Chapter VII

CONCLUSIONS
The Republic of Lebanon though a part of the Arab World is unique in many important respects. Unlike the others, Lebanon has neither a Muslim preponderance nor a Muslim character. Catholic Christians, particularly Maronites, constitute a sizeable section of its population and have played a historically dominant role in the domestic politics of the country.

The Maronites have a long history of contacts with the French which started with the crusades in the twelfth century. In the mid-seventeenth century King Louis XIV in a response to an appeal by the Maronite Patriarch formally "adopted" the Maronite community in Lebanon. This royal protection was renewed by succeeding kings so that by the end of the eighteenth century it had become a well-established tradition. As a result of the special status of France in the Levant, French Catholic missionaries flocked in large numbers to Lebanon. The Maronites, in turn, developed strong political, linguistic and cultural ties with France. French became the cultural and literary language of the middle and upper classes and soon replaced Arabic in the houses of many Lebanese Christians. Lebanon ruled by the Maronites under the protective canopy of a Christian power, in time, became the dream of a majority of Christian Lebanese.

After the First World War, France was given mandatory powers over Syria and Lebanon. In September 1920, France
created the state of Greater Lebanon by annexing territories from neighbouring Syria. During the French rule a concerted effort was made by the Maronite Christians to differentiate Lebanon from its Arab milieu and justify its existence as an entity separate from the rest of the Arab World. Maronite intellectuals developed historical, cultural and even geographical arguments aimed at demonstrating the 'special nature' of Lebanon that had very little in common with the Arabs.

When France lost its position in Lebanon during the Second World War, the Maronite community had to abandon its plans for a Christian state in Lebanon. A section of the Maronites correctly assessed that it was impossible to realize their dream of a Christian state without the backing of French power. A moderate group advocating pragmatism came to the forefront of the community's leadership. Led by Bishara al-Khoury, it arrived at a political understanding known as the 'National Pact' with the Muslims for sharing political power once independence was achieved. The more militant elements like the clergy and the Phalanges, however, still entertained the parochial notion of Lebanon as a Christian homeland and continued to seek allies outside the Arab World. But despite persistent efforts on their part, a Christian state failed to materialize as the Western powers showed little interest.
The existence of a Christian community in Lebanon claiming a separate identity for itself and striving to establish a Christian state in the Levant was of tremendous importance for the state of Israel which came into existence in 1948. The Jewish state had been created in the midst of intense opposition first from the indigenous population, the Palestinian Arabs, and later on by the Arab states who came out in support of the Palestinians.

In view of the Arab hostility it became imperative for Israel, for considerations of national security, to cultivate links with all those forces in the Arab World which did not share the Arab hostility towards Israel or in some cases even had a fundamental conflict with Pan-Arabism. At one level, these were the non-Arab nations on the periphery of the Arab World, countries such as Turkey and Iran, and at another, the non-Muslim, non-Arab or non-Sunni minorities in the region. The cultivation of such forces would lead to the creation of a ring of dependable allies and proxies in an otherwise hostile environment and Israel would no longer remain the isolated focus of Arab hostility.

Apart from security considerations, the notion of an alliance with minority groups in the Arab World also had a quasi-ideological dimension. It was in Israel's interest to emphasize the heterogeneity of the region, the fact that it was a mosaic of culture, religion and nationalities and not a homogeneous Arab-Islamic region. In such a pluralistic
environment, the Jewish state had a legitimate place whereas in the homogeneous Arab-Islamic conception it looked like an alien intruder.

As early as the 1930s and 1940s, members of the political department of the Jewish Agency, an embryonic foreign office, developed working relationships with minority groups in several Arab countries particularly in Lebanon. The Zionist leaders perceived the Catholic Christians of Lebanon to be sharing many of the predicaments faced by the Jewish community in Palestine. Both communities felt insecure by the rising tide of Muslim and Arab aggressiveness. Both felt the common need for political protection of the Western powers upon which they had traditionally depended for their precarious existence in a hostile environment and both felt that they were involved in a life and death struggle between desert and civilization.

The convergence of interests between the Lebanese Christians and the Jewish state therefore, provided maximum scope for cooperation between the two, and if the Maronites succeeded in converting Lebanon into a Christian state the potential benefits to Israel would be many. It would prevent Lebanon from becoming a part of an Arab war coalition against Israel; it could not serve as a launching pad or base for the forces of an Arab country hostile to Israel; it would compel Syria to divert a part of its military resources from the Israeli front to the Lebanese front; and
finally, it would provide Israel with an opportunity to occupy Southern Lebanon which had strategic as well as economic importance. Strategically, in the event of a war between Israel and Syria, an Israeli column could move through Southern Lebanon into the Biqa and then proceed in an outflanking sweep towards Damascus. From the economic point of view the occupation of Southern Lebanon would enable Israel to utilize the waters of the Litani river which flows through this region.

Extensive relations in the political and economic fields developed between the Jewish community in Palestine and Lebanon during the 1930s. Emile Edde, a passionate Francophile, who was the President of Lebanon from 1936 till the outbreak of the Second World War was very sympathetic to the Jewish cause in Palestine. He shared many of the Zionist misgivings regarding the Arabs and repeatedly come to the assistance of Zionist leaders in times of crisis.

Following the outbreak of the Second World War, Lebanon came under Vichy control and Edde was deposed. With the loss of French position in Lebanon, the Maronites were forced to abandon their plans for a Christian state and agree to a pluralistic Lebanon. These developments came as a severe setback for Jewish-Maronite relationships. The government of independent Lebanon severed all ties with
Jewish Palestine and began to identify itself with the Arab cause.

The turn of events compelled Zionist leaders to seek out those elements in the Maronite community like the clergy and the Phalangists, who while paying lip-service to the pluralist formula, still aspired to establish a Christian state. Secret contacts were maintained with these elements during the decades following the establishment of the Jewish state.

In the early fifties, the Israeli government considered investing money in trying to help the Phalange win several seats in Parliament. Several Israeli emissaries met with a Phalangist politician, Elias Rababi who was trying to solicit financial and political support. Some of the Israelis dealing with the issue argued that it would be useful to encourage pro-Israeli elements in order to have a friendly Christian Lebanon, so the result was that a specific sum of money was spent.

Plans for taking Lebanon out of the Pan-Arab circle and its affiliation with the Israel were seriously discussed by Ben Gurion, Dayan and others during the mid-fifties. Ben Gurion's plan called for the establishment of a smaller Maronite state that would be allied to Israel. Ben Gurion argued that the establishment of a Christian state in Lebanon was a natural matter, had historic roots and would be
supported by the Christian world. He realized that the bulk of the Maronite community had come to accept the *status quo* but argued that in times of crisis and commotion things change and even the meek feels like a hero. Ben Gurion's plans were supported by Dayan who believed that all that was needed was to find an officer of the Lebanese Army and persuade him to declare himself the saviour of the Maronite community. The IDF could then enter Lebanon, occupy the relevant territory and form a Christian government in alliance with Israel. Ben Gurion's and Dayan's ideas can be interpreted as early manifestations of an Israeli grand design on Lebanon, finally attempted some twenty-five years later. They were not acted upon then, because Moshe Sharett who was the Prime Minister at that point of time, ruled out any bold Israeli initiative in Lebanon.

During the fifties and sixties, Israel also tried to obtain a share of the waters of the Litani. The Lebanese government, however, could ill-afford to provoke nationalist sentiments both within and outside the country by striking a deal with the Jewish state. Any willingness to supply water to Israel would have been construed as an act of treachery. It, therefore, turned down all Israeli proposals calling for a joint exploitation of the Litani.

The advent in the late sixties, of Palestinian commando activity in Southern Lebanon directed against
Israel added a completely new dimension to Israel-Lebanon relationship. The rise and growth of the PRM in Southern Lebanon brought in its wake Israeli raids, a phenomena from which Lebanon had been totally free till the mid-1960s.

On the face of it, the Israeli raids were in response to commando operations launched by the PRM from Lebanon against Israel and formed a part of its overall policy of reprisals against Arab states. The reprisal policy had been initiated in the early fifties in the face of large-scale infiltration by Palestinian refugees from the West Bank and Gaza. Apprehensions over Israeli reprisals was a major factor discouraging countries like Syria, Egypt and Jordan from permitting Palestinian guerillas to operate on their territory. A deeper analysis of the Israeli raids against Lebanon, however, suggests that in applying this policy to Lebanon, Israel had certain fundamentally different expectations. To begin with, commando operations from Lebanon never really posed a serious threat to the security of Israel's northern settlements. This is borne out by the fact that Israel did not even bother to take the elementary security precaution of fencing its border with Lebanon till May 1974. Between 1968 when the commandos began to make their presence felt in Southern Lebanon and the summer of 1974, the border between Israel and Lebanon contained no physical obstacle. Yet, between June 1968 and
June 1974, the UN reported 1.4 Israeli violations per day of Lebanese territory.

The intensity of Israeli raids suggests two things. First, the Israeli intent was to liquidate all manifestation of Palestinian nationalism, particularly its militant variant so forcefully represented by the Palestinian guerillas. Second, the Israeli strategy was intended to facilitate the attainment of certain long term aims with regard to Lebanon. Israel was aware of the deep sectarian cleavages in Lebanon and the conflicting perceptions of Christians and Muslims towards the presence of Palestinian guerillas in Lebanon. By resorting to a relentless series of raids, Israel's aim in the long run was to bring about a polarization between the Lebanese Christians and Muslims over the issue of presence of Palestinian guerillas in the country. Such a polarization, Israel calculated, would undermine the uneasy national consensus, reinforce trends towards Maronite separation as well as generate intense political strife. Domestic political strife could then lead to Lebanon's partition, a theme to which the Israeli leaders were not averse, while at the same time giving Israel the option of asserting de facto control over Southern Lebanon. That this was indeed one of the Israeli objectives, is borne out by an analysis of the nature and pattern of the Israeli raids from the late sixties till the onset of the Lebanese Civil War.
From the late sixties till the mid-seventies a situation of tense insecurity prevailed throughout Lebanon as a consequence of continuous Israeli raids. The government's inability or failure to confront the enemy led to an erosion of its legitimacy in the eyes of the Muslims. Each new raid brought the NM and PRM closer to each other. To the Maronite Christians, the growing unity between the Palestinians and their Lebanese allies was a potentially dangerous development. In their view, if the Palestinians were not subjugated quickly they would provide the muscle which the growing Muslim protest movement against Christian hegemony lacked. The Maronite parties began to solidify their ranks and strengthen their militias in preparation for what increasingly seemed like an inevitable showdown. In turn, the NM-PRM also stepped up its preparation.

Following the October 1973 Arab-Israeli war, there was a rapid escalation in the level of Israeli raids. This led to a virtual depopulation of the South. The people worst affected - the poor Shiite peasants - fled northwards particularly to Beirut. Uprooted from their land and traditional environment these Shiite peasants became an erupting volcano of frustration. Lebanon was turned into a powder keg with a fuse attached. The ambush of Palestinians by gunmen of the Kataib in April 1975 was the spark which finally ignited the fuse plunging the nation into Civil War.
The breakdown of national consensus and the collapse of the Lebanese state could not but have caused immense satisfaction to the Israelis. During the first few months of the Civil War with the Lebanese Front, representing the Christian camp, clearly on the offensive, Israel felt quite satisfied with the military developments in Lebanon. This satisfaction, however, soon gave way to alarm with emerging signs of Syrian intervention in the Lebanese conflict.

The Syrian intervention was a result of certain developments that had taken place after the October 1973 war. Syria sought to develop an independent power base after the removal of Egypt as a confrontation state when the latter concluded a separate deal with Israel in 1975. It was to rest on Syria's influence in its immediate Arab environment comprising Lebanon, Jordan and PLO. Such a grouping would permit negotiations with Israel from a position of strength. It was in this context of implementing the eastern front strategy that Syria formulated its policy toward the Civil War. During the first few months of the conflict it supported the NM-PRM forces. Syria, however, changed sides when Junblatt insisted on completely crushing the Lebanese Front and gaining an outright victory. If the Palestinians and their Lebanese ally would have won, they would have installed a leftist government in Lebanon over which Syria would have little
control. They could have arranged a confrontation with Israel at any time which suited them, rather than a moment convenient to Syria. This was a situation Syria could not allow to occur.

Israel gave its tacit consent to a limited Syrian military intervention once it became apparent that the latter was going to intervene against the NM-PRM and in favour of the Lebanese Front. The acceptance of Syrian intervention had a number of advantages for Israel. First and foremost, Israel was spared from undertaking a costly and large scale military operation itself in order to save the Christians from defeat. Second, a massive Israeli military action in Lebanon at that point of time would have in all probability jeopardized the interim settlement with Egypt and reoriented the latter towards a renewal of military activity. Third, Israel calculated that if a part of the Syrian army was tied down in Lebanon, its ability to confront Israel in a war would be reduced. The Israelis were quick to perceive that it rather entailed a dispersion of Syrian military energies in a potential 'Vietnamese' situation. Fourth, Israel expected that a Syrian intervention in Lebanon would impose severe financial burdens on the country's already weak economy compelling the Assad regime to turn to the conservative Monarchies in the Gulf for aid. This in turn would help reduce the Baath regime's militancy. Fifth, Israel anticipated that a long
drawn-out presence in Lebanon would weaken the morale of the Syrian army and foster indiscipline and corruption within ranks. Finally, the Syrian action was bound to lead to deep divisions in the Arab World for a long time to come. Israel, however, laid down certain geographical as well as functional limits known as 'red lines' beyond which Syrian activity in Lebanon would not be allowed to escalate.

While agreeing to a limited Syrian military intervention as a temporary and expedient measure Israel was at the same time building up an extensive network of contacts with Maronite leaders, supplying the Maronite militias with huge quantities of weapons and laying the groundwork for the de facto annexation of parts of Southern Lebanon. The 'Good Fence' policy of humanitarian assistance was specifically intended to consolidate Israel's influence among the population of the South especially among Christians. It was a subtle way of cultivating proxies to promote Israeli objectives in the South and for the expansion of Israeli influence as far north in Lebanon as possible.

The 'Good Fence' policy led to the establishment of autonomous Christian enclaves in the South adjoining the Israeli border. The residents of these enclaves commuted daily to work in northern Israel; goods manufactured in Israel were sold in these enclaves; the Israeli currency became a medium of exchange and even a mobile postal unit accepted mail for despatch via the Israeli postal system. In short, these enclaves became for intents and purpose an extension of the Jewish state.
Hand in hand with the programme of humanitarian assistance, Israel helped the residents of these enclaves to set up a Christian militia, the forerunner of the SLA. A renegade Major of the Lebanese Army, Saad Haddad was appointed by Israel as the Officer-in-Charge of this Christian militia. Haddad's militia acted as a potentially destabilizing factor not only in the South but in the whole of Lebanon. Haddad's attempt to expand the enclaves resulted in continuous tension and warfare in the South and wrecked the Lebanese government's plan to restore its authority in this troubled region.

The installation of the Likud government headed by Menachem Begin in 1977 led to important changes in Israel's policy toward Lebanon. Likud's foreign policy was activist, supportive of frequent and extensive use of force as an instrument for dealing with Israel's political and military problems. The Likud's position was even more hawkish than the school of thought represented by such Labor leaders as Ben Gurion and Dayan. The government changeover in Israel, therefore, brought with it a very assertive posture vis-a-vis Lebanon than hitherto pursued by the government of Yitzhak Robin.

Begin openly acknowledged Israel's role in Lebanon both in the border area and in the north. He publicly sympathized with the Lebanese Christians. They fitted into
his world-view which emphasized the similar course of their history with that of the Jewish people and assigned Israel the role as a protector of the Christian interests. The Begin government's militancy led to an intensification of the war by proxy in the South with the IDF itself participating in some of the battles being waged by Haddad's militia. Another inevitable outcome of Begin government's militant posture was a hardening of Lebanese Front attitude vis-a-vis the Syrians. The Lebanese Front rejected all peace plans put forward by Syria and declared that the future of Lebanon could be determined only after the expulsion of Palestinians from the country and the withdrawal of Syrian peace-keeping troops. The unconditional support extended by the Likud government to the Christians of Lebanon made the Lebanese Front very optimistic about the future. The dreams of a Christian Lebanon were revived and Bashir Jumayil and his circle came to believe that Christian hegemony in the country was not a function of numbers but of historic tradition. That hegemony should be based on the military and political power of the Maronite community and its allies in Lebanon, and that power should in turn be based on an alliance with Israel.

Israel's active backing of Haddad and the Lebanese Front effectively foiled all attempts of the Lebanese President to reassert and restore the authority of the
state. Israel's invasion of Lebanon in March 1978 was specifically intended to throw everything into turmoil once again. Yet to recover from the rigours of the Civil War, the invasion sent fresh shock waves reverberating through the Lebanese body politic and doomed all prospects of an early national reconciliation.

Under international pressure Israel was forced to withdraw from the bulk of the territories occupied during the March invasion. The UNIFIL formed soon after the invasion, was deployed in the territories evacuated by the IDF. Israel, however, handed over a strip of Lebanese territory on the border not to UNIFIL but to Haddad. The following year Haddad proclaimed the independence of the border strip and named it the "Free State of Lebanon".

Throughout the late seventies, the Lebanese Front, with Israeli encouragement and support, made preparations for a final showdown with the Syrians. The expulsion of the Syrian army from Lebanon was the necessary precondition for the resurrection of "Fortress Lebanon" - a Christian-Maronite state in the Levant. In December 1980 the Lebanese Front felt bold enough to challenge the Syrians in Zahle, the heart of Syrian-dominated territory. The conflict that ensued in Zahle between the Lebanese Front and Syria soon led to a large-scale Israeli involvement. As the situation deteriorated and an all-out conflict seemed
imminent, the US stepped-in to defuse the crisis. The Israeli Prime Minister had to yield to American pressure and agree to a ceasefire negotiated by the American envoy Philip Habib in July 1981.

The ceasefire ironically enough strengthened the determination of the Begin government to initiate a decisive move against Lebanon, one which would completely redraw the political map of Lebanon. Such a move came ten months later when Israel launched its second invasion of Lebanon. The June 1982 invasion was not a limited one like the earlier invasion. It had deeper and more fundamental objectives. These were (a) crushing and destroying the PLO both as a political and military force in Lebanon (b) inflicting a humiliating defeat on the Syrian army so as to effect its total or partial withdrawal (c) installation of Bashir Jumayil as the President of Lebanon and the imposition of Lebanese Front control throughout the Lebanese body politic and (d) signing of a peace treaty with Lebanon.

The 1982 war departed radically in many significant respects from the patterns of previous thirty-four years of Arab-Israeli conflict. It was unusually long, lasting over three months, if mid-September is taken as its terminal point, and its military dimension was often overshadowed by its political aspects - the goals it sought, the controversies it generated and the impact it had on the Lebanese political system.
During the first few weeks of the invasion, everything proceeded as planned and it seemed as if Israel had finally succeeded in realizing the historic Zionist ambitions with regard to Lebanon. The Syrian army in Lebanon had been defeated, the PLO expelled from Beirut and finally Israel's foremost ally, Bashir Jumayil elected to the Presidency of Lebanon. Later developments, however, were to prove that the hopes engendered by these early successes were at best premature.

The first setback to Israel's elaborately conceived grand design came with the assassination of President-elect Bashir Jumayil on 14 September 1982. Jumayil was the linchpin of the grand design. His death came as a shock for the Israelis. They had no candidate to replace him who would combine the ability to govern Lebanon with a pro-Israeli disposition. The assassination furthermore triggered the infamous massacre of Palestinians in Sabra and Shatila. As a result of this massacre, the military campaign which had begun with the support of a broad segment of Israeli opinion, turned into Israel's most controversial and divisive war. Its initiators were subjected to the scrutiny of a commission of inquiry whose findings had a profound impact on their political futures.
Amin Jumayil, who succeeded his brother to the Lebanese Presidency had neither dynamism nor the charisma of the latter. Though he went along with the Israeli connection and signed the Israel Lebanon Agreement of May 1983 he came under intense pressure from the Muslim community to sever relations with the Jewish state. Meanwhile the IDF itself gradually got sucked into the Lebanese imbroglio as the inter-communal situation in the Shouf worsened in early 1983. The IDF whose role was reduced to unpopular policing functions in the shouf often found itself caught in the crossfire. The growing Israeli casualties led to an Israeli withdrawal from the Shouf and Beirut area in September 1983. Following the Israeli withdrawal, the Druze drove out the Phalangist militiamen who had entered the Shouf under the protective canopy of the invading Israeli army, from the mountains. With every successive round of fighting, the Lebanese Front was being confined increasingly in the Christian enclave of pre-June 1982. The high hopes of the future that were so dramatically boosted by Israel's invasion once again became a remote dream.

The withdrawal of American Marines from Beirut in February 1984 left Amin Jumayil in a helpless position. Denied of all external support, Jumayil finally gave into Muslim demands for the abrogation of the May 1983 Israel-Lebanon Agreement.
The IDF which had withdrawn to a line on the Awwali river in September 1983 soon began to face a new challenge from the Shiites of the South. The Shiites had initially received the invading Israeli Army with a sense of relief. They had tired of paying the cost in blood, sorrow and wealth for the armed guerilla presence in their midst. But as the occupation wore on, the liberators became conquerors. Having thrown off the shackles of the PLO presence, the Shii community was unwilling to tolerate domination by any foreign power - Arab or Israel.

Shii-Israeli relations began to deteriorate and a powerful resistance movement backed by the Shiite clergy soon developed in the South. By the end of 1984 it became clear that there would be little respite except by getting out of the swamp that South Lebanon had become. When the new Israeli 'national unity government' was formed in August 1984, it was evident that its main function would be to extricate Israel from the Lebanese quagmire. This it did in early 1985 when Prime Minister Shimon Peres succeeded in getting the cabinet to approve a staged withdrawal from Lebanon. By the third anniversary of the Israeli invasion, the bulk of the IDF had withdrawn from Lebanese territory save for a thin 'security belt'.

In the final analysis, the most important reason for the Israeli failure was the political nature of Lebanon.
Ten years of unceasing turmoil within a political structure ill-matched to time and place added up to a situation not at all amenable to a 'quick-fix'. Nor was it feasible to impose the will of one group, the Maronites, upon disparate others, for in Lebanon no single sect had the capability to mould the country in its own image. Israel's military might could not produce the desired changes in a hostile environment highly charged with conflicting forces and loyalties and ever changing alignments. Nor could its ally the Lebanese Front establish its control over areas occupied by the IDF. Contrary to Israeli expectations, the Maronite power was limited as was evident in the fighting in the Shouf mountains in 1983. More important, Israel discovered to its dismay that the Christians of Lebanon were no longer assured of ascendance because of demographic changes unfavourable to them. The 1982 Lebanon War carried to extravagant lengths an interventionist perspective in Israeli politics which from the days of Ben-Gurion's premiership aimed at hegemony over Lebanon by military means. But the war and its consequences demonstrated the inherent limits to the ability of Israel to mould the Lebanese body politic according to its desire and liking.