Chapter II

ISRAEL'S SECURITY INTERESTS IN LEBANON
The existence of a Christian community in Lebanon claiming a separate identity for itself and striving to establish a Christian state was of tremendous importance to 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 in support of the Palestinians.\(^1\) Arab opposition to a Jewish state in Palestine ultimately culminated in the first Arab-Israeli war of 1948. The outcome of the war further embittered the Arabs and Israel was faced with a coalition of hostile Arab states which refused to recognize the Jewish state.

It became imperative for Israel, both before and after its creation, for considerations of national security, to cultivate links with all those forces in the Arab World which did not share 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

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the Arab World like the Christians in Lebanon, Kurds in Iraq, Druze in Syria and the Copts in Egypt. 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. Secondly it would lead to the partial diversion of a part of Arab military resources to theatres of operation other than the Arab-Israeli front thus partially alleviating the military pressure on Israel. 2

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, nationalities and races and not a homogeneous Arab-Islamic area. In such an area the Jewish state had a legitimate place whereas in the homogeneous Arab-Islamic conception it looked like an alien intruder. 3 Thus from the very inception of the Zionist enterprise in Palestine, Zionist leaders have made it clear that they would not accept the uniformity of the Arab-Islamic character dominating the whole Arab world. They found it obligatory to endorse, and even awaken, every

3. Ibid., pp.35-36.
racist, factional, sectarian, regional or cultural isolationist movement that may have roots in the Arab World.  

The centre-piece of this entire strategy of an alliance of minorities were the Christians of Lebanon, particularly the Maronites. Yitzhak Greenbaum, representative of the General Zionists felt that it was a "grave mistake", not only in terms of class outlook, but also in terms of national outlook, if we think that the Arabs are one unit. Perhaps we are incapable of putting into practice the old Zionist idea of making an agreement with the Arabs of Eretz-Yisrael. Once it was thought that we could come to an agreement with the Arabs of the neighbouring countries. Now it seems that this too is extremely difficult and perhaps impossible, but we could make contacts with the minorities in the Arab world. Is it not possible to strengthen our contacts with the Lebanese, who are to a certain extent in a similar situation to us in Eretz Yisrael? Greenbaum was sure that cooperation with the Lebanese Christians would promise success:

Just as we are interested in England, Lebanon is interested in France. Just as France is interested in Lebanon, because it is the gateway to Syria, so England is interested in Western Eretz-Yisrael being in Jewish hands - so the Jews can at least flourish undisturbed. I see no reason why we shouldn't strengthen relations with the Lebanese. Why don't we go to the Lebanese and tell them - 'We can make a pact with you, we'll help you and you will help us'. I think we should start thinking in this direction.


5. Greenbaum to Chain Weizmann, 6 February 1932, S 25/3217, Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem.
The Zionist leaders obviously saw in the Catholic Christians of Lebanon as sharing many of the predicaments faced by the Jewish community in Palestine. Both communities felt insecure by the rising tide of Muslim and Arab aggression. 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 the desert and civilization, between intolerance and freedom and between ignorance and enlightenment.

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 part of an Arab war coalition against Israel; nor could Lebanon serve as a launching pad or base for the forces of another Arab country involved in a war with 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. The flow of the Litani averages approximately 700 MCM per year and the river as such is a source of high quality water with very low salinity. Complete control of the waters of the Litani, according to some estimates, would augment Israel's scarce water resources by as much as thirty to forty per cent. Finally, a Maronite state in Lebanon would be a model and focal point for all Christians in the Arab World. It would strengthen the justification for a Jewish state in the area even in the eyes of the Arabs.

(i) Israeli-Maronite Relationship:

*Genesis and Evolution*

The roots of the Israeli interest in Lebanon and connections with the Maronite Christian community there can be traced to the second decade of the present century. At a time when it became evident that the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire was going to provide the Zionist movement


with an opportunity to obtain an internationally recognized entity in Palestine, several Zionist leaders like Ben Gurion, Haim Kalwariski, Aharon Aronson and Tolkowsk came forward with proposals regarding the boundaries of the desired Jewish colony. All these proposals more or less sought to incorporate the whole of present-day Southern Lebanon in the desired Jewish colony.\(^8\) During the course of the First World War the British had succeeded in occupying Palestine through a combination of military superiority and Zionist political support and in so doing had thwarted direct French access to the Sinai Peninsula and Suez Canal. In 1918 Palestine still did not exist as a political entity and its borders were, therefore, ill-defined. That Palestine’s northern limit should be on the Litani river or further north near Sidon or any of a half a dozen more places as outlined in various Zionist plans was of little importance to the British once they had succeeded in placing strategic depth between the Suez Canal and the French forces in the Levant. It was, of course, a matter of tremendous import to the Zionist leaders who were interested in procuring for Palestine a defensible boundary and one which would include within Palestine the abundant water resources of Upper Galilee. On 27 February 1919 the World Zionist Organization (WZO) placed before the Supreme Council at the Paris Peace Conference a boundary proposal dated 3 February

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1919. In deference to France's status as an ally of Great Britain, the WZO refrained from using security arguments in support of its boundary proposal. The main justification for the boundary request was the inclusion within Palestine of the Litani river and the headwaters of Mount Hermon. The proposed line started from the Mediterranean coast just south of Sidon, running in a north-easterly direction across the Litani river so as to include the whole of the Jordan catchment area up to its northernmost source in Rashaya before turning south towards the Golan Heights\(^9\) (see Map 2).

France which at that time had both Syria and Lebanon under its occupation rejected the Zionist claim and insisted upon following the original Sykes-Picot line. Months of negotiation then followed between Britain and France. Finally, in June 1920 France proposed a compromise solution. It called for a line that would leave the coast at Ras an-Naqurah, a few miles north of the Sykes-Picot line and proceed eastwards. It was then to turn north, so as to include within Palestine a "finger" of territory containing the northernmost Jewish settlement (Metulla) and the Hula valley.\(^10\) The inclusion of this "finger" was a direct


Boundary Proposed Submitted by the WZO Before the Paris Peace Conference, February 1919

consequence of the Tel Chai massacre, which had taken place three months earlier. The Litani was left wholly under French control. With the northern settlements safely within Palestine the WZO then launched a vigorous campaign aimed at persuading the French to give up Litani but failed. Weizmann states, "I tried to convince General Gourand the French High Commissioner in Beirut of the importance to Palestine of the waters of the river Litani, but could arouse no interest". Final agreement between Britain and France reached in December 1920 accepted the French proposal of June in its entirety and the border between Palestine (later Israel) and Lebanon came to be established where it stands today. From the Zionist perspective the implications of Palestine's northern frontiers were quite serious. In the north the country was deprived of almost all important water resources which the Zionist leaders considered vital for the power and irrigation plans they had in mind. More important, "by failing to approximate any natural geographic boundaries, the borders left the country all but indefensible militarily". Notwithstanding the existence of substantial economic and security problems, the Zionist movement was

11. In February 1920 a band of Arab guerillas attacked the Jewish colonies of Metulla and Tel Chai along Palestine's northern border, in a twilight area between the British and French zones of occupation. Among those killed defending the settlements was Joseph Trumpeldor wartime leader of the Zion Mule Corps and a Zionist folk hero. Sachar, n.1, p.123.


not, in the early 1920s, in any position to reverse the Anglo-French decision. Zionist leaders, therefore, accepted the boundaries of Palestine as determined without much protest. At the same time, fully conscious of the fact that a violent Jewish-Arab conflict was in the making, Zionist leaders sought to shift their focus to one of establishing links with the Maronite Christians in Lebanon who in their opinion were engaged in a running battle against the onslaught of Arabism and Islam. As early as 1920, a cooperation pact was signed for the first time between Yehoshua Khankin a Zionist emissary and some Maronite activists. 14 However, during the 1920s Jewish-Maronite relationship remained confined by and large to the question of land for settlement of Jews in Lebanon. Even in this endeavour the Zionists were not much successful because of the wariness of the French. Weizmann himself reported that he was told by the French High Commissioner, "Of course...I would not want you to work in Southern Syria, because immediately after you had come to Tyre and Saida you would want the frontier rectified". 15

Despite French opposition, contacts between Zionist leaders and Maronites during this period over the question


15. Weizmann, n.12, p.452.
of land purchase undoubtedly helped to lay the foundation for future political cooperation between the two. In the early thirties, the Jewish Agency was approached by Nejib Sefir with an offer of political cooperation. Referring to his visit Hayim Arlosoroff, Political Secretary of the Jewish Agency stated:

A few days ago we were approached by a very intelligent and, I think, not uninfluential Lebanese Christian named Nejib Sefir, who tries for some time to bring about a rapprochement between us and the various Christian communities, particularly with the Maronites in Lebanon and Palestine. He is likewise prepared to organize certain activities among them directed against the Pan-Islamic Conference. Although I knew that Christian circles have been the hot-bed of violent anti-Jewish sentiment in Palestine we cannot afford to forgo a chance that in present circumstances the Christian minorities should look to us as their national ally. There is at the moment any number of reasons for assuming that the tendency towards such an alliance is growing... in view of the fact that at present we are entirely isolated and cut off from any non-Jewish forces in this and the neighbouring countries, I think we should not neglect such possibilities. 

In 1933 the Jewish Agency despatched Victor Jacobson (who had served as the Zionist movement's official emissary in Istanbul before World War I and thereafter in Paris and Geneva) to Beirut to establish contact with prominent Christians and discuss with them the idea of an alliance between them and Jewish Palestine. In his letter to

Jacobson, which is highly instructive about the pattern of thinking prevalent among Zionist leaders regarding minorities in the Arab world, Arlosoroff wrote:

As time goes on the Lebanese Christians must come to cherish the idea of an alliance with a preponderantly Jewish Palestine which would strengthen their power of resistance against Muslim aggression or domination. There are Lebanese people of a relatively high political intelligence and education who have already expressed some such thoughts. It is now the most opportune moment to develop these ideas in direct touch with the influential people there without, of course, gratuitously accentuating the antagonism between our aims and Muslim aspiration or further arousing their animosities...

The leading figures of the Maronite community whom Jacobson met expressed a keen interest in cooperating with Jewish Palestine in the economic, political and even military fields. "The Christian Lebanese entity" in the opinion of prominent Maronite politicians:

cannot and shall not be treated in the same way as other parts of Syria. Lebanon will develop into a sovereign independent state. In its development it may be constantly threatened by a Muslim Syria, possibly by a 'Greater Arab' or Pan-Arab alliance. Alone, it will be too weak to withstand the Muslim pressure. Therefore, it will depend, for a long period, upon the protection of the Mandatory powers, while at the same time seeking a strengthening of its position in a political union with Jewish Palestine which finds itself in a similar position.... Their parallel situation from a geographic, economic

17. Arlosoroff to Jacobson, 2 January 1933, Z4/20177, Central Zionist Archives.
(being the industrial area of the Near East) as well as political point of view, compels both countries to seek protection mainly in this close (perhaps even military) union.

The Jewish Agency also evinced a keen interest in the Christian separatist Young Phonecians movement started by Charles Corm and sought to establish close links with it. Eliahu Epstein (later Elath) a protege of Arlosoroff, who during his period of studies at the American University of Beirut from 1931 to 1934 had made a wide network of influential contacts frequently met with Corm and other prominent figures of the Phonecian movement. In one of these meetings in mid-1934 when Corm suggested the setting up of a Palestine-Lebanon club, he immediately received an enthusiastic response from the Jewish Agency. Epstein informed Corm:

I have had a talk with Shertok (later Sharett) regarding our plan. Mr. Shertok expressed his appreciation of the activity contemplated since it will not only inaugurate the revival of a common and glorious cultural past but help to further our mutual interests, present and future. The Palestine-Lebanon club will fulfil a vital cultural need and should needless to say, be approached with the seriousness due to an undertaking of this nature.


19. Epstein to Corm, 31 October 1934, S 25/3143, Central Zionist Archives.
The election of Emile Edde, a passionate francophile, as the President of Lebanon in January 1936 was a matter of immense satisfaction for Zionist leaders in Palestine. He was known to share many of the Zionist misgivings regarding the Arabs and his views regarding the common interests of the Christian Lebanon and Jewish Palestine were similar to those held by Zionist leaders. In one of his meetings with Epstein, Edde had remarked that the Jews and Lebanese were both Occidental people living in the East and he always believed that they had a common programme to implement.  

With the accession of Edde to the Presidency, the Jewish Agency, therefore, looked forward to an era of close cooperation with Christian Lebanon.

In 1936 negotiations were going on for parallel French treaties with Lebanon and Syria which would have confirmed the final separation of the two countries. Sensing that this was an appropriate moment for the conclusion of a formal treaty of friendship with Christian Lebanon, the Jewish Agency sent Epstein to Beirut to sound out the mood of Christian leaders. When Epstein met Edde in September 1936 and placed before him the proposal of the Jewish Agency, the President offered, when the new status of Lebanon was settled, to come out with a public statement in favour of a Maronite Jewish alliance.

20. Personal interview with Eliahu Elath.
This time [Shertok wrote to Weizmann] Epstein broached the subject of giving concrete shape to this alliance idea in view of the impending negotiations between France and Lebanon which are to culminate in a Treaty. Edde declared himself again all in favour, but made it clear that it was not enough for him to hear from us about the favourable attitude of the Quai d'Orsay to such an agreement. The Haut Commisariat in Beirut often spoke with a different voice.... If, we are interested in seeing progress made with the Jewish-Maronite accord, it was up to us to get our friends in Paris to send to Beirut a suitable instruction and as soon as he would be informed by the French High Commissioner of this favourable attitude he would get in touch with us and enter into formal negotiations.21

The Jewish Agency also shrewdly assessed that it was an opportune moment now to reactivate plans for the settlement of Jews in Lebanon in view of the favourable political climate prevailing there. "Just because the Lebanon was on the threshold of independence" Shertok wrote to Weizmann:

the ruling Maronite element was likely to be more interested than before in promoting a suitable scheme of Jewish settlement in the Lebanon... it is the paramount interest of the Maronites - if they wish to maintain their political ascendancy in the republic and prevent its fusion with eastern Syria - to force the Muslims down into the position of a minority. This they can do in one of two ways; either by ceding strips of territory inhabited mainly by Muslims... which would mean throwing out the baby along with the bathwater or by introducing a new element which, without swelling the ranks of their own community, would nevertheless make the Muslims lose their position of numerical superiority as against the non-Muslim communities.22


22. Ibid.
Zionist hopes for forging close relations with Lebanon during Edde's Presidency were, however, dashed due to the outbreak of Arab rebellion in Palestine. The Arab rebellion inflamed passions and in no time feelings ran high in the Arab world against the Palestine Jewry, compelling even pro-Zionist Maronites like Edde to act with great restraint in their dealings with Jewish Palestine.

The Arab revolt created grave security problems for the Jewish community in Palestine. There was much sympathy for the revolt in the states bordering Palestine, and in time, districts of Lebanon bordering Palestine became sanctuaries and launching pads for Palestinian Arab guerrillas. The British authorities, finding themselves incapable of preventing the infiltration of guerrilla bands from the north, appealed to the French for assistance. The French were unwilling to antagonize the nationalist elements in Lebanon or Syria any further and turned a deaf ear to the British entreaties. Unable to get French help in sealing the border, the British decided to act unilaterally. Unofficial raids were launched against Arab villages through Lebanese territory by Jewish commandos led by a British officer, Orde Wingate.23 As the security condition worsened the British government acting on the proposal of the

security advisor to the Palestine government, Sir Charles Tegart, finally decided to physically seal the border.\textsuperscript{24}

The Jewish Firm of Solel Boneh Ltd. was given a contract to construct a barrier along Palestine's borders with Lebanon, Syria and Transjordan. Along the Lebanese border, the barrier was to consist of two or three barbed wire fences with tangled wire in between. The barrier was to be guarded by existing frontier posts; additional ones to be constructed wherever footpaths crossed the boundary.\textsuperscript{25}

The barbed wire fence which came to be known as "Tegarts Wall" instead of improving the security, united Arab peasants on both sides of the boundary in a violent campaign against the wall. A rural mounted police sent to guard the fence was no match for the anger of the Lebanese and Palestinian peasants and the authorities in Jerusalem had to impose curfews in the Arab villages near the border with Lebanon.\textsuperscript{26} The negative consequences of the border fence induced Britain to once again appeal for French help. Eventually France agreed to deploy a thousand-strong force to patrol the Lebanese and Syrian boundaries with Palestine following which there was a partial decline in cross-border operations.

\textsuperscript{24} Palestine Post, 2 May 1938.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 28 May 1938.
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 1 July 1938.
The outbreak of the Arab revolt led to the appointment of the Peel Commission which was to inquire into the fundamental causes of the unrest, to explore Arab and Jewish grievances and to make recommendations for the future. Anticipating that the Peel Commission would recommend the partition of Palestine, Zionist leaders launched a vigorous campaign to have the boundaries of the future Jewish state to be contiguous to Lebanon. They sought open Christian support for Lebanese contiguity with the future Jewish state. The Maronite leaders were told that only by close cooperation in all spheres could Jews and Christians face the danger from their neighbours, who were totally unprepared to come to terms with the existence of independent national minorities in their midst. Maronite leaders should therefore, be on their guard and make sure that when the partition map was decided upon, it would adhere to the principle of a contiguous and joint border between the Jewish state and Lebanon and that there should not be corridors between the two states which would pass through Muslim territory. 27 At the same time Zionist leaders sought to influence the British by citing ties of friendship with the Lebanese Christians as a valid justification for their demand for a common border. Replying to the British High Commissioner in Jerusalem, Sir Arthur Wauchope's

27. Epstein to Shertok, 12 May 1937, S 25/3163, Central Zionist Archives.
request for his "personal opinion on certain aspects of the partition question", Shertok wrote that it was:

Vitally important for the Jews that the area of their settlement should remain contiguous with Lebanon. Ties of friendship have already sprung up between us and the Maronites and among the thinking people of both communities there is a strong hope that in future this friendship will be cemented into a permanent economic and political alliance to the advantage of both communities and countries. Any wedge driven between us and the Lebanon will reduce the chances of stability and prosperity for both countries and for the Mediterranean littoral as a whole.  

In the midst of all this diplomatic activity, in August 1937 the local Arabic press in Beirut carried reports that the Lebanese government was about to publish a statement on the Palestine political situation in favour of the Arabs, similar to the statement which had been published by the Syrian government. The publication of such reports caused immense concern among the Zionist leaders and the Jewish Agency promptly sent Bernard Joseph to Beirut with a view to endeavouring to prevent the publication of any such statement. Joseph met Edde and obtained the latter's assurance that no such statement would be published though there was tremendous pressure for its publication both internally and externally.  


29. See "Minute of an Interview of Dr. Bernard Joseph with President of the Lebanese Government on Friday 6 August 1937", S 25/5581, Central Zionist Archives.
scored yet another diplomatic victory when upon its insistence the Lebanese government forbade its members' attendance at the Pan-Arab Bludan Conference hosted by Syria. The Jewish Agency was also successful in dissuading the Lebanese government from participating in the Arab Inter-Parliamentary Conference held in Cairo a year later to discuss the situation in Palestine. 30

When the Mufti of Jerusalem Haj Amin al-Husseini fled to Lebanon in October 1937 following the outlawing of the Arab Higher Committee, a new phase opened in Zionist-Maronite relations. Beirut and Damascus became centres for pan-Arab propaganda and the Jewish Agency's efforts were directed towards pressurizing the French to curb Palestinian activities in Lebanon and at encouraging the Maronites to demand more forceful action by Mandatory authorities. During the first few months of 1938 the Zionist press repeatedly threatened Lebanon with a boycott if the anti-Jewish activities of the Palestinians were not curbed. In one of its editorials the Palestine Post noted:

We are on general principles opposed to boycott measures, whether they be directed against commerce or tourist trade, and we should deeply regret it if the resentment which is being widely felt in Palestine against the Lebanon and Syria being used as a centre of operations against the peace of the country were to lead to a boycott of Syrian and Lebanese goods or to a cancelling

30. Eliahu Sasson (Member of the Arab Department of the Jewish Agency) to Shertok, 21 July 1938, 24/17024 B, Central Zionist Archives.
of holiday trips to the north... the new habit of Palestinians to regard the Lebanon as a holiday resort will not be encouraged if tourists and holiday makers feel that in close proximity to their holiday resorts plots are being hatched against their own lives and peace of their homes.

Zionist threats to boycott tourism and trade, however, had little tangible impact on Lebanon. Their Maronite friends in Lebanon were as concerned as they were themselves by Haj Amin's activities but there was a strictly defined limit to what the Maronites could actually do.

(ii) Lebanese Independence and Its Impact on Zionist-Maronite Relationship

With the outbreak of Second World War Lebanon came under Vichy control. The Vichy High Commissioner General Henri Dentz deposed President Edde and placed restrictions on his political activities. With the imposition of Vichy authority and deposition of Edde, Zionist-Maronite relationship suffered a great setback. Lebanon and Syria increasingly came under German influence. German spokesmen, in order to gain favour with the Muslim population, supported the anti-Zionist attitude of the nationalists in both countries. This caused considerable alarm among the Zionists leaders and they readily acceded to a British request for help when the latter decided to invade Lebanon.

31. Palestine Post (Jerusalem), 21 April 1938; see also 4 April 1938, 3 May 1938 and 30 May 1938.
and Syria. The Haganah leadership made available Arabic speaking Jews belonging to the Jewish task force Palmach for special duty in Syria and Lebanon. The invasion plan code-named "Operation Exporter" began on 8 June 1941. Its main thrust was an invasion of Lebanon launched from Palestine.

The attacking force consisted of two infantry brigades of the 7th Australian Division and one battalion of Jewish commandos. Opposing them was a French ground force of roughly equal strength. However, the Australians possessed significant air and naval advantage.

On the first day of the attack itself the Australians seized the Lebanese border post at Ras an-Naqrurah and the southern town of Marjayoun fell shortly thereafter. However, problems quickly developed when a unit of Jewish commandos failed to capture the Qasiniyah coastal bridge. Moshe Dayan, then a young commando lost his left eye during this attack. Marjayoun was retaken by Vichy forces but as they had insufficient strength the town was recaptured by the Australians on 24 June. Meanwhile, the main attack using air and naval superiority, simply bludgeoned its way

34. Sachar, n.1, p.234.
to the outskirts of Beirut and an armistice was signed on 14 July 1941 ending Vichy rule in the Levant. 35

The restoration of Free French authority in Lebanon, however, did not lead to a revival of Zionist-Maronite relationship on the scale on which it had been going on in the 1930s. The entry of British army into Lebanon led to many domestic political changes. Edde's 'National Bloc' lost ground to Bishara al-Khuri's 'Constitutional Bloc'. With the eclipse of Edde's influence Zionist leaders lost their principal connection and support within the government. While Edde had openly sympathized with the Zionist cause and advocated cooperation between the Lebanese Christians and Jews of Palestine, Khuri who became President in 1943 and led his country to independence that year, did not favour cooperation with Jewish Palestine as this had antagonized the Lebanese Muslims. Zionist leaders therefore had to turn to those elements in the Maronite leadership who did not fully subscribe to Khuri's point of view. One of these was the powerful Maronite Church which continued to sympathize openly with the Zionists. Thus, in 1946 the Maronite Bishop of Beirut, Mubarak and the Vicar of the Patriarchate testified before the Anglo-American Committee of Enquiry in favour of partition in Palestine and the

35. Longrigg, n.33, p.314.
creation of a Jewish state. Earlier that year Patriarch Antoine Arida had signed a document with the Jewish Agency Executive Member Dov Joseph in which the Jewish demand for independence and Maronite demand for a Christian Lebanon were mutually recognized. The Phalangists also were sympathetic towards the Zionist cause though officially they supported the Arab stand. Within a short span of a decade they had emerged as a force to reckon within Lebanese politics. Though the Phalangists accepted the National Pact they tended to interpret it in extremely narrow and sometimes sectarian terms. To them the interest of Lebanon was above all other interests and Lebanon should not be made to sacrifice its interest for the sake of some greater Arab interest. Such an attitude obviously led the Phalangists to give only a half hearted support to the Arab cause in Palestine. It was to the Phalangists that the Zionist leaders turned more and more after Lebanon’s independence.

(iii) Lebanon and the First Arab-Israeli War

In November 1947 the passage of the Partition plan for Palestine by the UN General Assembly immediately led to the outbreak of a violent conflict between Palestinians and

37. Jerusalem Post, 1 July 1983.
Jews in Palestine. As the British mandate drew to a close in May 1948, conditions along the Palestine-Lebanon boundary reverted to the chaotic state that had prevailed during the Arab revolt of 1936-37. An Arab guerilla band known as the Arab Liberation Army, under the leadership of Fawzi al-Qawuqji operated on both sides of the Lebanon-Palestine frontier and Southern Lebanon, now part of the independent republic of Lebanon, again served as a sanctuary and staging area for Palestinian guerillas. In the midst of this conflict it soon became apparent that an intervention by the regular armies of Arab states including Lebanon in support of the Palestinians was imminent. Zionist leaders sought to mobilise Christian opinion within Lebanon.

In this connection, contacts were established between Father Joseph Awad an American of Lebanese origin and the American Zionist Emergency Council (AZEC) in March 1948. Awad was a fervent supporter of the idea of Christian Lebanon and had turned to the AZEC for moral and material help. The AZEC readily contributed funds to the Phonecia Press, a propaganda organization which championed the cause of Maronite separatism. In turn Awad, who was in favour of a Lebanese-Israeli non-belligerency pact, agreed to undertake a visit to Lebanon to sound out Maronite leaders opposed to Lebanon's participation in the war. In view of the changed political atmosphere then prevailing, such
indirect contacts with Lebanese Christians were preferable to direct ones which would have been construed as acts of treason by the Lebanese government. On his return to the US Awad informed Eliahu Ben-Horin, Middle Eastern Affairs advisor of the AZEC that things in Lebanon had reached such a state (as the latter reported in September 1948 to Moshe Sherett, Israel's foreign minister) that the Phalangist Party was ready "to begin a military insurrection to overthrow the Riyad al-Solh government and gain power". The Phalangists "wanted to know" how Israel could help. Following this, a meeting was arranged between Abba Hilel Silver, Head of AZEC and Elias Rababi editor of the Phalangist Party newspaper Al-Amal. Rababi also held talks with senior Israeli official Tuvia Arazi in Paris but nothing of consequence seems to have emerged from these talks.39

Meanwhile Lebanon along with Egypt, Syria, Transjordan and Iraq participated in the first Arab-Israeli war. On 15 May 1948, Israel's first day as an independent state, two Lebanese infantry battalions and a company of armour attacked and overran the tiny settlement of Malkiya.40 The seizure of Malkiya placed Lebanon in opposition to the


UN Partition Plan as it was located in an area designated by the UN as part of the projected state of Israel. Three days later Israel launched a counter-attack, took the Lebanese army by surprise and recaptured Malkiya. The settlement was to change hands once again when the Lebanese army reacting to its defeat successfully stormed Malkiya and another settlement Kadesh-Naftali on 6 June. After this victory Lebanon retired from active combat, turning over its gain in the central sector to the Arab Liberation Army.

Lebanon, however, found that disengagement was no easy matter. The Israeli Defense Forces (IDF), intent upon securing as much of Mandatory Palestine as possible launched a campaign named "Operation Hiram" (named after the ancient king of Tyre) in October 1948, aimed at dislodging the Arab Liberation Army from Northern Palestine. The Arab Liberation Army was forced to abandon Palestine and retreated into Southern Lebanon. The IDF pursued the enemy into Lebanon and occupied eighteen Lebanese villages. The Israeli advance was halted only when it had reached the point where the Litani takes a westward bend.

The Zionists had finally managed to obtain a foothold on the Litani and in late 1948 claims emanated from Israeli

41. Ibid., p.158.


diplomatic and journalistic circles that inhabitants of the occupied villages were asking to be placed under Israeli military authority and that there was a pro-Zionist "free Lebanese movement" active in Israel. The Israeli leaders believed in late 1948 that they could conclude a very profitable peace treaty with Lebanon which would not only secure for Israel access to the waters of the Litani, but would further fragment the Arab world by detaching Lebanon from the coalition of hostile Arab States. On 21 May 1948, Ben Gurion, Israel's first Prime Minister wrote the following in his diary:

The Achilles heel of the Arab coalition is the Lebanon. Muslim supremacy in this country is artificial and can be easily overthrown. A Christian state ought to be set up there, with its southern frontiers on the River Litani. We should sign a treaty of Alliance with this state.

Israeli hopes for signing a peace treaty with Lebanon rapidly faded during the armistice negotiations which began under UN auspices in January 1949. The Solh government took a pro-Arab stand and insisted on a total Israeli withdrawal from occupied Lebanese territories. Several weeks of stalemate followed as Israel tried to couple its withdrawal from Lebanon with a Syrian withdrawal from a tiny piece of

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Palestinian territory in the Hula valley. After considerable international pressure Israel finally agreed to withdraw and on 23 March 1949 a General Armstice Agreement (GAA) was signed between the two. Israeli forces withdrew from Lebanon behind an Armstice Demarcation Line (ADL) the purpose of which was to "delineate the line beyond which the armed forces of the respective parties shall not move". As to the location of the ADL, the GAA provided that "The Armstice Demarcation Line shall follow the international boundary between the Lebanon and Palestine". The GAA also called for the stationing of "defensive forces only" in the "region of the Armstice Demarcation Line". The region of the ADL in case of Lebanon was defined in the Annex to the GAA as the region "south of the general line El-Qasmiyah-Nabatiyah-Tahta-Hasbaya" and in case of Israel as the region "north of the general line Nahariya-Tarshiya-Jish-Marus".

Notwithstanding the conclusion of the armistice agreement, Israel's rendezvous with the Phalangists continued. In November 1950 Rababi met Shulamit Schwartz (later Nardi) of the AZEC who later that month sent a report of

47. Ibid., p.393.
48. Ibid.
this meeting to the Israeli foreign minister Moshe Sharett. Following the receipt of Schwartz's report Sharett wrote on 21 November to Walter Eytan, the Director General of Foreign Ministry, that the Phalangists are:

worthy of serious attention on our part. The picture drawn in... Schwartz presentation... the taking of Lebanon out of the Pan-Arab circle and its affiliation with Israel - is extremely heart warming and opens the door to a far reaching alignment in the whole structure of the Middle East.... Moreover even if this goal is not swiftly attainable... it nevertheless remains a goal that is well worth striving for and investing energy and means in.

He then instructed Eytan to seek permission presumably from the Prime Minister David Ben Gurion to have Gideon Rafael, Councillor to Israel's UN delegation in New York, meet Rababi. A meeting between Rafael and Rababi duly took place on 12 December 1950. At this meeting Rababi informed Rafael that the Phalangists intended to contest in the Lebanese elections due to be held in the spring of 1951 and asked for financial assistance. Regarding armed insurrection to overthrow the Solh government Rababi said "While there are plans for a revolution the responsible leaders believe the hour has not struck for energetic actions and more active political preparations must first be made". Following this meeting the Phalangist Party received a sum of IL 3000 from Israel for its election campaign.  

50. Jerusalem Post, 1 July 1983.
(iv) Israeli Plans for Intervention in Lebanon

Plans for taking of Lebanon out of the Pan-Arab circle and its affiliation with Israel were seriously discussed once again in early 1954. On 25 February 1954 Syrian troops stationed in Aleppo revolted against Adib Shishakly's regime and the next day the Shishakly regime actually fell. With Syria in the grip of an internal turmoil and with the entire Arab World's attention temporarily riveted on Syria, the moment was ripe for a decisive initiative concerning Lebanon, according to Ben Gurion, then on temporary retirement from the Prime Ministership. On 27 February, from his retreat in Sdeh Boker in the Negev, Ben Gurion wrote to Sharett that Lebanon "is the weakest link in the Arab League" and that the Christian community there constitutes:

a majority in the historical Lebanon and this majority has a tradition and a culture different from those of the other component of the League.... The creation of a Christian state is therefore, a natural act; it has historical roots and will find wide support in wide circles in the Christian world both Catholic and Protestant.... Perhaps (there is never any certainty in politics) now is the time to bring about the creation of a Christian State in our neighbourhood. Without our initiative and our vigourous aid this will not be done. It seems to me that this is our

51. Ben Gurion who had served concurrently as the Prime Minister and Minister of Defence of Israel since its establishment in 1948, had temporarily stepped down from the government in November 1953. He returned to the government in February 1955 to assume his former position as Defence Minister. He eventually took over the premiership once again in June 1956. During this period Moshe Sharett held the post of Prime Minister.
central duty or at least one of the central duties of our foreign policy. This means that time, energy and means ought to be invested in it and that we must act in all possible ways to bring about a radical change in Lebanon.... If money is necessary, no amount of dollars should be spared.... This is a historical opportunity. Missing it will be unpardonable.

In 1950 Sharett himself had been very enthusiastic about an alliance between Israel and Christian Lebanon, but the failure of the Phalangists to launch an insurrection and later on their uninspiring performance in the Parliamentary elections of 1951 and 1953 had perhaps forced him to make a reassessment of the whole situation there. He was, therefore, not in favour of a bold move concerning Lebanon. Besides, there are basic differences in the style of functioning of the two leaders. While Ben Gurion espoused a hawkish approach to the Arab-Israeli conflict minimizing thereby the prominence of external constraints, Sharett represented a dovish and more restrained line of conflict management, attributing great importance to foreign powers and international public opinion. Sharett, therefore,

52. Moshe Sharett, Personal Diary cited in Livia Rokach, Israel's Sacred Terrorism: A Study Based on Moshe Sharett's Personal Diary and Other Documents (Belmont, 1980), p.23.

53. In the 1951 Parliamentary elections only three Phalange members were elected. They were Joseph Chader, Jean Skaff and Albert al-Hajj. In the 1953 elections only Chader was elected from the Phalangists.

wrote to Ben-Gurion that there was "no point in trying to create from outside a movement which is non-existent inside. One can reinforce a spirit of life when it is already beating. One cannot inject life into a body which shows no sign of life". If Israel were to intervene it could, he added, "rend with one motion the fabric of Christian-Muslim cooperation within the framework of present Lebanon..." It could "throw the Lebanese Muslims in the arms of Syria and at the end of the process bring on Christian Lebanon the historical catastrophe of its annexation to Syria and the utter blurring of its personality within the greater Muslim state". Moreover, in Sharett's opinion, there was no guarantee that the Arab League or the West would not intervene or "that the bloody war that must inevitably erupt after such an attempt will remain confined to Lebanon and will not immediately drag in Syria as well?" As regards the fallout of an ill-conceived and ill-timed Israeli attempt to restructure Lebanon, Sharett warned that the venture could create serious complications for Israel in the region:

In this situation I fear that any attempt by us to raise the question would be taken as a sign of frivolousness and superficiality - or perhaps worse: as adventurist profiteering in the well-being of others, and as readiness to sacrifice their fundamental welfare for the sake of Israeli temporary tactical advantage. Moreover, if the matter did not remain secret... there is no calculating the damage this would cause us vis-a-vis the Arab states and the Western powers alike, damage for which
the (eventual) success of the operation itself would provide no compensation.

Ben-Gurion, however, remained unconvinced with Sharett's judgement. In May 1955 during a meeting of senior officials of the defense and foreign Ministry Ben Gurion once again raised the issue of intervening in Lebanon. The timing now was appropriate, he maintained, due to renewed Iraqi-Syrian tensions and domestic instability in Syria. This time he was joined in by Chief of Staff Moshe Dayan according to whom, Sharett recorded:

the only thing that is necessary is to find an officer, even just a major. We should either win his heart or buy him with money, to make him agree to declare himself the saviour of the Maronite population. Then the Israeli army will enter Lebanon, will occupy the necessary territory and will create a Christian regime which will ally itself with Israel. The territory from the Litani southwards will be totally annexed to Israel and everything will be alright.56

Sharett was still not in favour of an intervention in Lebanon. Nonetheless, on Ben Gurion's suggestion, he agreed to set up a joint commission of the foreign and defence ministries to deal with Lebanese affairs. Dayan, however, seems to have continued his insistence for immediate and direct action because on 28 May Sharett once again noted that the chief of staff:


56. Moshe Sharett, Personal Diary, cited in Rokach,n.52,p.26
supports a plan to hire a (Lebanese) officer who will agree to serve as a puppet so that the Israeli army may appear as responding to his appeal 'to liberate Lebanon from its Muslim oppressors'. This will of course be a crazy adventure. ... We must try to prevent dangerous complications. The Commission must be charged with research task and prudent actions directed at encouraging Maronite circles who reject Muslim pressures and agree to lean on us.

Sharett's call for moderation and caution vis-a-vis Lebanon ultimately prevailed and for a decade after this Israel did not intervene in Lebanon. But given the fact that the idea of an alliance with Lebanese Christians was widely shared in Israel's foreign policy and security establishment, it seems likely that covert links with a section of the Maronite community was maintained throughout this period. 58

(v) The Controversy Surrounding the Litani River

Acquiring the abundant waters of the Litani river for purposes of irrigation was another abiding Israeli objective in the decades following the signing of the GAA. Twice the Zionist leaders had tried to acquire the Litni - in 1920 and 1948 - but on both occasions they had failed. The 1920 boundary agreement had cut sharply into the most optimistic Zionist estimates of the amount of water available to

58. Yaniv, n.2, p.36.
support extensive Jewish colonization of Palestine. Zionist planners had hoped to divert part of the flow of the Litani eastward into the Hasbani river, where it would flow south in the Jordan Valley and eventually be piped overland to Negev. Yet the 1920 border agreement between Britain and France had left the Litani entirely within Lebanon. In 1943 the Zionist received a small measure of encouragement when some Maronite leaders appeared to be willing to share the waters of the Litani for the agricultural development of the Jewish colony. The Lebanese engineering firm of Alfred Naccache and Jewish engineers of the Palestine Water Cooperative conducted a joint study which concluded that Lebanon could usefully employ only one-seventh of Litani's flow. The study recommended, therefore, that most of the water be diverted from a point where the river takes a westward bend through a tunnel into Palestine. In exchange for water Lebanon would receive "all or part of the power produced by the drop from the mountains to the Jordan Valley". The study heartened the Zionists, whose "dreams of Negev development could not be fully realized without the Litani water". To enhance its claim on the Litani the Jewish Agency utilised the services of Walter Clay Lowdermilk, who was then the Assistant Chief of the United States Soil Conservation Service and later the Head of the Department of Agricultural Engineering at Technion.

the Israeli Institute of Technology. He spent three months doing field studies in Palestine and Transjordan and proposed a Jordan Valley Authority (JVA) on the lines of the Tennesse Valley Authority (TVA). The details of the JVA were then developed by James Hays, Chief Engineer of TVA. The Lowdermilk-Hays plan noted the possibility of tapping the Litani and diverting some of its waters to the coast and Negev. 60

The Arab-Israeli war of 1948, however, served to fundamentally alter the prospects for such a cooperative undertaking. The Zionist victory had created such bitterness in the Arab World that the Lebanese government could ill-afford to provoke nationalist opinion both within and outside by striking a deal with the Jewish state. Any sign of Lebanese willingness to supply water to the Negev and thereby facilitate Jewish immigration to Israel would have been be regarded as treachery not only by other Arab States, but by Lebanese Muslims as well. The development of the Negev was not critically important in so far as feeding the existing Jewish population was concerned. Rather, the purpose behind it was to facilitate the absorption of Jewish immigrants which Israel voluntarily sought for defensive purposes. 61

60. See Walter Clay Lowdermilk, Palestine: Land of Promise (New York, 1944).

Irrigating the Negev was a venerable Zionist dream and although its failure to acquire the waters of the Litani had wrecked plans for large-scale desert irrigation, Israel decided that even a token Jewish agrarian presence in the Negev would be an important symbol of the vitality of the Jewish state. In July 1953, therefore, the Israeli cabinet approved a plan to draw water from the Jordan river at the Banat Yakub Bridge for diversion to the Negev. Work on the Canal began in September 1953 but as the diversion point was located in a demilitarized zone created by the 1949 Israeli-Syrian Armistice Agreement, Syria immediately protested. The Syrian position was upheld by both the UN and US. American pressure ultimately forced Israel to suspend work on the project the following month.\(^6^2\)

In October 1953 President Eisenhower despatched Eric Johnston to the region to try to convince Israel and the Arab states to undertake the joint development of the Jordan Valley. Johnston carried with him a plan prepared by Charles T. Main which called for a dam and reservoir to be built in Lebanon on the Hasbani river but the Main Plan excluded the Litani altogether because it was a wholly national river.\(^6^3\)

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The Main Plan's omission of the Litani led to loud Israeli protests. To counter the Main Plan Israel came up with its own plan drawn up by an American engineer John S. Cotton. The Cotton plan tied the Litani to a regional development scheme and estimated that the surplus water not needed for irrigation in Lebanon amounted to nearly fifty per cent of the reiver's flow. Accordingly the Cotton plan argued that large quantities of Litani water be diverted to Israel from a point near Marj Uyun.64

Israeli desire to bring in the Litani into a regional water development scheme did not find favour with the Americans. As Brecher points out, "While a strong case could be made on technical and geo-economic grounds, Israel's legal claim was non-existent; the Litani was a wholly national river of an enemy state".65 In any case the water sharing negotiations initiated by the US itself failed amidst proposals and counter-proposals and in October 1955 the Arab League decided against signing an agreement with the Jewish state.

Israel remained determined, with or without Arab cooperation, to divert part of the Jordan river waters for irrigation. Consequently in 1956 a National Water Carrier

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64. Schmida, n.62, pp.16-18.

Project for irrigating the Negev was approved and work began in 1958. In order to avoid armistice complications, the diversion point was shifted to a point entirely within Israeli territory.

The 1956 Israeli plan was as much objectionable to the Arabs as the 1953 diversion scheme. In January 1964 the Arab League adopted a plan designed to defeat the Israeli intention of diverting the waters of the Jordan. The Arab plan amounted to an attempt to reroute the headwaters of the Jordan - Hasbani and Banias - away from Israel. The Hasbani was to be diverted partially into the lower Litani with a smaller quantity going eastwards into Syria's Banias river. The Banias in turn was to be connected to the Yarmuk river a tributary of the Jordan.66

Israel quite expectedly was severely critical of the Arab League decision. Noting that the Arab League had earmarked part of the flow of the Hasbani for irrigating Southern Lebanon, Israel argued that:

All irrigation plans for southern Lebanon have turned, in the first instance, on utilizing the River Litani with its annual flow of 850 million cubic metres, of which, to this day, most runs to waste into the Mediterranean. Now, a good deal of the flow of the Upper Hasbani is to be wasted as well.

Lebanon has ample water for irrigation; arable land, not water, has always been the factor limiting the development of Lebanese agriculture. Work began on the Arab League's plan and Lebanon decided to proceed with its share of the scheme while at the same time declining to invite forces from other Arab countries to help defend southern Lebanon from Israeli attacks. Feelings once again ran high in the Arab world as tension mounted between the frontline Arab States and Israel. The June 1967 Arab-Israeli war, caused in large measure by tensions arising from the water crisis, put a sudden and final end to the Arab League's diversion plan. In a period of six days the amount of territory controlled by the Jewish state tripled. The Golan Heights, the balance of Mandatory Palestine and the Sinai Peninsula all came under Israeli occupation. With the seizure of Banias stream by Israel in 1967 the water issue itself lost much of its urgency. In its place was a more deadly confrontation - the advent of Palestinian commando activity in Southern Lebanon directed against Israel which would completely change the focus of Israeli-Lebanese relationship.

Conclusion

The existence of a Christian community in Lebanon

claiming a separate identity for itself and striving to establish a Christian state was of tremendous importance to 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 Arab hostility towards Israel or in some cases even had a fundamental conflict with Pan-Arabism. 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 cultures, religions and nationalities. In such an area the Jewish state had a legitimate place whereas in the homogeneous Arab-Islamic conception it looked like an alien intruder.

The centre-piece of this entire strategy of alliance of minorities were the Maronite Christians of Lebanon. The Zionist leaders perceived the Maronites to be sharing many of the predicaments faced by the Jews. Both communities felt insecure by the rising tide of Muslim and Arab aggressiveness and both felt the need for political protection of the Western powers upon which they had traditionally
depended. The convergence of interests between the two, therefore, provided maximum scope for cooperation. 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 part of an Arab war coalition; nor could Lebanon serve as a launching pad for the forces of another Arab country. Finally it would provide Israel with an opportunity to occupy Southern Lebanon which had strategic as well as economic importance.

Extensive relations in the political and economic fields developed between the Jewish community in Palestine and Lebanon during the 1930s and 1940s. When France lost its position in Lebanon during World War II, the Maronite Christians had to abandon their plans of establishing a Christian state and arrive at an understanding with the Muslims for sharing political power. This came as a great setback to the Jews of Palestine. Lebanon severed its relations with Jewish Palestine and began to identify itself with the Arab cause. Zionist leaders were forced to turn to those elements in the Maronite community like the clergy and the Lebanese Phalanges who still entertained the parochial notion of Lebanon as a Christian refuge in the Arab East. Secret contacts with these elements were maintained throughout the fifties and sixties. Plans for taking Lebanon out of the Pan-Arab circle and its affiliation with Israel were seriously discussed by Ben-Gurion,
Dayan and other top decision-makers during the mid-fifties. They were not acted upon because Moshe Sharett who was the Prime Minister then, 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 opinion 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.