collapse in 2019 when Lebanon's banks became insolvent. The event triggered the disappearance of the lifetime savings of an entire population, with losses reaching 69-72 billion US$[191].

Following the collapse, poverty exploded, unemployment rates tripled, and basic services (power, water, telecom) degraded to crisis levels[192].

As the failing banks stripped the average citizen of their life savings, the personal fortunes of the political class grew bigger.

Najib Mikati, Michel Suleiman, Walid Jumblatt, Nabih Berri, Gebran Bassil, and many others, all became billionaires, along with their wives, sons, relatives, and henchmen. Some like Gebran Bassil, were so blatant in corruption that they fell under international sanctions. The U.S. Treasury sanctioned Bassil in 2020 under Global Magnitsky for corruption, explicitly saying that his conduct exemplified Lebanon's systemic corruption[193].

U.S. Treasury/OFAC also later sanctioned several businessmen tied to Lebanese power brokers for corruption that undermines governance (e.g., Jihad al-Arab, Dany Khoury).

Hezbollah at this time became an organization that owns and moves billions in assets in Lebanon and abroad. The U.S. officials have repeatedly cited Iranian support of around $700 million/year that goes to Hezb since the 2010s[194]. This help complements illicit-finance networks that spread from Lebanon to Venezuela. Their financial muscles translated into armed vetoes domestically and expeditionary roles abroad.

Power brokers priced ministries, SOEs, and permits as rent farms. EDL's subsidy became patronage; telecom was a cash cow milked without reinvestment; and customs and VAT were treated as a cash stream for the political class. Public

hiring ballooned as a vote-buying device while public-private "consortia" recycled the same contractors, tied to the same political leaders.

When the music stopped and the state was unable to keep lining up the pockets of the corrupt political class, depositors' savings filled the hole only to be subsequently stolen in what can be described as the most blatant public theft in modern history.

This level of failure stands atop an unmissable factor: the mafia economy is not an unintended consequence of a few bad actors, but the natural result of a deeply dysfunctional system.

VIII. Lebanon under Hezbollah

From the Doha Agreement in 2008 till 2025, Lebanon's operating system was tilted in an unprecedented way: one sect managed to hold all the power cards simultaneously, and it wasn't the Maronites.

Once Hezbollah and its allies received a "blocking third" in cabinets, it had a de facto veto over consequential decisions. Every decision from then onwards had to either be in their favor or was blocked.

Doha ended street fighting but enacted constitutionalized paralysis: anything that touched Hezbollah's weapons, security equities, its economic interests, or foreign alignments, wasn't on the table anymore.

Hezbollah considered anything that resembled building a strong state as a threat to its own parallel state and withdrew it from public discussion. Any policy that did not give the

two biggest Shiite parties an increased share in the clientelist system in the form of appointments and economic advantages, wasn't allowed to pass. State institutions were treated as coffers to line up the pockets of Shiite elite and corrupt politicians who facilitate these policies.

Hezbollah no longer needed to roll its guns each time it wanted to get something done: the cabinet veto replaced the street as the first instrument.

Inside the state, Hezbollah did not set out to "own every ministry." It set out to own chokepoints and allies who were promised a share of the spoils.

Over the years, Hezbollah and Amal made sure they appointed their followers in every sensitive government position they could. Even though the State and its Army and Security forces were already engineered to be pro-axis and pacified by fifteen years of Syrian occupation, the trend continued from 2008 onwards. It ensured that even inside the Army and security forces, Hezbollah's power is unmatched.

On the security side, the most emblematic shift was the General Directorate of General Security. By convention, it was historically led by a Maronite but shifted in July 2011 to Maj.-Gen. Abbas Ibrahim, a Shiite officer. General Ibrahim was widely described as operating under Hezbollah's de facto oversight while also mediating with foreign interlocutors.[195]

At the borders and the docks, the pattern was similar. A Chatham House study (2021) underscored Hezbollah's de facto sway over the porous Syria border and alleged use of the Port of Beirut for illicit trafficking — drugs, weapons, and explosive material. Hezbollah could bend state functions

wherever it needs to, while letting the rest decay. This is the definition of a state-straddling system[196], or in other words, a parasite.

The President at the time, Michel Suleiman, was completely pro-Hezbollah, as well as Prime Ministers of the era like Saad Al-Hariri and Najib Miqati. When Michel Aoun was elected president in 2016, a unique event in Lebanese history occurred: the majority of the parliament seats with around 100 MP, the majority of the cabinet with more than two thirds, the three presidential seats (Presidency, Cabinet & Parliament), and the vast majority of government institutions and Army and Security and economic assets, were all under the rule of one party and one sect.

While Michel Aoun, 83 years old at the time, was falling asleep on his chair in Baabda, Hezbollah's leader Hassan Nasrallah became the real ruler of Lebanon from the shadows.

Nasrallah used violence as he saw fit to veto, acquire or bend every sector and institution to Hezbollah's will. In 2011, when Prime Minister Saad Al-Hariri was not enacting all of Nasrallah's whims, Hezbollah conducted a capital-wide civilian invasion using thousands of men dressed in Black in what became known as "The Black Shirts incident". This invasion intimidated the remaining parliamentary blocs into voting for Hezbollah's PM candidate, Najib Miqati.

In another example, when a private Lebanese bank tried to implement a list of American sanctions aimed at Hezbollah members on its clientele in 2016, the Bank's Headquarters were bombed. The blast quickly ended the audit attempt[197]. What Hezbollah could not get through the cabinet, it extorted by force.

The transformation of the country into a drug-trafficking, weapon-trading hub came with a huge cost. Eventually, it blew up, symbolically and in real life, in Beirut's port in August 2020. The explosion was the third most powerful non-nuclear explosion in history, and took more than 240 lives, wounded thousands, and destroyed tens of thousands of homes in Christian-majority East Beirut.

Families demanded accountability; yet the probe into who stored, protected, and moved ammonium nitrate hit a familiar wall. Interference, pressure campaigns, assassinations, political cover, armed riots, and legal maneuvers repeatedly halted the investigation of Judge Tarek Bitar. The obstruction prompted UN institutions to warn about "interference" and "threats."[198]

By the third anniversary of the blast, Hezbollah had already "obstructed or quashed" the domestic process[199]. Those responsible for the blast that destroyed half the capital have not been held accountable to this day.

Like the port, the airport was completely under the hands of Hezbollah and Amal and used for smuggling drugs, weapons, and personnel. Despite denying the allegations of their dominance over this strategic state asset for years, the Lebanese State had to reshuffle the airport management in 2025 under international pressure. The government overhauled security, fired staff, and even barred flights suspected of IRGC cash or logistics. These moves proved that the claims of Hezbollah's influence over the airport were credible enough to trigger high-stakes, externally cheered housecleaning.[200]

The economic price of this order was significant. The country became internationally isolated as Hezbollah tightened its control.

In 2011, U.S. Treasury designated the Lebanese Canadian Bank as a Primary Money Laundering Concern, tying it to a global narcotics network with Hezbollah links[201]. In 2021, amid Syria's captagonized war economy and porous borders, Saudi Arabia banned Lebanese fruits and vegetables in a huge blow to Lebanese agricultural sector. The decisions came after the seizure of 5.3-million-pills stuffed inside fruit shipments[202].

Lebanese authorities announced large Captagon and cash seizures in later years too, sometimes described as "bound for Hezbollah." This reinforces the fact that the state was cleaning up late what non-state leverage had long enabled.

Trials and testimonies in the American judicial system about Hezbollah's drug network in the late 2010s described Hezbollah's illicit-finance operations as continent-spanning, laundering proceeds through trade, front companies, and real estate[203].

While Lebanon was dwarfed by Syria's captagonized war economy, the illicit flows from the country and Hezbollah's foreign politics isolated it internationally, halted economic developments, and spooked investors.

Abroad, Hezbollah's expeditionary turn became decisive. In Syria, the movement's involvement saved key regime fronts and rewired Middle Eastern balances. Hezbollah shifted from "Lebanese resistance" with a limited foreign role to become Iran's regional arm with frontline roles around Damascus, Qalamoun, Aleppo, and supply corridors.[204]

In Iraq, as the Islamic State surged and Iran's Quds Force orchestrated the Popular Mobilization Forces, Hezbollah's cadres and guidance were documented in shaping and guiding Iraqi "special groups" (2014–2020) alongside IRGC officers[205].

In Yemen, UN expert reports (2019–2024) and major-wire coverage assessed that Hezbollah specialists trained and equipped the Houthis, enabling long-range drones and missiles that hit deep into Saudi Arabia and the Red Sea[206].

This outward growth fed inward leverage: a party that wins battles abroad and plugs into Iran's logistics spine returns with enhanced deterrent power against domestic rivals.

At home, 2019–2024 showed how the formula hardens. In September 2021, amid fuel shortages, Hezbollah imported Iranian fuel via Syria, publicly and defiantly, from a country under international sanctions. This was a testament to a chilling fact: the parallel state holds more power than the actual state. Pro-Hezbollah and Axis press presented it as proof of life for Hezbollah's provisioning capacity and the state's incapability.[207]

A quieter lever during this time was real estate and demography. Church leaders and Christian NGOs have warned for years that systematic land purchases, mixed with economic hardship, are pushing Christians to sell and alter the balance in sensitive belts. Many Christian voices decried the "changes in ownership of land once owned by Christians," urging safeguards for the "demographic balance" that underpins the fragile confessional system.

Hezbollah's demographic expansions started since the year 2000 at least, but media and public opinion only started

catching up to it a decade later. In 2011, a draft law to ban inter-confessional land sales for fifteen years sparked national debate but did not pass in the cabinet.

Many Christian activists and community outlets highlight targeted purchases in mixed Christian/Druze areas, Jezzine hinterlands, Metn ridges, and coastal strips (Khaldeh, Chouweifat, Jdeideh, Byblos, etc.). Definitive nationwide data are scarce, but the reality on the ground that we see with our own eyes cannot lie: there is a quiet strategy of Shiite expansion in mixed districts that has been going on for decades, and no one is really doing anything about it.

This rapid expansion of Hezbollah's power did not pass without incidents and resistance. Three events came to symbolize, for many Christians and Druze, their resistance against Hezbollah's reign over the country:

- Shwayya, Hasbaya (6 Aug. 2021). After Hezbollah fired rockets at Israel, Druze villagers in Shwayya intercepted a flatbed truck carrying a multiple-rocket launcher and detained members of the crew as they passed through their area. This was a rare, public challenge to Hezbollah's freedom of movement.

- Tayouneh, Beirut (14 Oct. 2021). During a Hezbollah/Amal protest to oust Judge Bitar (the port-blast investigator), gunfire erupted along the Ain el-Remmaneh/Tayouneh axis. At least six Hezbollah and Amal armed thugs were killed, and dozens were wounded in the worst street violence in years. Hezbollah accused Lebanese Forces of an ambush; LF denied, alleging self-defense. The purpose of the rally (to obstruct the judge) and the use of arms in mixed

districts became for many proof that the violent logic of Hezbollah has not changed.

- Kahaleh, Aley District (9 Aug. 2023). A Hezbollah truck carrying ammunition overturned on the Damascus–Beirut highway in a Christian town, endangering civilian lives. Residents blocked the road, and an armed clash ensued in which two men were killed (one local, one Hezbollah). The incident confirmed what the community already believed: weapons transit was ongoing wherever Hezbollah pleases, going through Christian and Druze localities while the state is completely absent.

While Hezbollah was taking over the State, it was still building and expanding its own parallel system. It replicated government institutions and ruled its own areas without state interference, anchoring a sect-bound polity with its own security, welfare, finance, and communications.

The effect was permanently diluting the state's monopoly of force and sovereignty. It also built a sectarian hierarchy in Lebanon: the Shiite sect was treated as if it is above the law, being cared for by its own parallel state and given special provisions and status from the government at the same time.

Hezbollah's parallel state includes:

1) A religious army and independent security corridors

- Hezbollah's main pillar is its heavily armed military wing, with independent command and supply that can outgun state agencies. U.S. Senate testimony in 2010 described the group's coercive overmatch and its willingness to use violence as the decisive factor in domestic politics.[208]

- The South, parts of Bekaa, and the Southern suburb of Beirut, were all no-go zones for the Lebanese Army and security. The party did not hesitate to draw these lines by force when necessary, by killing several Lebanese Army officers and UNIFIL personnel.

- Border management and strategic depth: Hezbollah's de facto control over the Syria–Lebanon frontier and privileged access via the airport, ports, and overland routes are all classic attributes of a sovereign corridor.

2) A parallel communications network

The party's secure fiber-optic and radio system that was acknowledged publicly by Hezbollah during the May 2008 crisis has been expanded and developed several folds since then. The outcome of that event set a lasting precedent: hard power protects parallel infrastructure, which in turn protects hard power.

3) A sect-anchored welfare and reconstruction network

Over the years, Hezbollah built a vast network of companies and economic institutions that provide social and economic services, including:

- Jihad al-Binaʾ (*construction arm*): U.S. Treasury designated it in 2007 as an entity formed and run by Hezbollah with Iranian funding. After the 2006 war, it led billions worth of reconstruction projects across Dahiyeh and the South[209].

- Hospitals, schools, media: A dense network (e.g., al-Rassoul al-Aʿzam hospital; party schools; al-Manar TV) animates a comprehensive service ecosystem that substitutes for the state in Shiite districts. Hezbollah is a major provider of social services to

hundreds of thousands of Shiites, often surpassing the State in its offerings and abilities.

- Al-Imdad / Martyrs Foundation: Sanctioned or documented as providing stipends and social support to fighters' families and the wounded, further binding the community to the parallel system.[210]

4) An independent banking and finance system

- Al-Qard al-Hasan Association (AQAH) operates as a shadow credit system with dozens of branches, collateralized often by gold, and long scrutinized by regulators. OFAC designated AQAH for sanctions in 2007, and again in 2021 and 2025[211].
- In 2025, amid intensified pressure (including Israeli strikes on its branches in 2024), Lebanon's central bank banned licensed institutions from interacting with Al Qard Al Hassan in a formal admission that a parallel banking rail was undermining the financial order[212].

The September 2024 war with Israel brought this twenty-year trajectory to a harsh conclusion. Months of cross-border fire tied to Gaza escalated into massive Israeli strikes and ground incursions into southern Lebanon.

Heavy Hezbollah losses, large-scale displacement, and systemic destruction left an opening in politics to regain some of the State's sovereignty away from the party. By early 2025, under a patchwork ceasefire, a government without

Hezbollah blocking third saw light for the first time in 16 years.

The war also snapped foreign-aid illusions and exposed the degree of Lebanon's failings and isolation. Donors and Gulf partners, already alienated by Captagon seizures and state paralysis, increased their distance.

Hezbollah was appointing Presidents, army chiefs, judges, and general managers wherever it wanted. It was deciding on public budgets and foreign policies. It ensured a special status for its members and followers and facilitated regulatory and economic activity for Shiite individuals and enterprises.

At the time of writing this book, Hezbollah's rule had suffered a serious blow, but even as a new war is ongoing, the results of the past 20 years of politics haven't yet radically changed and the party, along with Amal, still has the upper hand in Lebanese politics and government.

During its peak power, Hezbollah ruled the country without governing it. Lebanon had a façade made of a President, Cabinet, and Parliament, but in reality, it was Hassan Nasrallah making all the decisions, or vetoing the ones he did not like, from his underground bunker.

IX. A Republic in Permanent Crisis

The 35 years from 1990 to 2025 stand as a stark testament to the Christian experience in post-war Lebanon. It was a period of engineered marginalization that transformed Christians from architects of the state into second-class citizens in their ancestral homeland.

From the Taif Agreement's constitutional sleight-of-hand, which stripped Maronite prerogatives while preserving armed exceptions, to the Syrian occupation's brutal dismantling of Christian institutions, the foundations of decline were laid early. Missed reforms in 2000, 2005 and again in 2025 allowed Hezbollah's parallel state to flourish, unchecked by a hollowed-out sovereignty. Aoun's pivot in 2006 and the Doha Accord's veto mechanisms institutionalized a cartelized republic, where corruption siphoned billions, emigration drained talent, and assassinations silenced dissent.

Under Hezbollah's shadow rule, Lebanon devolved into a hub of illicit trade, expeditionary wars, and demographic engineering. Crises like the 2019 financial collapse, 2020 port explosion, and 2023-24 war exposed the state's fragility.

Christian communities, once vibrant centers of influence, now face existential threats: thinned populations, eroded political weight, and a security landscape where they are disproportionately vulnerable. These failures, expressed by political neutralization, economic predation, and security asymmetries, underscore a core truth: the promise of coexistence in a unified Lebanon has repeatedly faltered, not due to inherent sectarian incompatibility, but because of unbalanced power dynamics that favor armed dominance over equitable rule.

Since its inception, the Republic barely knew a year without crisis. The system changed from Political Maronism (1943-1975) to Political Sunnism (1990-2005) to Political Shiism (2008-2025). But while faces and names changed, catastrophe was always around the corner.

Between 2024 and 2026, the Republic squandered another post-war opportunity and plunged into a new war that the Christians did not decide on or support.

Since the end of the civil war, Christians were mostly spectators in the affairs of their country, unable to veto policies against their interests or contribute decisively to things that matter. Since the implementation of Taif, Christians did not have a decisive say in foreign affairs, peace and war decisions, economic development, or social policies. While a few of their leaders amassed fortunes and accumulated titles, most Christians lost faith in the country and either emigrated or resigned to their fate.

For Maronites, this era renews the imperative of self-determination where autonomy in governance, security, and cultural preservation offers the only viable safeguard against further erosion.

As the Lebanese Republic completed its first century, it has become a failed state. What makes matters worse is that its Christians have completely lost their weight within the political equation and have become second-class citizens in a country they created.

This reality, however, is not destiny. In Volume II, we will explore strategies for resilience from federal models to international alliances, charting a course for Christians to thrive in an uncertain future. Before we get there, however, we have to make a final analysis today to evaluate whether the Republic today is still aligned with the Maronite Cause and Christian interests.

Table 5. Post-Taif Presidents 1990-2025

President	Loyalty	Key Policies	Major Consequences
Elias Hrawi 1989-1998	Loyal to Damascus Extended term via Syrian pressure.	Enforced Taif: Disarmed militias (except Hezbollah). Oversaw Syrian occupation integration. Reconstruction under Hariri.	Brutal suppression of Christian leaders (e.g., Aoun exile). Debt surge to 103% GDP. Emigration waves. Political hollowing of Christian representation
Emile Lahoud 1998-2007	Damascus loyalist; extended term via Syrian pressure.	Blocked reforms; maintained Syrian tutelage. Opposed UNSCR 1559 (disarmament). Security pacts with Syria.	Hariri assassination (2005); Cedar Revolution. 2006 war devastation. Assassination series; institutional paralysis.
Michel Suleiman 2008-2014	Pro-Hezbollah/Syrian axis; post-Doha compromise figure.	National dialogue on defense that legitimized Hezbollah's arms. Cabinet formations	Syrian refugee crisis spillover. Gridlock leads to presidential vacuum (2014). Economic stagnation;

		favoring veto blocs.	rising corruption.
Michel Aoun 2016-2022	Allied with Hezbollah (Mar Mikhael MoU) / Pro Syrian axis.	Blocking reforms; self-extension of parliament. Allowed Hezbollah's foreign expeditions. Cabinet vetoes on accountability.	2019 financial collapse. Port explosion (2020). 2021 clashes. Hyperinflation. Emigration peak. Christian leverage eroded.
Vacuum 2022-2025	N/A (Gridlock by Hezbollah allies).	Caretaker governments; no major policies. Blocked elections/reforms.	Ongoing crisis: 2023-24 war. State failure. international isolation. Demographic engineering accelerates.
Joseph Aoun 2025 -	Centrist	Discourse about disarming Hezbollah and restoring the state. Declined to pursue decisive action.	Further state failure and capture by Hezbollah. 2026 War after failing of disarming the party.

Table 6. A chronology of Post-Taif Christian marginalization

Era/Phase	Political Failures	Economic Failures	Security Failures
Taif & Syrian Occupation (1989-2005)	Constitutional downgrading: Shift to cabinet-led system, loss of Maronite presidential powers. Exile/imprisonment of leaders. Puppet presidents installed.	Debt ballooned to 103% GDP by 1997 via reconstruction corruption. Exclusion of Christian areas from development. Patronage networks deepened inequality.	Selective disarmament: Christian militias dissolved; Hezbollah armed. Syrian control over army and security forces. Persecution and assassinations.
Missed Reforms & Cedar Revolution (2005-2008)	Failure to disarm militias post-Syrian withdrawal. Doha Accord grants veto power to Hezbollah. Aoun's pivot allies with Hezbollah.	2006 war losses: $5B (22% GDP), growth drop from +6% to +2%. Gridlock stalls reforms. Corruption persists.	2006 war: 1,300 deaths, infrastructure destruction. Assassination wave targets anti-Syrian figures. Hezbollah rearms, defying UNSCR 1701.

Cartelized Republic & Aoun Era (2008-2020)	Blocking third vetoes reforms. Chronic vacuums: No president (2014-2016), gridlocked cabinets. Hezbollah captures institutions and vital state assets.	Debt hits 150%+ GDP; $40B EDL losses. 2019 collapse: Currency devaluation, banking crisis.	Parallel state: Hezbollah's expands its army, border and port control. Black Shirts invasion (2011), Tayouneh clashes (2021). Obstructed probes in port explosion.
Perpetual Crisis & 2023-24 War (2020-2025)	No reforms post-war; vetoes block change. Hezbollah's foreign policy isolates Lebanon. Ongoing presidential vacuum.	Hyperinflation, poverty at 80%. Illicit trade funds parallel economy. Lost diaspora remittances.	2023-24 war: thousands of deaths, displacement. Expeditionary roles (e.g., Syria, Yemen) drain resources. Unresolved port blast: 240+ deaths.

Chapter 7

Why the Lebanese State No Longer Protects Maronite Survival

After more than a century of failure, the history of the Lebanese Republic included three civil wars, many foreign invasions and occupations, several armed exceptions, and countless economic hardships, and eventually, collapse. It is only normal, even necessary, for every Lebanese to question the viability of this state. This is more so in the case of Maronites and Druze, who were the founding pillars of the republic.

The Maronites gave up their mountain autonomy in exchange for partnership with other sects, in the hope of building something worthwhile together. Even as the Christian elite and masses deeply believed in the project and offered compromise after compromise to keep this country viable, other sects never fully came around to embrace it. Other sects always wanted to mold Lebanon into their own version of an Arabian Islamized state or merge it with Syria and the rest of the Arab world, seldom offering any compromise in return.

Eventually, the tally of Christian concessions, coupled with the worst historical leadership the Maronites ever had, transformed them into a minority and second-class citizens in their own country. Now is the time for them to ask the tough questions about the realities of the republic and their fate in it.

In this chapter, we argue that the Lebanese state is a structurally failed country, immune to reform, rendering it useless to Christians at best, and dangerous to their future at worst.

I. What Counts as "State Failure"?

Every serious analysis must begin with a definition that is neither sensational nor evasive. The state, as a political form, rests on a cluster of capacities: extraction (taxation), coercion (monopoly of legitimate use of force), administration (rule-keeping and adjudication), and delivery (public goods and services).

When the state loses these capacities in a durable, systemic fashion, we speak of a failed state. We speak of collapse. Collapse, at its core, is a failure to ensure security and establish the conditions for a stable civic life.

Two concise formulations anchor our frame. First, the classic definition of Max Weber:

"A state is a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory."[213]

If this foundational "claim" of the state becomes compromised — if militias, foreign forces, or criminal syndicates exercise effective coercion — then the line from order to failure has been crossed.

Second, let us anchor our definition further in the security capacity of modern statecraft: "War made the state, and the state made war," a shorthand for the tight coupling of extraction, protection, and administration.[214]

If the state cannot collect, cannot protect, and cannot adjudicate, it unravels.

In recent decades, Lebanon's unraveling has been a prolonged slope of disintegration, punctuated by shocks like the 1975–1990 civil war, the 2008 realignment, the 2019 financial implosion, and the 2023-24 War. For the Christian mountain heartland, the meaning of collapse is practical: it signals the failure of the center to guarantee the necessary conditions of freedom and decent life. This has far-reaching implications.

For our book, we define "collapse" of the Lebanese state as the concurrent, sustained degradation of (a) the monopoly of force, (b) fiscal and administrative capacity, (c) the provision of essential services and infrastructure, and (d) the rule of law and judicial capacity.

We will measure each of these elements with logic and rationality, uncovering a deeper layer of structural dysfunction, and evaluate whether the Lebanese state still serves its purpose for Christians.

II. The Security Breakdown: from the Monopoly of Force to the Rule of Militias

A collapsed state is first audible, then visible. You hear it in the language people use: names of militias, people with power who are not elected officials, and rumors about which areas are no-go zones for civilians and the state alike. You see it in the privatization of protection, in the routinization of intimidation, and the normalization of crime and violence. You notice it in the slow resignation of officials who, despite

being at their posts, know that the law is not enforceable anymore.

After the civil war, a fragile power-sharing and a heavy foreign hand restored the appearances of a central state, but the militias, namely Hezbollah and Islamo-leftist ones, endured beneath the surface. They reasserted themselves through the first years of Taif, then expanded and took over the state itself. The post-2005 era, and particularly the last decade, normalized the political presence of non-state arms within the national equation, peaking with the militia ruling the state without governing the country. They captured the power but stayed immune to any kind of accountability.

The lack of the monopoly of force in Lebanon is double-edged: the militias exercise their power without checks, while the official security apparatus and the Army are unwilling and unable to exercise their internal security role.

The problem is structural. It is not something that can be solved by some governmental reforms or a new parliamentary majority. In sheer numbers, the non-state actors are larger, better equipped, better funded, and more entrenched in their fighting doctrine than the state's armed forces. Expecting them to disband and disarm on their own and hand over their power is extremely naïve.

Hezbollah's fighter corps is commonly estimated at ~40,000–50,000 (active fighters and reserves) by Western intelligence establishments[215]. Hassan Nasrallah once claimed that the party has 100,000 fighters in the same speech he used to threaten the largest Christian party with violence. His exact words were "Do not miscalculate. Be wise and behave"[216], setting the political tone like a father disciplining his children.

Around Hezbollah, there is a cluster of smaller but real armed formations and cadres. This includes Amal, The Muslim Brotherhood (الجماعة الإسلامية), and factions of the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP)[217].

Inside the Palestinian camps, multiple groups maintain weapons and "security committees"—notably Fatah, Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Asbat al-Ansar, and Jund al-Sham. Camps like Ain al-Hilweh regularly host clashes among armed factions; UN and press reporting have documented more than a dozen clashes of militants in 2023 alone[218]. While headcounts vary and are politicized, open sources consistently note dozens of factions inside Ain al-Hilweh alone. Security sources estimate the Palestinian armed militants at about 10,000 men, with Hamas alone having 1,500 active fighters on Lebanese soil[219]. The long-standing norm is that the Lebanese Army does not enter the camps. This was the case since the end of the civil war, except for Nahr Al-Bared camp war in 2007.

By contrast, the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) number ~84,000 on paper[220], with most of the headcount being in non-fighting roles. Analysts have argued that Hezbollah alone "outnumbers and outguns" the army, given its equipment, mobilization speed, and deployable combat units[221].

Taken together, Hezbollah's core, Lebanese allied armed militias, and the Palestinian camp arsenals, exceed or approach the LAF's *deployable* combat strength. This explains why the state's monopoly of force is contested in practice, even if asserted in law or discourse.

The problem does not stop here: The Lebanese Army is not designed, nor equipped, nor able to handle any attempt by

the state to confront non-state actors. A big part of the problem is not in the fighting ability of the Army but in its sectarian nature that reflects the nature of Lebanese society. Any internal clash risks splitting the army into competing factions along sectarian lines, just as it happened during the civil war. The Army also suffers from the absence of decisive political decisions at the top. This means that even if the current events unfolding in Lebanon end up with a much weaker Hezbollah, the problem will persist. The rise of armed militias is the result of a paralyzed political infrastructure and a permanent security gap that paramilitary organizations come to fill. If one armed faction declines today, another will rise in its place in a few years.

The Lebanese state's default strategy in domestic crises from independence till today is doing nothing to assert the monopoly of force. The LAF didn't intervene in 1958 when Arabist political parties tried to topple the Republic and unify it with Syria. It didn't intervene decisively against Palestinian armament in the 60s and 70s. And it didn't intervene when the Civil War broke out in 1975.

In May 2008, when the cabinet moved against illegal telecoms networks and Hezbollah retaliated by attacking the capital, the army deployed but "did not engage[222]". It maintained neutrality while political leaders raced to Doha to sign the surrender of the political system to the armed party.

The same caution shaped policy toward Palestinian camps for decades: army and security forces "do not enter these camps," ring-fencing them instead.

In Beirut's 2021 Tayyouneh clashes, the LAF was present and later made arrests, but the day's firefights among rival

gunmen unfolded before order was restored. This was another episode that read domestically as the army "staying on the bench" until a political/operational opening emerged.

In 2025, after a devastating war that weakened Hezbollah significantly and even with unprecedented international support and governmental cover, the LAF still did not move to disarm the militia, leading to renewed war with Israel in 2026.

This recurring restraint is not accidental: with multiple armed players, fragile legitimacy, and limited kit, the state often prices the cost of action as higher than the cost of non-action, and the monopoly of force erodes accordingly.

Two truths in political science are most important here; the first one is:

"When the state cannot disarm private armies, it shares sovereignty in reality, whatever it claims in law." In other words, whatever the officials say about the legitimacy of Hezbollah's "Resistance," or whatever excuses they make for tolerating various Palestinian and Islamo-Leftist militias, the truth is that the state is not sovereign and does not rule its own country.

The second truth is: "Territorial control is cumulative. The more a non-state actor embeds in service provision and security, the harder it is for the central authority to reassert a monopoly without massive costs."[223]

The monopoly of violence cannot be simply reinstated when the state decides to do so. Even if the Lebanese Republic and the Lebanese Army decided to uphold the monopoly of coercion, like they announced multiple times after the last two wars, the cost of accomplishing that is prohibitive. The

Lebanese Republic and the LAF never moved decisively against an internal actor in the past one hundred years, and they're not going to start doing that now.

The reality of chaos and militias is a fixture in the Lebanese Republic and not an ailment that can be fixed. This also means that the central state is unable or unwilling to take preventive action against the emergence of new armed actors. Even if we solve the problem of the current militias, new militias will emerge sooner or later. For example, armed Syrian militias can be easily assembled from the 1.5 million refugees on Lebanese soil.

The absence of the monopoly of force alone can break a state entirely. Even if the rest of the Republic was perfect, the existence of a parallel army with its own foreign policy is enough of a factor to render the Republic dysfunctional. Overall, this simple reality is dangerous for the long-term freedom of Christians in the country.

The longue durée of Mount Lebanon teaches that autonomy was always negotiated under the shadow of force. The early Maronite experience already fused religious community with a distinctive military posture: local levies, rugged terrain, and monasteries that functioned as logistical nodes and operational command centers.

The memory reaches far: the Battle of Amioun (694) sits as a symbol of organized resistance in the hills, with the Mardaites embodying an early grammar of mountain war and defense. The lesson of Maronite history is essential: in these mountains, the protection of life and liberty was never outsourced; it was owned, taught, and renewed.

Fast-forward to the modern republic: the Lebanese state's monopoly of force was shattered since the 1960s and was

never restored. It was replaced with a marketplace of militias. The official army never acted when it was needed the most and never defended Christians when they were under attack. The Army did not even defend itself when its own officers and soldiers were assassinated by Hezbollah.

In this republic, Christians must share their country with armed militias without having an army of their own. How is this sustainable for their long-term freedom?

If you told a Maronite in the 19th century that a militia from the Bekaa and South would rule over them and decide their affairs, they would have thought we were completely defeated. They would not believe that modern Maronites have handed over their destiny so willingly.

For Maronite localities and the Christians of Lebanon, the security breakdown translates into existential dilemmas: policing will always be negotiated. Judicial decisions will always be selectively enforceable. The line between politics and protection will always be blurry and subject to shifting bargains.

The security and safety of Christian communities and their individuals under this reality is not a given, but a soft point to be always prodded, pressured, and pushed by others. In other words, the lives, property, rights, and security of Christians under this reality are not guaranteed, and they will always be bargaining chips in the political game.

Christian communities and young men already learned to "route around" official channels to secure basic guarantees. Families map risk in terms of roads and affiliations. This reality is both metaphorical and real. This was shown painfully in 2025 when young man Elia Abou Hanna was

killed by Palestinian militias after taking a wrong turn in Beirut[224]. The obituary of Elio itself was a stark reminder of the reality of Christians in the country, with all his uncles and aunts and their entire families being abroad. There was almost no one from his extended family left in the Mountain to even carry his coffin.

In this environment, the old mountain rule should return immediately to the Maronite mind: your security is only as strong as your own networks and your own readiness.

This security void compounds with fiscal insolvency, as we explore next.

III. Administrative and Fiscal Collapse: The Bankrupted State

If security failure is audible and visible, administrative collapse is legible. It is in the official paper that no longer serves a purpose. In the license that can be bought but not honored. In court decisions that arrive late but do not bite.

Fiscal collapse is at the core of total collapse: a currency that flees its own denomination, a bank that counts bills but does not pay its depositors, and a tax that is assessed but cannot be collected or defended.

The Lebanese crisis after 2019 converted decades of mismanagement into a complete breakdown. When banks informally froze deposits in late 2019, dollar accounts became “lollars” (un-withdrawable dollars), trapping savings and payrolls and rendering millions of Lebanese poorer overnight.

On 7 March 2020, the government announced it would default on a $1.2 billion Eurobond — Lebanon's first sovereign default — signaling the scale of balance-sheet insolvency and governance failure[225].

It is not the role of this chapter to audit every figure, but we must register the essentials: the currency lost the features of money. The banking sector froze into a museum of balances for funds that no longer exist. The state budget became a figment of imagination. Harsh capital controls were implemented without a formal law, and most Lebanese citizens around the world lost their entire lifetime savings.

By mid-2023, the IMF assessed that GDP had shrunk by ~40% since 2019, the lira had lost ~98% of its value, and inflation had run in triple digits. These facts reclassified Lebanon's economy and ballooned poverty rates[226]. The losses are estimated at 70-84 billion dollars[227]. When this chapter was being finalized in March 2026, depositors were still uncompensated, and fiscal reforms were absent.

World Bank estimates that poverty more than tripled from 2012 to 2022, rising from 12% of the population in 2012 to 44% in 2022[228]. Dollarization was driving a large off-grid cash economy that eroded taxation and public investment.

As the crisis bit, crime rates skyrocketed. Murders doubled in the first four months of 2020 vs. 2019. Car thefts rose ~50%, burglaries 20%, and that's only the reported crimes from ISF data[229]. By 2021, the situation was much worse: thefts up 266%, car thefts up 212%, murders up 101%, vs. 2019 baselines[230]. In 2024, ISF-based analyses reported that crime "remains high" relative to pre-crisis years[231].

This is a structural-level failure. In a report in 2021, the World Bank described the economic catastrophe in the following terms:

"Lebanon's crisis is the most severe in the country's modern history, marked by a breakdown of basic public services, a collapse of the financial system, and a dramatic increase in poverty. Lebanon's financial and economic crisis is likely to rank in the top ten, possibly top three, most severe crisis episodes globally since the mid-nineteenth century." [232]

This bankruptcy disrupted the state's administration on all levels. Essential services like passport issuance, car registrations, and legal transactions became periodically unavailable as the state was unable to provide such services. The public employees' body completely collapsed. Most public servants stopped attending their posts while their salaries became non-existent, barely enough to cover the cost of gas to reach their offices. During the crisis, the average salary of Lebanese soldiers and security personnel deteriorated from ~1000$ to around 60$ per month – one of the lowest salaries in the world. Consequently, security services and army deployment were scaled down significantly.

"The erosion of state capacity has hollowed out core functions, including revenue collection and service delivery, undermining social trust and economic recovery."[233]

For Mount Lebanon's parishes, municipalities, and families, fiscal failure is painfully concrete. Municipalities cannot plan because line items melt. Schools price tuition in currencies that parents do not earn. Police officers and teachers alike lose purchasing power, and with it, presence, and morale. The law itself degrades when procedural timeframes and

legal remedies collide with a frozen financial reality. Legal contracts become a burden. Loans and credits disappear along with new business ventures. Cash economy emerges as crime skyrockets and money laundering becomes the biggest financial sector, drowning the country further in a cycle of isolation and disintegration.

In classical terms, the social contract presumes two things: the state can protect, and the state can pay (for courts, schools, roads, electricity). When the treasury is empty and the law cannot be executed, the social contract dissolves.

IV. The Blacked-out Republic: Large-scale Infrastructure Failure

Apart from the monopoly of force and the legislative and administrative roles of the state, providing a functioning modern infrastructure to citizens is one of the main reasons why states exist.

Infrastructure is a country's nervous system. When it fails, the body politic shakes, poverty rises, and parallel networks will start taking over, further eroding the authority of government.

Electricity has been the bellwether of the Lebanese State's failure. The utility's chronic underperformance produced a parallel universe of private generators, subscriptions, and informal grids.

In 2024, Lebanon's public utility provided only one to three hours of electricity per day[234]. An informal diesel-generator industry worth $3 billion fills the gap. The propagation of private generators never fully aligned with legality, public

health, or safety. The state suffers periodic nationwide blackouts when fuel stocks run dry.[235] The Republic has been unable or unwilling to regulate the private generation sector, while big political players amass billions from the problem.

The "generator grid" entrenches pay-to-live governance and widens the distance between wealthy and poor: the wealthier buy stability; the rest ration medicine, refrigeration, showers, and study hours. Crackdowns are episodic and political; the structural cure —restoring a public grid with transparent financing and procurement—remains elusive.

The failure of the grid alone contributes visibly to the fracturing of the state into independent fiefdoms. "Service delivery is fragmenting along local and private lines, with municipalities and communities improvising solutions in the face of central failure."[236]

This polluted reality also contributes to a severe health crisis. Cancer rates increased by an astounding 162% from 1990 to 2023, and death rates are constantly climbing. This made Lebanon the country with the fastest-rising rate of cancer cases and deaths in the entire world[237].

The water situation is not much better. Water networks, too, swing between scarcity and contamination. One report from 2022 puts this stark reality in view: "In Lebanon, drinking water has become a luxury that few can afford"[238]. All Lebanese households and cities do not have access to drinking water and must buy it in bottles from stores. Many towns do not even get water at all and must buy massive quantities of water every week just to shower and flush their toilets.

The water crisis is exacerbated by corruption and scandals,

with a series of expensive dams that failed to retain and provide water. This includes the Msailha Dam in Batroun[239] and the Qaisamani Dam in Mount Lebanon.

When the worst recorded drought hit Lebanon in 2025[240], the entire country plunged into a thirst crisis, and humanitarian organizations raised the alarm. UNICEF's 2025 Situation Report and HAC appeal highlight WASH fragility (the vulnerability and weakness of Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene systems). They point to the rising water-trucking costs and drought-related impacts. UNHCR warned of elevated risks of waterborne diseases as people started using contaminated water for their needs[241].

When we investigate other sectors, we find the same reality: a failed public sector that doesn't provide basic services. For example, Lebanon has one of the worst telecom networks and internet speeds in the world[242]. "Digital service delivery suffers from fragmentation, inefficiency, and interagency conflicts… the government is unable to deliver services efficiently"[243], says one report.

The health sector is even worse: "Lebanon's health system is best described as a fragmented and pluralistic system with service delivery predominantly dispensed by the private sector."[244] WHO noted heavy damage and interruptions to health services in the past decade, with workforce flight of expert doctors and nurses since 2019. The health sector is also marred by mounting drug shortages, including medication for critical diseases like cancer[245].

Disaster exists everywhere you look in this country. Intermittent garbage crises have continued to recur since 2015, with landfills near capacity and no proper centralized solution[246]. This contributes to a worse public-health crisis,

while municipalities and private companies must step in to fill the state's role.

We can go on and on and talk about road infrastructure, the collapse of public transportation, and the decline of the education system, but you get the idea. The failure includes all levels of governance and all economic and social sectors. It touches on all the aspects of daily life.

What does service collapse mean for the Christians of Lebanon?

Their current existence in the country is, in the very literal sense of the word, survival mode. They must provide their own electricity, water, and basic services, paying twice and thrice for the same failed service. Businesses, small and large, but especially family firms, suffer compounded costs, undermining the very economic base that allows Christian families to remain on ancestral land. The full-spectrum economic collapse is the main driver of immigration and demographic drain in the Christian community.

Even during Kafno with a world war and a brutal Ottoman occupation, the services of the Mountain State did not collapse this dramatically. The traditional microgrids and federalized village cooperation under a unified parish network in the Mountain were much more dependable than the institutions of the Lebanese Republic.

This multi-level failure of the Lebanese state has deep political consequences. A state that cannot keep the lights on becomes, in daily consciousness, optional.

V. Justice Denied: The Dysfunctional Legal System

Lebanon's justice system functions less like a neutral architecture of law and more like a contested arena in which political actors negotiate impunity for themselves and their followers. In other words, there is no rule of law in the Lebanese Republic. There are only the bargains imposed by the strongest politician.

Judges face rotation games, parallel prosecutions, and disciplinary threats. Law-on-paper yields to "phone justice" in practice, where rulings and sentences are handed by extra-judicial forces.

The pattern is the clearest in politically sensitive or sectarian cases, where investigations stall, evidence chains are questioned into oblivion, and victims are sent from one jurisdiction to another until time itself becomes the acquittal.

Human rights groups have long documented this structural impunity. Probes into high-profile killings and attacks routinely feature procedural violations, selective arrests, and intimidation of investigators and witnesses. International support and generous donor funding have not translated into rule-of-law outcomes in these files.[247]

The trial for the murder of Lebanese Army Officer, Pilot Samer Hanna in 2008 is an example of this hollowed-out process. The investigation led nowhere. After a few months, Hezbollah handed over a fighter of their own, claiming that he shot the pilot by mistake from three hundred meters away, thinking the helicopter was Israeli. The state's investigations showed an execution style bullet wound from close range, while the helicopter was clearly branded with

LAF insignia. In 2025, a former minister of Justice and Commander of the Lebanese internal forces (ISF) during the time of Hanna's murder, stated that the helicopter was forced to land and Hezbollah executed the Maronite pilot from point blank, while only detaining the Shiite pilot for a few hours[248]. The suspect, who was handed over by Hezbollah, was charged with involuntary manslaughter and released on bail after 6 months[249].

The Beirut port explosion is the culminating exhibit of this complete judicial corruption. The domestic inquiry into the blast lurched forward but froze for years under a barrage of legal challenges and political interference. In January 2023, Lebanon's top prosecutor even ordered the release of all detainees and filed charges against the lead investigating judge in a move that rights groups called unprecedented and obstructive. Subsequent appeals and countermeasures deepened the paralysis[250].

Six years on, at the time of writing this chapter, families of victims still await a credible path to justice. No official was charged or held accountable for this crime. From Michel Aoun, the President at the time, to the smallest Lebanese Customs personnel who were involved in storing and covering up the existence of thousands of tons of ammonium nitrate in the port, there was zero accountability.

The case is similar with the financial collapse of 2019. Up till today, no one has been sentenced or held accountable for engineering a Ponzi scheme on a national level and stealing billions of dollars from the pockets of millions of Lebanese citizens. The former Central Bank Governor, Riad Salameh, was arrested in late 2025 and released on bail shortly after, in an episode that highlighted the elite's immunity from accountability.

This dysfunction sits atop a broader economy of coercion managed outside ordinary courts. The military judiciary, an exceptional forum theoretically reserved for service offenses, routinely asserts jurisdiction over civilians, including protesters, journalists, and critics. Due-process violations and opaque reasoning mar its proceedings. Lebanese and international organizations have for years urged the state to end civilian trials in military courts and confine the tribunal to its proper scope[251].

The tribunal's record reinforces the perception of selective severity. In landmark cases that involved murder, it has missed opportunities to hold perpetrators to account, while elsewhere it has pursued civilians with terrorism-adjacent charges for acts of dissent, like destroying public property during the 2019 protests[252].

The result is a two-tier system: ordinary justice is weak when crimes implicate power, but it is strong, intimidating even, when power wishes to make an example out of ordinary people or political opponents.

Human rights groups echo the same signal in their yearly reports: persistent political interference in the judiciary, widespread impunity for security-force abuses, and a widening trust deficit that pushes citizens toward private arbitration or silence[253].

The collapse of the state's monopoly of force is mirrored by the collapse of its monopoly of adjudication: when coercion is fragmented, and courts are pliable, the sovereign promise to equalize strong and weak under the law dissolves. It turns justice from a quest to achieve public good into a negotiated privilege.

This has deep implications for Maronites and Christians of Lebanon: an unjust state is also an unsafe one. A state unable to investigate a mass homicide that destroyed its own capital, or protect its citizens from a nationwide theft operation, cannot guarantee the property, contracts, or safety of "minorities" in the long run.

In practice, this means that Christians do not have any fixed rights guaranteed by law under the Lebanese Republic. Life, freedom, and property are all contingent on factional influence and the rule of the strongest, and not on legal rights or the rule of law.

VI. A Nation without a State: What Total Collapse Means for Lebanese Christians

Three major events in recent history express the complete disintegration of the Lebanese state:

- The financial collapse and bank insolvency crisis in 2019, and its following socio-economic impoverishment of the Lebanese population.
- The Beirut Port blast in 2020, where no one was held accountable for the lives and property lost.
- The war of 2023-2024 and then 2026 between Hezbollah and Israel, in which Hezbollah dragged the entire country into a destructive war for its own agenda.

The cross-border war started when Hezbollah opened fire on Israel in October 2023 in solidarity with Gaza, and it went on for a year. It escalated in September 2024 and ended up displacing tens of thousands and killing thousands, mainly from Hezbollah's militia.

The World Bank assessment in March 2025 estimated $6.8 billion in physical damage, another $7.2 billion in losses, and $11 billion in recovery and reconstruction needs. Lebanese GDP contracted by 7.1% in 2024[254].

Once again, no one was held accountable for the losses and destruction that Hezbollah brought on the country. Hezbollah's political grip was weakened, but most things continued with business as usual in the Republic.

In 2026, following the death of the Iranian Islamic Leader, Ali Khamenei, Hezbollah redid the same and retaliated against Israel with rocket launches, plunging the country one more time into another war. As I write these lines in March 2026, bomber airplanes are flying over as the war ravages what remains of Lebanon, and it is still unclear where this war will go and what destruction it will cause.

After the 2024 war, the Lebanese government moved to dispense millions of dollars in support for the Shiite population. It dedicated millions for compensation, exempted the majority of Shiite Southern areas from taxes and fees, and enacted a decree that compensates the wounded fighters of Hezbollah with the same offerings that exist in the Lebanese Army. This episode signaled how tilted the State has become in its sectarian favoritism. The rest of the Lebanese sects were left to pay the price of Hezbollah's adventurism.

In 2025, Lebanon got a new President and Prime Minister and enjoyed an unprecedented level of regional and international support. Bashar al-Assad's regime in Damascus was toppled, and the new Syrian government expressed its willingness to collaborate with the Lebanese state on an equal basis without interventions. Hezbollah took a heavy

blow and lost its veto inside the government. The international community gave the Republic the chance of disarming Hezbollah and implementing fiscal and political reforms, in exchange for immense investments and support.

At the time of writing, the opportunity was already lost, and none of the reforms or disarmament had happened. Despite such a rare chance in history, Lebanon's Republic is still sinking deeper into failure. As we demonstrated from our history lessons, the dysfunction of the state is structural and permanent, and not something that can be fixed by a new government or foreign support.

From late 2019 to 2026, Lebanon moved from a banking freeze to institutional failure: blacked-out grids, gutted water utilities, stalled justice, and a persistent dual authority over war and peace. Such a system cannot protect life, property, or savings.

For Maronites and Christians whose continuity depended in all their history on predictable security, effective administration, fair courts, workable services, and viable livelihoods, the evidence is definitive: the centralized Lebanese state, in its current form, cannot safeguard our lives or guarantee our future.

Bringing the threads together, the Lebanese central state has failed us, not just in the sense that it actively dislikes us and constantly tries to diminish our influence and existence, but also in the practical sense that it cannot protect, provide, or plan at the level a citizen may rightfully expect.

In the vacuum left by the Republic, Lebanese Christians have been improvising while the Shiite sect built its own parallel state, and the Sunni sect deepened its connections with Syria and Turkey. The Christians have been left alone without a

strategy or vision. When it comes to the destiny of an entire nation, improvisation is not a strategy. From now on, the task of every Christian political organization and activist should be to name a strategy for salvation and work on what it requires.

"When central authority decays, resilient communities rely on thick institutions, shared norms, and practical self-organization to preserve the substance of freedom"[255]. The problem today is that the traditional institutions of Lebanese Christians have long been eroded and rendered impotent. From family to parish to political party, the Maronite and Christian ecosystem of life-preserving institutions is severely lacking.

Christians of Lebanon let their own institutions and traditions decay and put all their faith in the Republic and its institutions. The problem is that this Republic is not theirs anymore, and its institutions were deformed to serve against their interests. The state is disintegrating and cannot even provide them with the very basics. This leaves them completely exposed to any socio-political turbulence that sweeps the Near East.

This void is extremely dangerous to the future of Christians in Lebanon and the East. Collapse, in the end, is about the loss of confidence that tomorrow can be organized by law and sustained by public good. When that confidence disappears, communities either submit to whoever can impose order, or they must recover order from within.

A Mount Lebanon sanctuary state with hard, no-exceptions rules, is the only rational way forward for a nation that is today without a state. If the Christians do not do their work

and build their own order, their own state, others will impose theirs on them.

Unfortunately, instead of trying to build their own institutions, most Lebanese Christians today think that the Republic can be reformed, but can it?

VII. Why the Lebanese Republic Cannot Reform Itself

Most Christians in Lebanon are captured by the idea of "reform from within," which is why they hold on to the Republic and its flag and institutions.

Part of this attachment is, of course, emotional: the Lebanese Republic is in the end the fruit of Christian struggle over centuries. It has also been their home for a hundred years, where several generations sacrificed their lives to keep it free and viable. It's not easy for most to admit its failure and let it go.

Ask anyone in Lebanon today about the state of the country and they will tell you that it is a failed state. We don't need to write a book to prove it. The problem, however, is that most Christians cling to the state despite its failures, because they have a hope of reforming it. The inconvenient truth is this: it is structurally impossible to reform this Republic, regardless of which faction tops the polls.

Let us evaluate the republic rationally: a system that fuses sectarian locks and vetoes with extra-constitutional militias, captured justice and patronage financing, cannot deliver unified sovereignty, rule of law, or a unified foreign policy.

This co-governance sectarian veto-bound system will always generate the same paralysis at the top. The Lebanese Republic is destined to be dysfunctional forever. Clinging to the illusion of reform is just delaying the inevitable. Let's discuss why the system is dysfunctional by design.

1. The Mechanics of Stalemate

The mechanics of inaction are baked into the very essence of the Lebanese Republic. The sectarian division of political power keeps vetoes active over the most decisive policies, creating periodic openings that let extra-constitutional powers gain weight and power over the central government. Coupled with patronage financing and clientelism, a natural result of a sectarian society, it hollows out the rule of law, produces corruption, and renders foreign policy toothless. Grouped, these factors create mechanics for a permanent stalemate, in which the republic is captured forever in a state of crisis and paralysis.

A) Design that Jams at the Top

The post-Taif system distributes key offices by sect, reserves supermajority thresholds for core decisions, and expects rival elites to co-govern through bargains. In theory, this prevents domination. In practice, it creates perennial coalitions of convenience where the price of any decision is a bundle of concessions and side payments.

Bargaining is built into the system, and corruption is its oil. The arithmetic of cabinet formation and legislative voting already requires multiple kingmakers and several signatures

from different sects; policy is born compromised at the top or not born at all.

This means that even with a supermajority in the parliament or cabinet, policy will still have to be made through compromise and negotiations between communities that have contradicting aspirations and policies. The environment of multiple vetoes opens the door for extra-constitutional pressure such as the use of bribes, corruption, intimidation, and violence. This means that apart from limited reforms, if a government wants to keep the peace, it will only ever be able to act on policies of the lowest common denominator. In other words, it will only be able to act on things that don't matter while the things that do are either divided as sectarian spoils or never get done.

B) The Extra-constitutional Armed Veto

Any constitutional design presumes the state's monopoly of force. Any reform plan ignores the simple fact that Lebanon lacks it.

A durable, organized, heavily armed actor stands outside the government's chain of command. That fact — regardless of how one judges its origins — means that every cabinet and parliament legislates under a security and political ceiling. When a reform touches strategic interests, the non-state veto can nullify or slow it at will. Paper procedures cannot restrain the guns they do not command.

Someone will say here that the same weapons will intervene with the establishment of other political solutions like federalism or independence in the Mountain, and that's true. However, even as Hezbollah uses its army to rule central

governmental institutions, it cannot use it to occupy or rule areas outside its sect by force. Mountain autonomy severely limits the effectiveness of sectarian arms outside their primary areas of influence.

We should repeat that the armed exceptions have roots that might create new armed factions again in the future. Yesterday it was Palestinians, today it is Hezbollah, and tomorrow it might be someone else. Whenever a new dictator arises anywhere in the Arab World, some Lebanese sects or foreign refugees will become part of his army. This is the unpleasant reality that reform cannot solve.

C) Judicial Capture and "Phone Justice": Hollow Laws

Reform assumes that Courts will issue judgments that the state will then execute. As we have shown, the rule of law is completely absent. Judges can be transferred, starved of resources, or politically disciplined at will. Prosecutorial hierarchies answer informally to party bosses: sensitive cases are shunted into tribunals or stalled by procedural skirmishes. The rule of law is in practice the rule of the deal. In general, investigators and magistrates lack insulation, budgets, and a single coercive chain behind their orders.

Again, the capture of the judicial body is a symptom of the Lebanese system and not a cause of the dysfunction. Changing faces and names in the judicial sector will eventually end up with the same mechanics.

The nature of the sectarian system prevents the trial of one corrupt head or network without the approval of the centers of power in their sect. Even in the unlikely event that such approval happens, it is customary that the government must

treat the other sects equally, by taking down an equivalent corrupt network in the other sects at the same time. This in turn, might lead to new vetoes. In practice, this means that fighting corruption never really goes anywhere apart from some symbolic arrests.

Anti-corruption cannot even start, much less finish in a diverse multi-national republic with delicate sectarian balances.

D) Patronage Finance: A Structurally Bankrupted State

The central state of Lebanon sustained its expenses for decades through rents: tariff discretion, public-sector payrolls, infrastructure monopolies, opaque procurement, and, later, financial engineering at the central bank.

Any "reform" that would rationalize electricity, customs, telecoms, ports, or procurement will also starve client networks and therefore will be met with resistance before it even starts. We are talking here about centers of power that can move billions in money and can bribe any government official along the command chain.

Coalitions whose survival depends on those networks cannot disarm them. When fiscal space collapses like in 2019, the system prefers financial repression (controls, multiple rates, arrears) to structural transparency because repression preserves discretion and protects this corrupt architecture.

E) Foreign-policy Fragmentation: Four currents, No helm

The four major communities of Lebanon — Christians, Sunnis, Shiite, Druze — are embedded in different regional

circuits and patronage constellations. Parliament may name a cabinet, but the state cannot speak with one voice abroad or enforce a single security doctrine at home. Diplomacy thus oscillates between ambiguity and paralytic hedging, inviting external tutelage and internal vetoes.

Conclusion of the republic political mechanisms: even the most talented reformers cannot out-govern this hardware. Where armed pluralism meets coalition math, permanent vetoes, and captured justice, paralysis is not a failure but a success of design. Some political commentators even praise that the system is dysfunctional by design because it does not let one sect to achieve complete domination over the others, but in reality, the Lebanese republic is a machine that reliably converts effort into stasis.

2. "But What if X Wins a Majority?": The Majority Fallacy

A common reply to structural critique is hopeful arithmetic: "If our side, which is known to be less corrupt and more patriotic than others, won a majority of seats, couldn't it force reform?"

The answer is no, for the following reasons:

Plurality cannot bring sovereignty.

Seat counts do not erase confessional quotas, veto points, or supermajority rules for key appointments and laws. Cabinet formation still requires cross-sectarian bargains. Presidents

and speakers will still emerge from interlocking sectarian processes, and the capacity to block routinely exceeds the capacity to build.

No chain of coercion, no reform.

Even if a reformist bloc holds 90% of seats, it does not command a unified and effective security apparatus. In a system where a non-state arsenal operates outside state command, a parliamentary majority cannot enforce controversial policies at the exact point where enforcement matters.

Courts cannot be conjured by votes.

Without an ethno-cultural federalist core that enables each community to manage its own affairs, along with insulated appointments, budgetary independence, tenure protections, and a culture of compliance backed by a single coercive chain, a majority in parliament cannot invent rule-credible prosecution and adjudication. It can pass as many laws as it wants, but it cannot guarantee their execution.

Foreign policy remains governed by coalition output.

Embassies, alignments, and treaties reflect the lowest common denominator of factions with external patrons. A slim majority cannot bind actors whose leverage stems from foreign guns and alliances, rather than from cabinets.

Verdict: a new majority of a more patriotic party is just a different driver of the same broken vehicle. Even a decisive electoral win cannot solve the problems this architecture generates.

3. The Foreign Policy Impossibility

We mentioned this several times so far, but it deserves a bit of expansion. A sovereign state must decide with unity when to deter, align, trade, or declare neutrality. Lebanon cannot do that for structural reasons:

- Divergent alignments. Communities maintain external ties to competing regional poles and have opposing foreign and domestic agendas.
- Internal vetoes. Because one actor maintains independent force, any foreign-policy line that touches its interests triggers pre-emptive paralysis.
- Incoherent signaling. Partners abroad receive contradictory messages from Beirut, so they default to bilateral deals with sub-state actors or leave the state to stagnate in its paralysis, as has been the case for the past decade.
- Sanctions and risk. Ambiguity raises risk. Legitimate banks and firms price that risk into credit and compliance penalties. Growth loses oxygen, and the economy stumbles forever.

No reform recipe can harmonize opposite currents without a unified cultural nation, a single coercive chain and an uncontested diplomatic helm. The machine forbids it.

4. Other Arguments for Keeping the Lebanese Republic

"We just need to abolish sectarianism."

While equality sounds appealing, history shows it often masks majoritarian dominance. The demand to abolish political sectarianism in a deeply sectarian society, is a veiled agenda used by majoritarian parties to strip Christians of all their political and administrative positions in the Republic. This slogan does not merit a discussion. The Christians who hold such an opinion need to take a close look at other Arab countries and see which government and administrative positions are held by Christians there. They will see a snapshot of their future without the guarantees of sectarian distribution.

"We just need a better electoral law."

Electoral engineering does not dissolve confessional quotas or the extra-constitutional veto. New districting can change who bargains; it cannot eliminate the bargaining at the top or the guns behind it.

"A technocratic cabinet could fix this."

Technocrats can diagnose and publish plans. Without coercive unity and judicial teeth, they administer gridlock and impotence. When reform collides with rent-pools, technocracy becomes a hollow photo op.

"International pressure will force reform."

External actors pursue conflicting policies. Some want stabilization at any cost, others use sanctions to compel behavior, and some just quit investing in the country. Foreign pressure fragments the political reality and doesn't bring real and lasting political change.

"Let's try serious decentralization inside the republic."

Decentralization is revocable under a captured center and weakest where it is most needed: finance and security. Without sovereignty's rails, decentralization is permission-based autonomy, but we will discuss that in more detail in Volume II.

"Anti-corruption first."

Anti-corruption is a prosecutorial pipeline that needs solid and independent investigators, prosecutors, courts, and law enforcement agencies. If any segment is captured or threatened, big cases die. Publishing reports without coercive backing invites impunity theater.

"Stabilize the economy, and politics will follow."

This was already tried and failed during the Hariri era. Politics still produced the crisis despite relative economic stability. The economy always follows political will. Stabilization executed under such a logic reinforces the networks that strangle true reform.

“We just need the people to wake up and revolt against all their leaders.”

October 2019 was real, even if only for a moment. It was a cross-sect, cross-class mobilization against corruption, misrule, and indignity. It achieved clarity and courage and provided a shared civic language. Despite being a historically unprecedented movement, it did not change the architecture nor had a lasting impact.

The system answered with repression and policing calibrated to avoid a single decisive break in the system while exhausting the streets. The time-tested arts of cooptation and distraction did the rest.

When a catastrophe - the port explosion – should have flipped the table, the investigation instead exposed how law can be stalled when it reaches the necks of those at the top. The lesson is not that protest is pointless; it is that without a single, lawful coercive chain and insulated justice, protests and revolutions, even when aimed at the entire political class, cannot govern or reform.

Volume I Conclusion

Which Way then, Maronite Man?

Throughout their long history, the Christians of Lebanon, and especially the Maronites, were either self-governing themselves or fighting for self-determination. After the catastrophe of Kafno, they sought the security of a grander Lebanon, compromising their independence in favor of a partnership that they hoped would ensure their future.

Unfortunately and predictably, the Lebanese Republic's century-long experiment has devolved into a structurally failed state, one that no longer safeguards the survival, freedoms, or prosperity of its Christian and Druze founders.

As detailed in the last chapter, failure manifests across interlocking metrics. It starts with the erosion of the monopoly of force, where militias and parallel states supplant sovereignty. It moves to fiscal and administrative impotence, evidenced by chronic debt, corruption scandals, and a 2019 default that vaporized savings. All of this comes on top of infrastructural decay, blackouts, and contaminated water, forcing citizens into survival mode. Judicial dysfunction allows impunity to reign in cases that matter, like the Beirut port explosion and high-profile corruption and murder.

These elements compound into a "total collapse," as seen in the 2019 economic meltdown, 2020 blast, and the wars of 2023, 2024 and 2026. These events dragged Lebanon into

further isolation and poverty, all without accountability or reform.

This irredeemable system, entrenched by veto mechanics, sectarian bargains, and external meddling, renders the Republic not just useless to Maronites and Christians but actively dangerous. Clinging to illusions of partnership or top-down fixes ignores the longue durée of concessions that transformed self-governance and autonomy into second-class status. Clinging to the false hope of reform isn't only delusional, but it wastes important time we could use to help our cause.

Reformers in Lebanon never lacked plans; they lacked a machine that could carry them and a system that could implement them. The problem is that the machine is not broken; it's designed this way and working as intended.

The current republic's hardware is designed to convert every program and reform attempt into negotiated paralysis.

If reform from within cannot produce a monopoly of force, rule-credible courts, or a unified foreign policy, then freedom and dignity become discretionary favors, and not rights. When that happens, our existence in the East is put under the mercy of others and their agendas – even if those others are our fellow citizens.

Therefore, we should turn, calmly and openly, to an entirely different architecture.

The good news is that Maronites and the rest of the Christians of this Mountain have the history, the culture, the geography, and the will to carve their own destiny and create a solution that works. What they lack are institutions that transform their will into action and discipline.

This volume's evidence culminates with a simple proposition: survival of a small nation needs the guarantees of a functional and effective state. The Lebanese Republic cannot provide us with such guarantees. Its center will always be ruled by militias and be capture-prone and impunity-ridden.

What should we do then? Should we cling to a false hope while our communities disappear? Should we do nothing while we become second and third-degree citizens in this failed republic?

It is time to envision different solutions. It is our right to live in a state that guarantees our livelihood and rights. It is our right to live in a state that has no security exceptions, where our lives, rights, and property matter. It is our right to live in a state with auditable finances, rights-bound policing, utilities that work, and justice that cannot be vetoed by anyone, and especially not by other sects or armed militias.

It is time to be courageous and envision a state that is ours. One that is small enough to be honest, disciplined enough to be lawful, and strong enough to be left alone.

We envision a country that can guarantee what the old machine cannot: that a child's schooling, a monastery's chant, a farmer's title, and a journalist's sentence do not depend on a bargain, a patron, or a mood. Only then can politics become ordinary again, and freedom predictable. Only then will Christian families choose presence over departure.

If the center cannot carry its load, the mountains must carry their own. And they can. The Maronites and Christians of Mount Lebanon have been scarred, marginalized, and

impoverished by this republic, but they are not erased. The only path forward is the one that leads us back to the mountain.

In the next volume, we turn from diagnosis to blueprint, exploring practical models for Christian self-determination, from federal arrangements to international legitimacy, charting a course toward renewal in an otherwise crumbling edifice.

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