



Double Degree Program in “International Relations” (LUISS-CFAU),  
Major in Security

Course of Sociology of Terrorism and Political Violence

**Italy in Lebanon**

**Complexities and Effectiveness of Bilateral  
Foreign Policy amidst Multiple Crises**

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Academic Year 2022/2023

*Al Libano e ai mille splendidi soli che mi ha regalato,  
alla bambina che voleva girare il mondo con lo zaino in spalla,  
e a te che non le hai mai lasciato la mano nei suoi traguardi,  
festeggiando sempre un po' più degli altri.*

*La tua arte è nel mio cuore.*

V.

## **Acknowledgments**

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to everyone who has helped, supported, and cheered me during this Double Master's degree, either coming from the academic or the personal environment.

For the completion of this Master's thesis, throughout the whole research process, I would like to thank my thesis supervisor, Professor Mohammed Hashas, for his inspiring lessons, unwavering support, and passion which guided me in deciding the focus of this thesis and in its drafting. I also thank my co-supervisor, Professor Pasquale Ferrara, for his punctual and accurate recommendations and remarks and his professionalism and competence. This thesis's direction and quality have been significantly influenced by the incisive academic journey and enriching experience this Double Master's degree, conjoint between LUISS Guido Carli and China Foreign Affairs University, gifted me with. Lectures, seminars, and discussions widened my perspectives on International Relations, expanding my knowledge and providing me with a firm foundation for this research. Moreover, learning from renowned scholars whose thoughts are highly impactful internationally, enhanced my research abilities and, consequentially, the depth of my analysis and my inquiry abilities.

I would like to thank the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in partnership with CRUI, for giving me the chance to live in the diplomatic environment and all its components from within. The MAECI internship at the Italian Embassy in Beirut, Lebanon, has allowed me to broaden the scope of my research. The exchange of opinion and qualitative interviews conducted with professionals of high caliber, and extensive experience in the field, were the key to making my master's thesis, a product that looks to the future, without forgetting to learn from the past.

In this regard, I am endlessly thankful for the guidance, expertise, and passion of Ambassador Nicoletta Bombardiere, and her team at the Embassy, particularly Counsellor Roberta di Lecce, First Secretary, Pietro Eynard, and Valeria Bianconi, for the unwavering work of the Italian Cultural Institute, for the professionalism of the Italian Trade Agency, and its Head Claudio Pasqualucci, for the comprehensive projects of the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation, and for the meaningful insights of the Italian Bilateral Training Mission (MIBIL), particularly General Angelo Sacco for his availability.

A special thank you goes to the "*1st Regiment Carabinieri Paratroopers 'TUSCANIA'*", who became great friends and supporters more than simply '*bodyguards*' during my stay in Lebanon.

On a more personal note, there would be so many things to say. I will start with the assumption that I am grateful for life. I am grateful because it has given me two fantastic parents who always looked after and loved me, my "little" brother who has always looked up to me, but, truly, it was him who taught me endless things, my grandparents, my aunts, my uncles, my cousins... Each of them has always pushed me to do my best and be the best version of myself, to fiercely face the world, and to believe in my dreams and aspirations. Without them, I would not be here, writing this acknowledgment. Thank you, Mum, Myriam, Dad, Enrico, and Emanuele, for being at the forefront of this amazing family I have the luck to call mine. I am forever indebted to you for all your sacrifices. You have been my source of strength constantly. Albeit hard it was to be next to me, you have always been there, encouraging me, when I could not do it myself, believing in me and my potential, when I could not see it: you are my ray of sunshine in dark times. My achievements so far are dedicated to you, my heart and soul. Infinitely thank you.

I also have a second family to thank: my friends. Those who bared with me since childhood and high school, those who saw me grow into many versions of me, but always loved and supported me. Those with whom I studied for my bachelor's degree, my '*Bunkerino*', and have been '*home*' ever since. Notwithstanding the distance that separates us, you were always '*next to me*'; I am sure wherever we will be our hearts will never be apart and, for that, I am forever grateful. Those with whom I shared "*happiness and sadness*" during my Master's: my '*Rome's family*'. Thank you for your unwavering support, reassurance, and patience throughout those two years, they would not be the same without you, and probably, I probably could have not achieved what I did if it was not for you, you always confided in my abilities, being an endless source of inspiration and fortitude. Without all of them, I would not be the person I am today: they have cared for me in the most challenging times, encouraged me to take the riskiest paths, always believed in me, and always fought with me.

I want to end by saying this, wherever I will go in this world, a tiny part of each and every one of you will come with me. I will be forever grateful to and for you, for showing and giving me Love in its purest form.

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## Introduction

### 1. Background and rationale

In the Middle East, many states came to being as the crystallization of their near and ancient past. Lebanon is no different. Once known as the “*Switzerland of the Middle East*”, it plunges its roots in the antique seafaring entrepreneurship of the Phoenicians and the grandeur of the Roman Empire, the Arabs, before it became part of the Ottoman Empire until its defeat marked starkly the beginning of its ‘*mandate past*’ under the French control. A subjugation that permeates the structuring of its institutions, politics, and social context: the double-lingual reality perpetrates the hold on it, being also one of the contributing factors in the general confusion and tension when looking for a sense of belonging either to the East or to the West.

Albeit being a small, peripheral reality in the Near Orient, it offers many emblematic insights of reflection, for example, its peculiar political structure system, which claimed for almost 80 years to be able to settle the sectarian-religious strife of the country. If on one side, the Lebanese system was clearly a turning point and an innovative example to be followed for many other states experiencing such a mix of Peoples, on the other, as time went by, it also proved to not adequately manage a changing population and its needs, turning to be one of its core problems nowadays.

Living in Beirut, the Sarajevo of the Lebanese Civil War gives you a ‘*little taste*’ of such constant antagonism, a relentless day-by-day tension, that moves from one scapegoat to another as the wind unfolds. Driving on its large boulevards, heading towards “*Place des Martyrs*”, next to the Blue Mosque and the Maronite Cathedral of Saint George, with an overarching Lebanese flag, history unfolds from the bullets’ marks on the building bordering the demarcation line – the Green Line- that separated the West and East part of the city, the Christians and the Muslims, during the Civil War, to the privatization of the public spaces where once the markets, “*الأسواق*”, the “*al’aswaq*”, would become melting pots for its citizens and the Digital District which exemplifies an intermitted longing towards modernity, that for now has not been totally fulfilled. The October Revolution (2019) compounded with those of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and that of the 2000s and 2010s become tangibles over and over and kept on living: the request for answers never stopped, albeit People returned to their normal lives, to their jobs, multiple ones, in order to survive. The city, and the country never truly recovered, and as many citizens like to say, “*issues have just been put under the rug*”.

Amidst this tangle, “*this athlete that never stops*”, as the sociologist Daniel Meier defined Lebanon, Italy, with its foreign policy and through its several apparatuses, starting from the diplomatic representation, has been able to forge strong ties, that rely on both institutional, political, and economic levels to a more grassroots reality, gaining and maintaining a “*high approval rating*” among the population. The recurrent identarian feeling with the Romans, with the ‘*Mare Nostrum*’, with the “*Mediterraneaness*” of Lebanese people binds the two countries together, all those elements represent a past, a culture that Lebanese people, especially that portion of the population which relinquishes any Arab origin, take great pride in.

Despite this fruitful engagement, policies, and aids attached, the impasse status of the Lebanese state machinery does not seem to come to an end anytime soon: the risk of perpetuating a “*victim mentality*” is a reality Italy and many countries engaged on the ground need to take into consideration. Failing to heal the critical issues within the Government and its institutions, in the long run, would result in a vicious cycle of aids that does not put the country in a position of recovery but in one of perpetual victimization, damage, and corruption.

This Master’s thesis aims to analyze the intricateness of the bilateral relations between Lebanon and Italy, and how the latter has been able to resist and prove the strength of their relationship through the compound crises of the last 20 years. In tracing back their history, both separately and conjointly, the inquiry will unravel historical contingencies to trace the ‘*best practices*’, the key points that have made the Italian foreign policy so effective in this context, albeit its complexities, and, mostly, its limitations, proposing an experimental policy recommendation.

In the first Chapter, there will be a historical recollection of the Lebanese state formation, its colonial past, its independence, its civil war, and continuous Revolutions. Knowing the tumultuous past of this fascinating country gives us a sound base to understand its present, its economic downturn, political impasse, and social disaggregation. The focus here is on the concept of “*compound crises*” that hit Lebanon in the last 20 years.

The second Chapter will be devoted to the analysis of Italian foreign policy, and its differentiated actions, spanning from diplomacy to cooperation, economic and trade relations, and military operations. Paving reference to the theoretical study of foreign policy formation in conjunction with International Relations theories, a recollection of historical ‘*toss and turns*’ will be presented. Through the General Directives issued by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs during those last years, the priorities and strategies for the Middle East will be



considered, to better comprehend, through a regional perspective, the specific actions implemented in Lebanon.

After presenting the groundwork on the two States, the third Chapter will delve into the history of their bilateral relations, with an initial chronological excursus of main events that are necessary to grasp the deepness of their bond. In this overview, the consideration of how Italy was able to stabilize within Lebanon, obtaining a series of successes in terms of “*soft*” and “*hard*” impacts on the host country, will be carried out focusing on the four fundamental pillars of its foreign policy, gathering important insights from experts that have been operating on the ground with the intent of disclosing peculiarities and apparent contradictions.

The conclusion will scrutinize the future perspectives of this bilateral partnership, bearing in mind the good practices and cautions the Lebanese context necessitates, but mostly debunking the limitations and shortcomings of this system set up in those 80 years of foreign policy. The state lives in a duality but it is still inexplicably afloat, how? In this perpetual stalemate, especially seeable in those last 20 years of compound crises, the feeling is that of a State that will be growingly lacking reactivity to external initiatives if those do not construct reliable projects based on a bottom-up approach tackling the middle class, which would eventually help profuse know-how in the country and maybe recover its administrative system, or at least the livelihood of a large percentage of the population. The risk for countries that have been subject to prolonged international help and sustain, like in the case of Lebanon, is that of propelling the “*victim mentality*”, and a consequent over-reliance on international aids and planning. In this view, what would it be the role of Italy in the long run? Time will tell, but its best practices could undoubtedly be trademarks for the whole international community.

## **2. Research question and objectives**

The main questions that guided the reasoning and the analysis of this thesis are as follows:

How has Italy been able to maintain a positive relationship with Lebanon amidst multiple and complex crises? Or, differently put, how have Italy’s contributions, direct or through comprehensive agreements made at the international level, been beneficial to Lebanon or Italy itself?

How has Italy's foreign policy and diplomacy been able to enter the Lebanese context and maintain an important role, even during “*compound crises*”? What are the key factors contributing to its effectiveness and its limitations?

In trying to answer the question and its derivatives, a historical-based analysis is applied. This thesis ultimately aims to assess the effectiveness of foreign policies and aid systems, to understand their functionality as well as their downfalls, shortcomings, and limitations to produce a groundwork for future policies, so as to not repeat the same errors, be functional for the international community programming, and for Italy, to focus on a more precise foreign policy with a regional approach, proper of a “*bridging country*”.

### **3. Scope and limitations**

The main limitations of this thesis lie on one side, on the perception of memory and consequentially history which in the Lebanese context has a strong identarian, fragmented, and subjective character. Needless to say, in the national schooling system, the last event of national history studied is the end of the French Mandate in 1946, and, on the other, the relentlessness distinguishing this country, both internally, regionally, and internationally.

From the historical and theoretical premises, this thesis will deepen its reasoning on the ground, when it comes to the Italian engagement in all its various set-ups. Albeit being quite general, due to the amplitude of projects and operations, the foreign policy directives are intertwined: lack of political stability would automatically hamper cooperation and development, and equally, if not more pivotal, a lack of security due to military deficiency would endanger the very maintenance of the mission in its entirety. Another aspect to bear in mind is the international principle of state sovereignty and non-intervention with whom every long-term planning on policies must be compliant.

### **4. Methodology**

The research methodology applied to examine the bilateral relations between Italy and Lebanon, necessarily lies on a historical foundation, archival sources, and official documents, notwithstanding newspaper articles, and other reports and documents made available to me by living in the researched country, Lebanon, for three months as an intern at the Italian Embassy, paired with additional qualitative research carried out through interviews. The recollection and chronology of events has been made possible thanks to National archives, historical and political papers, but also museums' infographics, and citizens' stories, which are a fundamental component considering the inability to agree on a shared past for Lebanese citizens. Historical data are then considered using various political scientists' and sociologists' lenses to schematize and better investigate the Lebanese context vis-à-vis how Italian foreign policy has been and

is carried out. From the objective directives, draft laws, projects, and attached data gathered by International agencies, related to the general crisis of the country, and Italian agencies, the testimonies of Italian representatives, from the diplomatic corps to AICS, ITA, and military staff (MIBIL and UNIFIL) have given this thesis a more concrete perspective on inadequacies, but especially, thanks to the acquired expertise (of around 4 years, which is the usual mandate time abroad for the Heads of the missions), next-steps and future perspectives for the upcoming years.

Since the Lebanese state lacks a proper national statistics agency, the data related to economic indicators, energy consumption, and population movements and transformations are available thanks to the work of international organizations and agencies on the ground (e.g., European Delegation, UN agencies, World Bank, IMF, IRENA, and international NGOs).

## **5. Literature review**

In order to ensure an impartial stance in the study, sources used come from Middle Eastern (mainly Lebanese), Western, particularly Italian, and international literature, as to be able to grasp as many points of view and inquiries on the topic, to explain the inherent dissimilarities and diverging points of view on the subject matter; from national and international community's papers; and from official governmental and institutional sources, that carefully detail policies and approaches taken.

The groundwork on the Lebanese context and the development of its relations with Italy will be mainly descriptive and qualitative, using a historical approach to draw attention to notable turning points. A more analytical part will rely on political science and thought, sociology, and IR theories, while the concluding chapters will be of a more experimental nature, presenting the data gathered from different Italian and International agencies operating on the field, paired with interviews, in order to properly delineate a provisional summary of best practices, and long-term objectives for policy recommendations.

The literature will be central in both the description and the assessment of historical crises and policies, offering a comprehensive inquiry that takes into account not just the more objective, sterile, description of the Western countries called upon by the United Nations, but also the more popular perspective overlooking Lebanese history and the scope of feasibility of

cooperation and engagement for Italy through the words of active parties, seeking deeper reasons and motives in strategic choices and stances.

The miscellaneous of literature which offered a main body of research and a sound basis to build on are the following books and articles:

- C. Ammoun, “*Ottobre-Libano (immagini di città)*” (2021) recalls the experiences of the October Revolution in 2019, the tension, the people everywhere in the streets, the general turmoil and the dispatch of the citizens against the false and corrupt political elite.
- S. Kassir, “*Liban: Un printemps inachevé*” (2006), a book fundamental to understanding that in the history of Lebanon, there have not been just movements, but indeed revolutions, or, at least, tentative revolutions that as such were longing for the overthrowing of the constructed order, favoring a new system.
- S. Kassir, “*Primavere- per una Siria democratica e un Libano indipendente*” (2006), the history of Lebanon is to be read as intrinsically related to the one of Syria.
- E. Khuri, A. Beydoun, “*Rappresentare il Mediterraneo: Lo sguardo libanese*”, this book puts forward the “*internal conflict*” of the Lebanese population, its heterogeneity, the confusion between looking inward, to the mountains, or outward, to the Mediterranean, in a perpetual search for a sense of belonging.
- E. Chiti, “*Libano- Frammenti di storia, società, cultura*” has been the backbone for this thesis, as it discusses the fundamental questions on Lebanon, guiding then a personal reflection on such issues, e.g., the state within the international dynamics of the region, its politics and militarism between religious divisions, as well as its quest to find a comprehensive national identity, the civil war and civil movements viewed both internally and regionally.
- B. Rima, “*Trilogia di Beirut*”, which is a graphic novel, along the line of “*Persepolis*” by Marjane Satrapi, in between documentary representation of Beirut and fiction, describes the city, its problems (embodied by metaphors), from the protest movements of the 1960s to those of today, from the ideals that once animated the youth to the present disenchantment, offering an intimate review of the recent history of Lebanon and challenging the reader to reflect on the dreams and hopes of revolts.
- L. Trombetta, “*Negoziazione e potere in Medio Oriente- Alle radici dei conflitti in Siria e dintorni*” (2022), as Kassir’s book, offers a space for reflection on the Syrian Crisis

and its interconnectedness to the Lebanese reality, it is indispensable to be aware of the complexities of the regional context, its different facets, to then produce a reliable analysis.

Regarding the theoretical analysis of Italian foreign policy and generally of foreign policy and diplomacy formation, those additional books and articles have been part of the groundwork for the historical research of Chapters 1 and 2:

- Luciano Monzali, Paolo Soave, “*Italy and the Middle East. Geopolitics, Dialogue and Power during the Cold War*” (2021) for the historical aspects of Italy’s foreign policy line followed in the Middle East and “enlarged Mediterranean”.
- Emilio Diodato, Federico Niglia, “*L’Italia e la politica internazionale. Dalla Grande Guerra al (dis-)ordine globale*” (2019), a small manual that concisely describes the internal diatribe when collocating the Italian foreign policy within one or another sphere, between the European, the American-Atlantic and the Mediterranean one.
- Elisabetta Brighi, “*Foreign Policy, Domestic Politics and International Relations. The case of Italy*”, (2013) puts forward a theory of multicausality to explain the decisions that have been taken throughout history by Italy in shaping its international objectives, between external and internal causes.
- Emilio Diodato, Raffaele Marchetti, “*Manuale di politica estera italiana*” (2023), a handbook, that provides a systematic overview of the main aspects of Italian foreign policy, policy formulation, and decision-making, but also a foundation for debates and different perspectives in a period of international transition that increasingly demands adequate knowledge of our country's action in Europe and the world.

# Chapter 1

## Recollecting Lebanon: from state formation to compound crises

The Republic of Lebanon's history is, as many other Levantine countries, a complex miscellaneous of centuries' worth of occurrences, exchanges, and influences. Already its location is emblematic to have a first insight into how entangled its history is to that of the region, to its complexity and richness. Situated in the Middle Eastern region (West Asia), on the shore of the Mediterranean Sea, bordering north and east with Syria and south with Israel, Lebanon shared its early stages of state formation with its neighboring states, particularly Syria (Greater Lebanon) until the declaration of independence in 1943, that three after would have created the basis of the country as it is known nowadays- the "*National Pact*".

Through every paper analyzing Lebanon's development and current situation, and interviews with experts and guides on site carried out for this thesis, the answer was always the same: Lebanon, its past, present, and future, cannot be understood if first there is an acknowledgment of the intertwining instances, between internal, regional, and international actors which confront, cooperate and fight one another.

This chapter sets out a thorough trip on Lebanon's statehood's beginnings and development, an anamnesis looking at key moments and significant occasions that have influenced the country's identity and character.<sup>1</sup> Lebanon is inherently hard to describe and depict, even when dealing with the intrinsic objectivity that is proper to history: memory has a too strong impact, and this will be seen especially in the description of the Civil War.

The state has always been transitioning, a history marked by "*periods*" of peace and of war not just since its independence, when France declared the end of its mandate over the country in 1946, but since its early history as a land of conquest. When it was freed, the last time, Lebanon found itself in a vacuum of power, as many other post-colonial countries, an aporia crystalized in the National Pact which put the country out of the label "*Western*" or "*Eastern*"<sup>2</sup> but to understand how the country moved on from there, it is important to track back its origins, its background, disentangling the complex tapestry that laid the foundation for its modern identity, from the Phoenicians to the Ottomans, those threads of Lebanon's rich historical fabric.

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<sup>1</sup> Much historical information has been gathered through the "Alternative Political Tour" of Beirut, carried out by the organization "Alternative Beirut". <https://www.alternative-beirut.com/tours-1/alternative-political-tour>

<sup>2</sup> Elena Chiti, "Libano. Frammenti di storia, societa', cultura" (Mesogea: Messina, 2012)

## 1.1 The birth of a nation

The Phoenician city-states, famous for their maritime trade and cultural achievements, flourished along the Mediterranean coast during the early history of Lebanon; the state is indeed geographically situated within the central-northern region of the Canaanite city-states, the ancestral descendants of the Phoenician civilization, throughout the Bronze Age. The area has been under the dominion of several empires in its ancient history: the Egyptian, Assyrian, Babylonian, Achaemenid Persian, Hellenistic, Roman, and Sasanian Persian empires.

Archaeological findings from Byblos<sup>3</sup>, a city in the North of Lebanon, provide compelling evidence of an early population, around 5000 BC making it one of the earliest towns with a continuous history of human habitation. The vestiges of ancient houses, characterized by crushed limestone flooring, rudimentary weaponry, and burial jars, unearthed, provide evidence of the Neolithic and Chalcolithic fishing cultures that inhabited the Mediterranean Sea shoreline more than 7,000 years ago.

The Phoenicians, renowned for their maritime expertise, expanded their influence across the Mediterranean over the first millennium BC. Together with Byblos, Sidon, and Tyre were the Phoenician dominant urban centers.<sup>4</sup>

Cyrus the Great, in the year 539 BC, integrated the towns of Phoenicia into the Persian Achaemenid Empire, afterwards the Phoenician city-states were conquered subsequently to the assault of Tyre in the year 332 BC, into Alexander the Great's Empire.

The Roman Empire later incorporated these city-states, laying the groundwork for the metropolitan centers and infrastructure we see today.

In the year 64 BC, the Roman military commander Pompey the Great successfully extended the Roman Republic by annexing the territory of Syria. Subsequently, the aforementioned area underwent division into two Imperial Provinces under the reign of the Roman Empire. These provinces were known as Coele Syria and Phoenice, with the latter including the territory that corresponds to modern-day Lebanon.

These early encounters with many cultures and civilizations provide the historical foundation for Lebanon's cosmopolitan character, in particular, the tension between feeling connected to

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<sup>3</sup> The city is designed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

<sup>4</sup> Sanford Holst and Antoine Khoury Harb Ph.D. "Phoenicians: Lebanon's Epic Heritage", (Santorini Publishing, 2021)

the Mediterranean heritage, and the Sea, or to the mountains, and the ancient civilizations that made up ancient Syria.<sup>5</sup>

This is not just an issue related to antiquity, it is necessary to tackle it in view of present days to understand the country, and its refusal, being total or partial, of any Islamic or pan-Arabic ideal: an autonomous Lebanon from whomever. As we will see, the idea consolidated in contemporary ages due to the contingencies brought about by the Civil War and the beginning of the Syrian War.

Lebanon identifies itself as the embodiment, the continuation of the old Phoenicia, which thanks to its tolerance and pluralism was able to open and maintain contacts with the Arab culture, scientific discoveries, art, music... and Islam. There is a dichotomy between the sea and the mountains, between the horizon and the shelter provided by the two. M. Chiha, one of the fathers of the Lebanese Constitution, was a convinced Mediterranean, and he, throughout all his life, advocated for the connection to the Sea and its history *“that there is a soul, a Mediterranean sensibility and that we Lebanese are, not strangers to this flame, to this fervor (...) Arab civilization claims us and we claim it,”* but *“the Mediterranean is our vital climate, our lake.”*<sup>6</sup>

The plurality is an intrinsic quality to both the Arab world, and the Mediterranean, which represents both a source of extreme prosperity, as well as of perils. It is possible to reiterate that even as it poured most of its population onto the coast, modern Lebanon has to this day tenaciously refused to assume its maritime identity entirely. But it is nevertheless, unquestionably, a Mediterranean country. It is so insofar as the Mediterranean is not only the Sea. Being a small country, the Mountain is too close to the Sea not to capitulate to the enchanted blue horizon.<sup>7</sup>

During the first propagation of Christianity, the present-day territory of Lebanon, along with Syria and a significant portion of Anatolia, emerged as a prominent hub of the Christian religion inside the Roman Empire. In the late 4th and early 5th century, an individual called Maron founded a monastic institution in the vicinity of Mount Lebanon, a Mediterranean mountain range. This tradition emphasized the significance of monotheism and discipline. The teachings of Maron were disseminated to the Lebanese populace in the area by the adherents

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<sup>5</sup> E. Khuri A. Beydoun “Rappresentare il Mediterraneo: Lo sguardo libanese”, trad. Elisabetta Bartuli, Giuliana Gregorio, (Mesogea, 2022)

<sup>6</sup> Hartman, Michelle, and Alessandro Olsaretti. ""The First Boat and the First Oar": Inventions of Lebanon in the Writings of Michel Chiha." *Radical History Review* 86 (2003): 37-65. [muse.jhu.edu/article/42884](https://muse.jhu.edu/article/42884)

<sup>7</sup> E. Khuri A. Beydoun “Rappresentare il Mediterraneo: Lo sguardo libanese”, trad. Elisabetta Bartuli, Giuliana Gregorio, (Mesogea, 2022)



of the monastic order. The individuals adhering to the Christian faith in question eventually were recognized as Maronites, and subsequently relocated to mountainous regions as a means of evading religious oppression imposed by the Roman government.

The Sassanid Persians had control over the region for ten years, spanning from 619 to 629, among the prolonged series of conflicts known as the Roman–Persian Wars.

In the 7th century, the Arab Muslims successfully invaded Syria, creating a new political order to replace prior rulers. Despite the official dominance of Islam and the Arabic language throughout this new rule, the conversion of the general inhabitants from Christianity and the Syriac language occurred gradually. Despite the succession of rulers over Lebanon and Syria, the Maronite minority has successfully maintained a significant level of autonomy.

The Lebanese highlands, due to their relative remoteness, functioned as a sanctuary throughout periods of religious and political turmoil in the Levant. The mountains exhibited a significant presence of many religious beliefs, with the coexistence of several established sects and faiths, including but not limited to Maronites, Druze, Shiite Muslims, Ismailis, Alawites, and Jacobites.

The development of the Druze faith may be traced back to the 11th century when it originated as a distinct branch within the Shia Islam tradition. The emerging religious movement garnered a significant following throughout the southern region of Mount Lebanon, indeed, until the early 14th century, that part of Lebanon was under the governance of feudal families belonging to the Druze community. Meanwhile, the Maronite population exhibited a progressive expansion in the northern region of Mount Lebanon.

In the 11th century, after the conquest of Roman Anatolia by the Muslim Turks, the Byzantine Empire sent a plea to the Pope in Rome, seeking aid. The outcome included a sequence of military conflicts that came to be known as the Crusades, initiated by the Franks (the French) hailing from Western Europe, with the objective of regaining control over the previously held Byzantine Christian regions in the Eastern Mediterranean, particularly Syria and Palestine (the Levant). The First Crusade achieved a temporary establishment of the Kingdom of Jerusalem and the County of Tripoli as states adhering to Roman Catholic Christianity along the coastal regions. The crusader powers exerted a lasting influence on the area, although with limited authority since the territory eventually reverted to complete Muslim dominion after a span of two centuries subsequent to the Mamluk invasion.

One of the enduring consequences of the Crusades in this particular area was the interaction between the Franks and the Maronites. In contrast to the majority of Christian communities in the Eastern Mediterranean region, who pledged their loyalty to Constantinople or other regional

patriarchs, the Maronites declared their allegiance to the Pope in Rome. Therefore, the Franks saw them as fellow adherents of the Roman Catholic faith. The earliest interactions between the Maronites and France and Italy resulted in long-lasting patronage for the Maronite community, persisting for centuries until the decline of the Crusader governments in the area. The incursion of the Ottoman Empire in Lebanon, and in the whole Levant, in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, marked a turning point in the crystallization of the state and its custom. Religious diversity was already a distinguishing feature, but it proved to be hard to find a way to establish a proper and functional relation with the imperial rule, that could encompass the different Peoples.

Given this, the Ottoman administration in order to be able to better control the miscellaneous cultures and religions split the country into its religious fractions, giving each and every sect some space for self-government. That represented a first step towards what then came to be known as the peculiar sectarian-based political system. Lebanon was thus geographically partitioned into many administrative regions, including Northern and Southern Mount Lebanon, Tripoli, Baalbek, Beqaa Valley, and Jabal Amil.

During the Mamluk and Ottoman Empire periods, the regions of Keserwan, Jabal Amel, and the Beqaa Valley were under the governance of Shia feudal families. Many urban centers remained prominent throughout the centuries, including Sidon, Tyre, Acre, Tripoli, and Beirut, among others. These towns were under the direct governance of the Muslim Caliphs, which led to a significant assimilation of the local population into Arab cultural practices and traditions.<sup>8</sup>

In the year 1590, Fakhr al-Din II assumed the position, as heir to Korkmaz, in the southern region of Mount Lebanon. He shortly and successfully solidified his position as the preeminent leader among the Druze community residing in the Shouf. In due course, he was designated as Sanjakbey, assuming the role of Governor over many Ottoman sub-provinces, expanding his dominion over a significant portion of Mount Lebanon and its adjacent coastal region, as a demonstration of his might by constructing a fortress that reached as far as Palmyra. His excessive actions ultimately beyond the tolerance of Ottoman Sultan Murad IV prompted him to dispatch a punitive expedition to arrest him in 1633. Fakhr al-Din II was sent to Istanbul, where he was thereafter incarcerated for two years, and ultimately, executed, in April 1635.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Collelo, Thomas, Library Of Congress. Federal Research Division, and Harvey Henry Smith. "Lebanon: A Country Study.", (Washington, D.C.: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1989) Pdf. <https://www.loc.gov/item/88600488/>

<sup>9</sup> James A. Reilly, "The Ottoman Cities of Lebanon: Historical Legacy and Identity in the Modern Middle East" (Library of Middle East History, 2016)

After the failure of Fakhr al-din's attempt to establish an autonomous state from Ottoman control, the Shihab family, of the Maronite faith, took power, reaching its apogee with Emir Bashir Shihab II, who was appointed governor by the Ottomans. Shihab came into conflict, however, between 1821 and 1825, with the rival Jumblatt family of the Druze faith, which he defeated by allying with Muhammad 'Ali's Egypt and France, thus laying the foundations for a sectarian conflict that would continue into the following century and lead to great massacres. The historical interaction between the Druze and Christian communities in Lebanon has generally been marked by harmonious coexistence and peaceful relations. However, there were periods of tension, especially during the 1860 Mount Lebanon civil war, in which inter-communal violence resulted in the unfortunate loss of approximately 10,000 Christian lives at the hands of the Druze community.

In the conflict, France and Egypt sided with the Maronites, England and the Ottoman Empire with the Druze, until the Ottoman government, with European agreement, limited the hegemony of the Maronites to a circumscribed territory of Jabal (Mount Lebanon), granting the Druze de facto power over the remaining interior territory.

In this same period, the Baalbek and Beqaa Valley, as well as Jabal Amel, had intermittent domination by several Shia feudal families, notably the Al Ali Alsagheer in Jabal Amel, who maintained their authority until 1865 when the Ottomans assumed direct governance over the area.

As we have seen, religious and sectarian identities began to progressively solidify in the 19th century, particularly in some families. While the Sunni Muslims looked to the larger Arab world for inspiration, the Maronite Christians built relationships with European countries with whom they felt closer due to their Phoenician and Roman past. Lebanese intellectuals started investigating their own identity as nationalism developed throughout the Middle East in an effort to overcome the sectarian barriers that were deeply ingrained in their culture.

The Emirate of Mount Lebanon, which had a duration of almost four centuries, was succeeded by the Mount Lebanon Mutasarrifate, following the implementation of the "*Règlement Organique*", a contract between European powers and the Ottoman Empire. Mount Lebanon Mutasarrifate, which existed from 1861 to 1918, was a territorial division of the Ottoman Empire that emerged as a result of the Tanzimat reform. It was referred to as "متصرفية جبل لبنان" in Arabic and "*Cebel-i Lübnan Mutasarrıflığı*" in Turkish. This self-governing region known as Mount, had great autonomy and a Christian *mutasarrıf*, or governor, in place, becoming identified as the "*homeland of the Maronites*", although it was supposed to implement a governing and social structure referred to as the "*Maronite-Druze dualism*".

## **1.2 The mandate shadow: a longed independence**

When the Ottoman Empire fell after World War I, and particularly with the 1916 Sykes-Picot Agreement, France was able through the arrangement achieved, on September 1, 1920, to carve out from its mandate over Syria, after the removal of various territories from the Province of Lebanon under the Moutasarrifiya regime, which was subsequently transferred to Syria, the territory of Greater Lebanon, having capital in Beirut, around the Maronite enclave, characterized by its Christian population, together with several Greek Orthodox enclaves, adding the coastal area and the Beqaa valley, inhabited mainly by Muslims, and Druze populations. During the initial period of 1920, the territorial jurisdiction of Lebanon was contended as a constituent of the Arab Kingdom of Syria. However, the Franco-Syrian War, leading to the defeat of the Arab forces and the surrender of the Hashemite rulers, ensued soon afterward the establishment of the Lebanese Republic by France on September 1, 1926. A constitution was ratified, giving the country a democratic makeup and a parliamentary form of governance. It marked a crucial turning point in the country's modern history, somehow setting in stone the divisions into ethnoreligious zones, which strengthened societal identities, but with a greater area and a more diversified population and later on, would become the foundation for the National Pact.

The mandate was characterized by periods of tension and dissent among the Lebanese population, who sought to preserve their cultural identity and aspiration for independence.

During the period of France's occupation by Germany, Lebanon achieved a certain degree of freedom. General Henri Dentz, as the Vichy High Commissioner for Syria and Lebanon, had significant influence in the process leading to the nation's attainment of independence. In 1941, the Vichy government granted Germany permission to transit aircraft and supplies via Syria, facilitating their deployment in Iraq to engage British troops. In response to concerns over Nazi Germany's potential acquisition of complete authority over Lebanon and Syria via exerting pressure on the vulnerable Vichy administration, the United Kingdom sent its military forces to Syria and Lebanon.

Following the cessation of hostilities in Lebanon, General Charles de Gaulle undertook a visit to the region. In response to mounting political pressures originating from both domestic and international sources, General de Gaulle decided to acknowledge the sovereignty of Lebanon. On the 26th of November, 1941, General Georges Catroux made a declaration stating that Lebanon would attain independence under the jurisdiction of the Free French administration. The year 1943 saw the conduction of elections, after which, on the 8th of November, the newly

formed Lebanese government decided to unilaterally terminate the mandate. The French responded to the establishment of the new administration by incarcerating its members. On 22 November 1943, the French government officials were freed in response to international pressure. The area was under Allied occupation until the conclusion of World War II, which marked also the cessation of the French mandate.<sup>10</sup>

Independence was recognized on November 22, 1943, and that opened a new chapter of great prosperity so that Lebanon became perhaps the main financial center of the Arab world between the 50s and 60s.

The National Pact's creation in 1943 was a significant turning point in Lebanon's struggle for independence.<sup>11</sup> This unofficial agreement established a system of power-sharing between the several religious groups, codifying in customary law the positions of President of the Republic for a Maronite Christian, Prime Minister for a Sunni Muslim, and Speaker of Parliament for a Shia Muslim. Although this setup was designed to prevent any one faction from dominating, it nevertheless ingrained sectarianism throughout the political system. The Christian demographic majority thus obtained was contested by the Muslims, until agreements established during the 1920s, and confirmed by the National Pact (1943), which divided political power among Christians, Sunnis, and Shiites, although with an advantage in favor of the former.

The final withdrawal of French soldiers occurred in December 1946.

Lebanon, albeit being a newly-born state, was at the forefront of the exodus succeeding the Nakba, during the first Palestinian-Israeli, indeed, in 1948, four official camps were established: Burj el Barajneh housed Burj el Barajneh, which housed approximately 19,526 refugees and was located in the Mount Lebanon region; Ein el-Hilweh located in the Saida province in South Lebanon, was the largest camp with approximately 44,133 refugees; also in

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<sup>10</sup> The termination of the mandate was brought about by the pronouncement of the obligatory authority, as well as the newly established states, asserting their independence. This was then followed by a gradual and complete acknowledgment of their sovereignty by other nations, ultimately resulting in their official inclusion into the United Nations. Following Art. 78 of the Charter of the United Nations, the condition of guardianship was terminated for all member states: the trusteeship system was no longer applicable to territories that have attained membership in the United Nations, moreover the relationship among these territories should be founded on the concept of sovereign equality.

<sup>11</sup> Luca Tatarelli, "SPECIALE. Libano: nel marzo di 80 anni fa la lunga marcia verso l'indipendenza. La storia dei rapporti politici interni ed esterni" (Report Difesa, Geopolitica & Sicurezza, 2023), via: <https://www.reportdifesa.it/speciale-libano-nel-marzo-di-80-anni-fa-la-lunga-marcia-verso-lindipendenza-la-storia-dei-rapporti-politici-interni-ed-esterni/>

the South Lebanon region, but in the province of Tyre, was the el-Buss camp with 9,840 refugees; and finally, the Wavell camp with 7,357 people and located in the Beqaa Valley.<sup>12</sup>

The influx of Palestinian refugees had destabilizing effects on several nations, but Lebanon has seen the most significant and enduring impacts. While the absolute numbers of Palestinian refugees during the initial wave of displacement in 1948-1949 were higher in certain regions such as Jordan, Lebanon received a significantly larger proportion of refugees relative to its territorial area and population. The administration of Palestinian immigration in Lebanon was further hampered by the unique confessional makeup of the country. The delicate equilibrium between Christian and Muslim populations would have been significantly disrupted by the influx of mostly Muslim Sunni Palestinians. The issue pertaining to refugees resulting from the 1948 war posed a significant threat to the viability of Lebanon as an example of peaceful cohabitation among several religious groups.

Moreover, Palestinian refugees in the country such as George Habash and Wadi'a Hadad played significant roles in the establishment between 1949 and 1950 of the radical and pan-Arab movement known as *Kawmuyun al-'Arab* that would be involved in violent resistance actions against Israel in the subsequent years. At this point, the history of the newly born country seems to be prosperous, albeit hard when dealing with securing internal stability due to the massive Palestinian refugees' inflow; the relative ease of those years was destined to degenerate into one of the bloodiest and most intricate wars in the area.

### **1.3 Echoes of conflict: the Civil War**

The fragile balance achieved lasted until 1958, when the founding of the United Arab Republic, a relatively short-lived political union between Egypt and Syria (until the 1961 Syrian coup d'état), triggered the revolt of the Muslim population, which was quelled by U.S. intervention in the country under the Eisenhower Doctrine. The revision of the constitutional compact demanded by the Muslims based on the changed demographic balance was denied by the Maronite Christians. Muslims' sense of privation of full representation in the government and

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<sup>12</sup> In later years, the refugee camps of Baddawi, Burj al-Barajna, Dbaya, Mar Elyas, and Miyye Miyye were established. Dikwana, Jisr al-Basha, Nabatiyya, Sabra and Rashidiyya. To date, Lebanon has 12 refugee camps with a total of approximately 500,000 Palestinian refugees registered with UNRWA.

political makeup of the country is one of the issues still haunting Lebanon in contemporary times.<sup>13</sup>

Early 20th-century political unrest in Lebanon saw the creation of a developing national identity. Intellectuals who emphasized the nation's cultural and historical ties, like Khalil Gibran and Michel Chiha, pushed for the creation of a distinct Lebanese identity. The country's energetic capital, Beirut, developed as a center for intellectual interaction, promoting a multicultural and pluralistic society.<sup>14</sup>

Unable to cope with the new developments affecting the Middle East since the 1950s (Cold War, the birth of Israel and the Palestinian refugee problem, political Islam, etc.), the National Pact will find itself at the center of the political, social, or inter-communal fractures that the country will experience with each crisis.

Tensions escalated after the 1967 Arab-Israeli war and with the so-called “*Black September*”, the Jordanian Civil War, which shifted the bases of Palestinian guerrilla warfare to Lebanon, violating the sovereignty of the Lebanese state and creating conflicts within the governmental structure and the national army, which was destined to split into its sectarian components.

Although Lebanon had not participated militarily in the Six-Day War, and indeed was the only country bordering Israel to emerge from that war with its territory intact, 1967 represented a disaster of enormous proportions. The Arab rout, Nasser's resignation rejected by the population outcry, and above all the exacerbation of the Palestinian refugee problem were all elements that helped lay the groundwork for the country's subsequent disintegration; for Lebanon, what Ammoun calls “*le temps des déchirures*” had now begun.<sup>15</sup>

It was precisely because of this sense of brotherhood mixed with helplessness and a certain shame at having been the great absentees in the 1967 war that led to an increase in support, even in official discourse, for the Palestinian struggle. The speeches became increasingly fiery and references to a dutiful revenge were increasingly frequent.

It was precisely from 1967 that the factual condition that has been referred to as “*the state within the state*” would emerge more and more clearly: Lebanon would increasingly fall prey to the Palestinian commandos, their decisions, and their war against Israel. It was precisely in

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<sup>13</sup> Melhem Chaoul, “Dalla politica al militarismo. Maroniti e Sciiti”, in Elena Chiti, “Libano. Frammenti di storia, società, cultura” (Messina: Mesogea, 2012)

<sup>14</sup> Robert G. Rabil, “Religion, National Identity, and Confessional Politics in Lebanon. The Challenge of Islamism” (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 9-16

<sup>15</sup> A. R. La Fortezza “Un’amicizia italo-araba. Italia e Libano negli anni Sessanta e Settanta”, in “Tra diplomazia e petrolio. Aldo Moro e la politica italiana in Medio Oriente (1963-1978)” (Bari: Caccucci Editore, Bari, 2018) pp. 155-199

the late 1960s that the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon began to organize militarily and increasingly carry out a series of incursions into Israeli territory having southern Lebanon as their territorial base.

On December 28, 1968, Israel responded militarily to the Palestinian incursions by bombing Beirut International Airport.

An impressive and rapid escalation of tension in Lebanon burst between the *fedayn* and the Lebanese army; in this difficult situation, many of the Arab countries began political-diplomatic action against Lebanon accused of wanting to liquidate the Palestinian resistance. Within this framework in an exchange of letters with Helou, President Nasser offered to mediate between Lebanon and the PLO; the mediation was accepted and on November 3, 1969, the Cairo Accords signed by Gamal Abdel Nasser, Yasser Arafat, and Lebanese General, Emile al-Boustani, were signed. Even though these agreements were concerned with reaffirming Lebanon's sovereignty, they concurrently legitimized the armed presence of the Palestinians and the possibility for them to use the south of the country to launch attacks against Israel.

In 1971, the resistance would finally move to Lebanon: thereafter at the 8<sup>th</sup> session of the Palestinian National Council, the Palestinian leadership confirmed the decision of moving their General Staff and intelligence services to Beirut.

Within this framework, in 1975, the civil war began.

Following an assault on a Christian bus in Beirut on April 13, 1975, an armed battle between Christian militias known as "*Lebanese Phalanxes*" and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), began. A period of violent conflicts and retaliation started at that point. Syria intervened<sup>16</sup> alongside the Maronites and against the presence of the PLO, the target of Israeli reprisals for attacks from Lebanese soil. An initial truce, reached in 1976, was broken by the intervention of Christian militias and the beginning of a long series of political assassinations. In 1978, Israel invaded Lebanon for the first time, occupying the area south of the Litani River, which it would hold until 2000. The Camp David Accords in the same year instead pushed Syria to support the alliance of Sunnis, Druze, and PLO, abandoning the Maronites, who found support in the Israelis. The years up to 1982 saw intensified clashes between Syrians and Maronites and attacks and retaliation by Palestinians and Israelis, while among the Shiite population, which had until then remained on the sidelines of the conflict, Hezbollah was born on the back of the 1979 Iranian revolution, adding extremist terrorism to the list of issues to be

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<sup>16</sup> Syrian military and intelligence forces remained in Lebanon for about 30 years from 1976 to 2005 as part of what was formally called Syrian "tutelage" in Lebanon and is instead described by many as foreign and associated with the Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon (1978-2000).



faced. In 1982, Israeli Minister M. Begin ordered the invasion of Lebanon, to root out its Palestinian guerrilla bases. An Israeli incursion was carried out, after intensifying PLO assaults, to assist Lebanese troops in pushing out the Palestinian army. The Israeli army arrived in Beirut, besieged, and bombed for weeks, until the intervention by the United Nations and an international peacekeeping force, a multinational force comprising American, French, and Italian contingents (joined in 1983 by a British contingent) dispatched to monitor the PLO's escape. The civil war resurfaced in September 1982, after the killing of Lebanese President Bachir Gemayel, an Israeli ally, and subsequent combat, together with it, numerous sectarian killings happened in other refugee camps.<sup>17</sup>

One example is the Sabra and Shatila massacre, which took place between September 16<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>, 1983, when the Lebanese Forces militia, commanded by a Maronite Christian Lebanese right-wing party led by Elie Hobeika, killed between 460 and 3,500 people, predominantly Palestinians and Lebanese Shiites, within the camps.

Following a deadly bombing strike the previous year, the multinational army withdrew in the spring of 1984. They were able to achieve a cessation of the bombing and the protected evacuation of Palestinians and Syrians from Beirut. As Israeli troops withdrew, Amine Gemayel, the Maronite leader architect of the alliance with the Israelis, and leader of the Christian militia, became president of Lebanon.

When its term came to a conclusion in the late 1980s, the Lebanese pound fell. By the end of 1988, one US dollar was worth £L500. As a result, the legal minimum wage was just \$17 per month.

The Israel's withdrawal and the expulsion of the PLO, civil war flared up again between and within the different communities with the direction of Syria, which remained the only outside force on the field. The climax of the conflict was reached when, in 1988, A. Gemayel gave the post of prime minister to Maronite General M. Aoun, violating the rules of the National Pact and triggering the reaction of the Sunnis and Syria. The Arab League's intervention succeeded in bringing all parties together for an agreement, which was signed in 1989 in Taif<sup>18</sup>, and

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<sup>17</sup> Anis 'Abd al-Kader, Review of Richard A. Gabriel, "*The 1982 Invasion of Lebanon*", *Journal of Palestine Studies* 16, no. 1 (1986), pp. 140–142. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2537029>

<sup>18</sup> These accords were aimed at bringing an end to the Lebanese civil war. The objective was to enhance and reinforce Lebanese sovereignty and authority in the region of South Lebanon, which was formerly under Israeli occupation. The agreements resulted in a redistribution of power, shifting it from the Presidency to a cabinet that was structured to ensure equal representation between Muslims and Christians. The agreement encompassed a bilateral security arrangement between Syria and Lebanon, aimed at facilitating the departure of Israeli soldiers from Lebanese soil. Additionally, the agreement stipulated the imperative disarming and dissolution of all militias, whether Lebanese and non-Lebanese in nature. (Further information available at: <https://peacemaker.un.org/lebanon-taifaccords89>)

established the rebalancing of the parliamentary representation of the communal components, assigning more weight to Muslims.

The last act of the civil war was Aoun's uprising against the terms of the agreement; this was suppressed by Syria, which remained in Lebanon until 2005, agreeing to withdraw only after the wave of popular demonstrations (the so-called Cedar Revolution) following the assassination of Prime Minister R. Hariri.

## 1.4 Unceasing revolutions

The conclusion of the civil war ushered in a period of “*healing*” and economic growth but was accompanied by persistent tensions that lasted since 1990.

Not movements but revolutions constantly revamped because they remained and still are incomplete, this is indeed the reality of Lebanon, a tangible one, daily.<sup>19</sup>

Since its end, the country has been trying to rebuild national political institutions ravaged by sectarianism and asserted its sovereignty, a period characterized by both economic boom and subsequent collapse, against the interference of Syria and Israel, but also, internally, against the militarization of the Shiite southern regions imposed by Hezbollah; the latter, in the summer of 2006, attacked Israel, provoking a new conflict, during which the Israeli army again briefly invaded Lebanon, and bombed Beirut. The 2009 elections, won by the alliance of anti-Syrian, Sunni, and Christian parties, confirmed Lebanon's evolution toward national unity.

The confessional political system, despite occasional setbacks resulting from disagreements among the three main politico-religious groups (Christian, Sunni, and Shiite), has shown resilience throughout time.<sup>20</sup>

### a. *The Cedar Revolution*

The year 2005 marked a significant turning point in the modern history of Lebanon, with the emergence of the Cedar Revolution. The assassination on February 14, 2005, of Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri started a, at first, non-violent popular protest movement, the event served as a trigger for the subsequent explosion, a catalyst, of extensive public indignation and unrest all over Lebanon, and particularly in Beirut, the heart of the Government and its elite. Ghassan Tuani defines it as “*Beirut’s Spring*”<sup>21</sup>, years before the Arab Spring took place.

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<sup>19</sup> S. Kassir, “Liban : un printemps inachevé”, (Sindbad / Actes Sud, 2006)

<sup>20</sup> Bassel F. Salloukh “The State of Consociationalism in Lebanon, Nationalism and Ethnic Politics”, (Taylor&Francis Online, 2023), DOI: 10.1080/13537113.2023.2187970

<sup>21</sup> Photography project published by Dar An-Nahar and Quantum Communications, Beirut, Lebanon, 2005

Individuals representing a wide range of religious and political affiliations participated in public demonstrations in Beirut and other prominent urban centers in Lebanon. The population was divided between those that participated in the demonstration in Riadh el-Solh Square on March 8, 2005, to thank Syria for its fraternal and indispensable support for Lebanon, this included Hezbollah, the Amal Movement, and other political factions that shared ideological alignment with Syria and Iran; and those, part of the opposition, spearheaded by prominent individuals such as Saad Hariri and supported by Western nations, gathered for a series of street protests that began in the aftermath of the assassination and ended on March 14, 2005, in Martyrs' Square to demand the withdrawal of the Syrian army from Lebanon.

The extraordinary spontaneous but organized '*civic*' reaction to the opposition's call culminated next to the Government's buildings and was one of the greatest protests in Lebanon's history. The protest movement exhibited notable cohesion transcending sectarian divisions and a resolute commitment to effecting political change via mostly nonviolent methods, exerting decisive pressure on the Syrian government.

The Cedar Revolution reached its apex with Syria's declaration of withdrawing its troops from Lebanon at the end of April, ending the '*Pax Siriana*'.<sup>22</sup> The occurrence signified the conclusion of approximately thirty years of Syrian military occupation in Lebanon and represented a notable transformation in the nation's political environment.

The departure of the Syrian militia generated several social and political phenomena that derived further transformation for the social fabric: portions of the population successfully reconciliated and took up a public space, a stronger sense of community was thought to be born; moreover the defeat of the Syrian regime's terror climate imposed on Lebanon was perceived as a sort of second independence, that meant also the rediscovery and re-appropriation of downtown Beirut, which would be a recurrent theme also in the October Revolution of 2019.

The two movements were not simply rallies of people demanding either resistance against the disarmament of Hezbollah and the maintenance of strong diplomatic relations with Syria, or the attainment of Lebanon's autonomy from Syrian sway, the demilitarisation of Hezbollah, and the implementation of democratic changes, they formed a growing political polarization, with ascending and declining coalitions. They changed their dynamics throughout time, characterized by intermittent phases of collaboration and conflict, playing a significant role in

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<sup>22</sup> Ziad Majeb, "Indipendenza, interessi comunitari e conflitti regionali: il Libano delle mobilitazioni", in Elena Chiti, "Libano. Frammenti di storia, società, cultura" (Mesogea: Messina, 2012), pp.65-70

impacting the political trajectory of Lebanon and in exacerbating the nation's prevailing state of instability. As political projects, they were two warping prisms of Lebanese reality.<sup>23</sup>

Various international entities, including both regional powers like Iran and Saudi Arabia, as well as Western governments, have had substantial influence in determining the attitudes and policies adopted by these alliances. A crucial aspect of the Cedar Revolution is indeed its notable reception of worldwide recognition. The United States and France assumed pivotal roles in mobilizing the international community to exert pressure on Syria, compelling the withdrawal of its soldiers from Lebanon. The provision of worldwide support served to strengthen the determination of the demonstrators and played a significant role in the ultimate triumph of the campaign. It is noteworthy to mention that Resolution 1559 of the United Nations Security Council, which was adopted in September 2004, assumed a crucial role by advocating for the withdrawal of foreign military troops from Lebanon and the demilitarisation of all armed groups, including Hezbollah.

***b. 2006-2008: wars and unrest***

On July 12, 2006, Hezbollah initiated a sequence of rocket assaults and incursions into Israeli territory, resulting in the deaths of three Israeli troops and the detention of two further soldiers. The Israeli government retaliated by using airstrikes, artillery fire, and initiating a ground invasion in the southern region of Lebanon, therefore instigating the 2006 Lebanon War. The cessation of hostilities was formally established via the enactment of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1701 on the 14th of August 2006, therefore mandating a cessation of armed activities. The confrontation resulted in the loss of life for a total of 1,191 Lebanese individuals and 160 Israelis. The southern suburb of Beirut suffered significant damage as a result of bombings conducted by the Israeli military.

During the period from 2006 to 2008, a sequence of demonstrations organized by factions expressing opposition to Prime Minister Fouad Siniora, who was aligned with Western interests, advocated for the establishment of a government representing national unity. This proposed government would provide mostly Shia opposition organizations the authority to exercise veto power. Following the conclusion of Émile Lahoud's presidential tenure in October 2007, the opposition declined to cast their votes in favor of a successor until a power-sharing agreement was established, resulting in a vacancy in the presidential office inside Lebanon. That year, the Nahr al-Bared refugee camp became a significant '*hot spot*', which

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<sup>23</sup> Elena Chiti, "Libano. Frammenti di storia, società, cultura" (Mesogea: Messina, 2012)

pitted the Lebanese Army against Fatah al-Islam. Albeit international commitment, the allocation of financial resources for the rehabilitation of the region has experienced delays in its realization.

Soon after the 2008 war initiated on 9 May 2008, when Hezbollah and Amal (the parliamentary opposition) troops took control of Western Beirut, employing its militias as a means of dissent, in response to two governmental decisions, one of them being the announcement of the unlawfulness of Hezbollah's communications network. The clashes progressively deteriorate throughout the nation, culminating in open armed confrontation. The violence was condemned by the Lebanese government as an attempted coup. The cessation of hostilities was achieved by the signing of the Doha Agreement on May 21, 2008. Following a period of political stagnation lasting 18 months, the conclusion of the agreement resulted in Michel Suleiman assuming the presidency and the formation of a national unity administration. If on one side, the Doha Accords effectively brought an end to the dispute, preventing the outbreak of a civil war, on the other, it put an end, once again to the democratic process, mandating the formation of a government of national unity by the majority: the consolidation of power leads to the emergence of oligarchic systems. This government gave the opposition the power to use a veto. The accord was a triumph for the opposition groups, as the administration acquiesced to all of their primary requests.

The national unity government experienced a breakdown in early January 2011 as a result of escalating tensions arising from the Special Tribunal for Lebanon. This tribunal was anticipated to bring charges against members of Hezbollah concerning the death of Hariri. In a recent development, Najib Mikati, the candidate of the Hezbollah-led March 8 Alliance, has been chosen as the Prime Minister of Lebanon by the parliament. Consequently, he has been entrusted with the task of establishing a new administration. Hassan Nasrallah, the head of Hezbollah, reiterated that the death of Hariri was attributed to Israel, albeit it was thought that Hezbollah formulated strategies aimed at assuming control of the nation in the event that the Special Tribunal for Lebanon were to issue an indictment against its members.

### *c. The Syrian Civil War: the spillover effect*

The offspring of the Syrian civil war in 2011 has significant ramifications for Lebanon owing to its geographical closeness to Syria. Lebanon saw a substantial surge in the arrival of Syrian refugees, resulting in considerable pressure on the nation's resources and infrastructure.

In 2012, the Syrian civil war had a potential risk of extending into Lebanon, hence resulting in an escalation of sectarian violence and armed confrontations between Sunni and Alawite

factions specifically in the city of Tripoli. Based on data provided by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the population of Syrian refugees residing in Lebanon saw a notable surge, rising from around 250,000 individuals in the first months of 2013 to a staggering 1,000,000 individuals by the latter part of 2014.<sup>24</sup> In 2013, the Lebanese Forces Party, the Kataeb Party, and the Free Patriotic Movement expressed apprehensions about the potential erosion of Lebanon's sectarian-oriented political structure due to the increasing number of Syrian refugees entering the country. The registration process for Syrian refugees was temporarily halted by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) on 6 May 2015, in response to a formal request made by the government of Lebanon. In February 2016, the Lebanese government entered into an agreement with the European Union, the Lebanon Compact, which allocated a minimum of €400 million in assistance to refugees and needy Lebanese individuals. According to the government's estimations as of October 2016, the nation is now accommodating around 1.5 million individuals from Syria.<sup>25</sup>

The refugee crisis has a significant economic effect. Lebanon saw a surge in unemployment rates, heightened rivalry within the labor market, and a deterioration in economic prospects for both the native Lebanese population and Syrian refugees. The prevailing circumstances put significant strain on the nation's already vulnerable economy.

Moreover, the refugee crisis has further intensified social and political tensions inside the country of Lebanon. The situation exacerbated sectarian divisions and elicited apprehensions over security and the possibility of radicalization. Although the international community offered humanitarian assistance, the job of effectively resolving the intricate and enduring issues associated with the integration of refugees remained a significant undertaking.

The Shatila refugee camp, situated on the periphery of Beirut, reached a population exceeding 20,000 individuals, including both Syrian and Palestinian refugees.

#### *d. The Arab Spring*

Although Lebanon was not one of the main scenarios of the Arab Spring, a series of political and social movements that unfolded in many Arab nations starting in late 2010, it was not impervious to the reverberations of the regional turmoil. The Arab Spring served as a source

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<sup>24</sup>Leo Dobbs, "The number of Syrian refugees in Lebanon passes the 1 million mark", UNHCR global website, April 2014, <https://www.unhcr.org/news/stories/number-syrian-refugees-lebanon-passes-1-million-mark>

<sup>25</sup>"EU and Lebanon adopt partnership priorities and compact", Council of the EU, Press release, November 2016, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/11/15/eu-lebanon-partnership/>

of inspiration and a model for civic engagement among the Lebanese populace, especially the younger generation, who were actively pursuing political transformation and the implementation of reforms, conscious of that *'failed intifada'* that took place a few years before.

Lebanese activists have effectively used social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter as strategic tools for the purpose of organizing demonstrations, disseminating information, and coordinating their collective efforts. The use of digital technologies facilitated the swift organization of demonstrators and the dissemination of the principles behind the Arab Spring movement throughout the nation of Lebanon.

This circulation of information was pivotal also in the establishment of important, catchy, slogans of protests, like the one of 2015, after the cessation of operations at the primary landfill facility inside the nation, which was the spark of the waste management crisis. The inception of the term "*everyone means everyone*," subsequently paved the way for the socio-political crash known as "*the people against the oligarchy*."

This fight against the rigid system began more pragmatically on May 8, 2016, when, during municipal elections, civil society entities presented themselves and their candidates' list, and the conventional political parties found themselves compelled to form alliances in order to secure victory in the city of Beirut council elections, necessitating collaboration against the civil society list.

#### ***e. The October Revolution, 2019***

In February 2019, eight months after the elections of 6 May 2018, a new government headed by Saad Hariri was formed, whose fate will be marked by an unprecedented economic crisis that from October 2019 will deeply affect the life of the country.

On 17 October 2019, a series of mass civil demonstrations commenced, initially sparked by proposed taxes on petrol, tobacco, and online phone calls via platforms like WhatsApp. A revival of protest movements from its near past referred to as the October Revolution or Thawra; it was distinguished by a burgeoning, bottom-up movement that aimed to tackle deep-seated political and economic challenges.

In the wake of these large spontaneous demonstrations, civil society generated an extra-parliamentary political opposition, evolving from protests into a nationwide denouncement of sectarian governance, an ailing economy, a liquidity crisis, high unemployment rates, pervasive corruption within the public sector, legislation perceived to protect the ruling elite from being held accountable, and the government's inability to deliver.

On November 19, 2019, a group of female demonstrators positioned themselves in a linear formation, effectively acting as a barrier between riot police and other protestors in Riad el Solh, Beirut.

The demonstrations in Lebanon precipitated a political crisis, leading to the resignation of Prime Minister Saad Hariri. In line with the sentiments expressed by the demonstrators, Hariri called for the formation of a cabinet composed of independent professionals, notwithstanding this, several politicians who were also in the spotlight during the demonstrations managed to retain their positions of authority. On the 19th of December 2019, the appointment of Hassan Diab, a former Minister of Education, as the next prime minister was announced. He was given the responsibility of assembling a new government. After its appointment, demonstrations, and instances of civil disobedience persisted: protesters were expressing their disapproval and criticism of his designation.

The October Revolution was characterized by a pervasive sense of disenchantment stemming from issues like corruption, economic stagnation, and governmental dysfunction. The involvement of the Lebanese youth in the demonstrations was important, as they effectively used social media platforms to coordinate and rally support. The reaction of the administration, characterized by efforts to quell the demonstrations via the use of coercive measures, served to intensify popular discontent and strengthen the resolve of the demonstrators. It brought about a notable shift in the realm of governance, having a profound impact on the political framework of the nation, highlighting the pressing need to tackle the longstanding issues deeply rooted inside Lebanon.<sup>26</sup>

## **1.5 Modern days compound crises: from the Beirut's Port explosion to nowadays<sup>27</sup>**

Lebanese politics, society, and economy are strongly marked by the conflicts and tensions that characterize the entire Middle East Region. In particular, Lebanon has been experiencing a deep economic crisis for years, aggravated by the chronic shortage of essential public services such as schools and health. Recently the economic crisis has been further amplified by the constant presence of about one and a half million Syrian citizens. According to the most

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<sup>26</sup> C. Ammoun "Ottobre-Libano (immagini di città)", trans. Caterina Pastura, ed. Elisabetta Bartuli, (Mesogea, 2021)

<sup>27</sup> The information pertaining the current situation of Lebanon are also part of a series of meeting of various nature, attended on behalf of the Italian Embassy in Lebanon, from May to August 2023.



accredited estimates in the last two years, following the Syrian crisis, about 200,000 Lebanese have joined the 250,000 who already lived below the poverty line, and 300,000, especially unskilled young people, have lost their jobs.

Two dates set the Lebanese crisis of the last two years: on 17 October 2019, when the financial law presented by the Hariri government based on further privatization (following 1990s Solidere's ideals) and new taxes unleashed the popular uprising that brought tens of thousands of people to the streets throughout the country; and on 4 August 2020, when an explosion at the port of Beirut, which is the primary one of the country, devastated the city causing more than 200 deaths, 7,000 injured and leaving hundreds of thousands of people temporarily homeless. The subsequent investigation revealed that the explosion was attributed to the hazardous storage of about 2,750 tonnes of ammonium nitrate in hangar No. 12, which was inadvertently ignited. Protests were promptly reignited in the aftermath of the explosion, leading to the subsequent resignation of Prime Minister Hassan Diab, who in January 2020 had succeeded Hariri's, and his government on August 10, 2020, which, however, remained in office in a caretaker role.

The Lebanese protest in the streets not only demanding the replacement of the ruling class, deemed corrupt and unable to meet the needs of an increasingly impoverished population (according to the World Bank estimates 45 percent of the population lives below the poverty line) but also the abolition of the confessional/consociational system that has always characterized and determined the political and social life of the country.

In recent years, the possibility of Lebanon's recovery has also been weighed down by the crisis in the state budget, which has motivated the widespread use of the national banking system and therefore the savings of the Lebanese who are being imposed increasingly unsustainable banking restrictions.

On 7 March 2020, the Lebanese government, with a foreign debt of almost 170% of the national GDP, declared the impossibility of meeting the deadline of an installment of Eurobonds of 1,2 billion USD, and shortly after the temporary suspension of all payments related to Eurobonds in USD.

These are the conditions that have for more than a year caused a dizzying devaluation of the Lebanese Lira against the US dollar on the black market, despite an official exchange rate of about 5 times lower than the exchange value.

In this scenario, the health crisis linked to the pandemic by Covid-19 with its heavy direct repercussions on the fragile health system and indirect on the production system, generates pressure on a system characterized by an increasingly fragile balance.<sup>28</sup>

With its complex geopolitical location between Syria and Israel, contemporary Lebanon is at the center of a contest that extends all the way to the more complex sociopolitical dynamics throughout the Middle East. The legacies of civil war, the various declinations of party alignments, and the massive influx of refugees are analyzed in an attempt to identify the elements of destabilization that have caused the profound changes to the country's ethno-religious balance. Attempts are made to trace the lineaments of political leadership, which has always been linked to confessional communitarianism and is progressively losing support, which the new protest movements hold responsible for the destruction of society and the economy, as well as for the unraveling of the country amid poverty, vulnerability, and marginalization. The very power expressed by Hezbollah is not shared by the majority of the population today, due to its growing militarism and controversial domestic and international policy choices. Thus, it seems that even the slightest change in the delicate regional balance could generate a new and more devastating internal conflict in Lebanon.<sup>29</sup>

The idea of “*compound crises*” became acknowledged recently after the COVID-19 crisis swept away the prior knowledge and state of preparedness modern states thought to have achieved in matters of preparation, prevention, and protection when dealing with emergencies. The convergence of ecological, social, and political dangers may give birth to compound crises when the combined effects surpass the mere summation of individual threats. The compound crises have the potential to significantly undermine the achievements in development by impeding the advancement toward poverty reduction and shared prosperity. The aforementioned repercussions are especially prominent in situations influenced by Fragility, Conflict, and Violence (FCV) since they restrict the ability of impacted populations to cope and intensify their susceptibility to subsequent compound threats. Consequently, the consequences and reactions to specific catastrophes have the potential to worsen pre-existing vulnerabilities associated with Fragile and Conflict-Affected Environments (FCV), thus amplifying the prolonged vulnerability to compounded risks.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>“Libano- contesto”, Agenzia Italiana per la Cooperazione allo Sviluppo, Beirut, <https://beirut.aics.gov.it/home-ita/paesi/iniziative/libano-contesto/contesto/>

<sup>29</sup>Davide Cellamare, “Il Libano moderno tra unità e lacerazioni”, (Les Flâneurs Edizioni, 2021)

<sup>30</sup>“UNDERSTANDING COMPOUND EVENTS IN FRAGILE CONTEXTS: examples for Ethiopia and Kenya”, International Bank for Reconstruction and Development / The World Bank, 2022, [https://assets.vu.nl/d8b6f1f5-816c-005b-1dc1-e363dd7ce9a5/3301ff6b-f169-45cb-9897-a6301d0b5ca0/IVM\\_HoA%20Compound%20Risk%20Full%20Paper\\_v2.pdf](https://assets.vu.nl/d8b6f1f5-816c-005b-1dc1-e363dd7ce9a5/3301ff6b-f169-45cb-9897-a6301d0b5ca0/IVM_HoA%20Compound%20Risk%20Full%20Paper_v2.pdf)

In the Lebanese context, compound crises have been ‘*on the agenda*’ since its independence, and unceasing revolutions have been part of the recent history of this state, between quests for expansion, economic contractions, migration influxes, and a persistent presence of the international community that, on the long run, partially hampered the capacity of this state to stand steadily on its own.

It is important to acknowledge that the expansion of Lebanon's economy has always relied mostly on foreign investment.<sup>31</sup> The absence of notable advancements in the domestic sector has perpetuated the country's persistent reliance on other nations. The combination of the delicate governance structure and the civil war in Syria in 2011 are significant contributing factors to the ongoing crisis in Lebanon, often regarded as the most severe crisis the country has faced in the last century and a half.

Extensive discussions have been conducted about the aforementioned subject, whereby the focal point pertains to the notable escalation in the population of refugees inside Syria, reaching almost one million individuals, as a direct consequence of the enduring war. The aforementioned figure is noteworthy, particularly when taking into account the overall population size of Lebanon, which stands at over 5.5 million individuals. In addition to them, there exists a population of Palestinians who have resided in the nation for an extended period. The demographic composition of migrants, mostly consisting of individuals adhering to the Sunni faith, has resulted in immigration playing a role in exacerbating the existing imbalance between various religious denominations. Indeed, the crisis was partly precipitated by the contentious discourse about the appropriate designation to be accorded to those seeking sanctuary. The aforementioned discourse included additional Arab nations, including Saudi Arabia, which serves as the primary investor in Lebanon. Consequently, the withdrawal of investments ensued, the jeopardization of the stability that had been ensured inside the country. Subsequently, the COVID-19 epidemic, together with the catastrophic explosion at the port of Beirut, dealt a last blow to an already decimated economy and an ineffective governmental structure.

Hence, under the present circumstances whereby Lebanon succumbs to a state of obscurity, the citizens of this nation find themselves compelled to consider emigration as the last viable option. In the present context, the political elite remains stagnant, immobilized inside a system plagued by corruption and susceptible to coercion via the exchange of favors and power

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<sup>31</sup> David Leonhardt and Sanam Yar, “Lebanon’s Crisis The World Isn’t Paying Much Attention.”, The New York Times, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/14/briefing/lebanon-financial-crisis-lira.html>

dynamics. This state of affairs is primarily driven by the apprehension of instigating another civil conflict.<sup>32</sup>

The port of Beirut, which serves as Lebanon's primary port, saw a devastating explosion on 4 August 2020. This catastrophic event resulted in the destruction of the neighboring regions, causing the loss of over 200 lives and inflicting injuries on thousands of others. The subsequent investigation revealed that the explosion was attributed to the hazardous storage of about 2,750 tonnes of ammonium nitrate in hangar No. 12, which was inadvertently ignited. Protests were promptly reignited in the aftermath of the explosion, leading to the subsequent resignation of Prime Minister Hassan Diab and his government on August 10, 2020, which, however, remained in office in a caretaker role.

In 2021, there were ongoing demonstrations in Lebanon as individuals used the tactic of road blockades using burning tires as a means of protesting against the prevailing poverty and economic crises.

The caretaker minister of energy, Raymond Ghajar, issued a warning on 11 March 2021 on the potential for Lebanon to experience a state of complete power outage, often referred to as "total darkness," by the conclusion of March. This dire situation is contingent upon the failure to acquire the funds for the procurement of fuel required to operate the nation's power plants. In August 2021, a significant gasoline explosion occurred in the northern region of Lebanon, and in September, a new government was established under the leadership of former prime minister Najib Mikati.

On October 9, 2021, a nationwide power outage lasting for a duration of 24 hours occurred as a result of the depletion of power reserves in the country's two primary power plants, which was attributed to a scarcity of cash and fuel resources. Days after the incident, a surge of sectarian violence erupted in Beirut, resulting in the death of numerous people. These confrontations mark the most lethal outbreak of violence in Lebanon since 2008. According to a report by BBC News in January 2022, the situation in Lebanon has seen a further exacerbation, characterized by a significant depreciation of the Lebanese pound and the indefinite postponement of a planned general election. The extension of the parliamentary elections was said to extend the political impasse inside the nation.<sup>33</sup> The European Parliament

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<sup>32</sup> Ziad Majeb, "Indipendenza, interessi comunitari e conflitti regionali: il Libano delle mobilitazioni", in Elena Chiti, "Libano. Frammenti di storia, società, cultura" (Mesogea: Messina, 2012), pp.65-70

<sup>33</sup> "Lebanon enters the new year in a deepening crisis - BBC News", Filmed January 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VXJ4uwcRgtE>

has characterized the current state of affairs in Lebanon as a *'man-made catastrophe resulting from the actions of a select group of individuals inside the political sphere'*.<sup>34</sup>

Lebanon had its first election in May 2022, after a severe economic crisis that pushed the country perilously close to the precipice of state failure. The severity of Lebanon's crisis has resulted in the classification of almost 80 percent of its people as impoverished by the United Nations.<sup>35</sup> During the election, the parliamentary majority of the Shia Muslim Hezbollah movement (with its supporters) was defeated. Hezbollah did not experience any electoral losses in terms of its parliamentary representation, but, its affiliated political factions saw a decrease in their respective seat allocations. Following the election, the Free Patriotic Movement, which is aligned with Hezbollah and led by President Michel Aoun, saw a decline in its status as the largest Christian party. The Lebanese Forces, under the leadership of Samir Geagea, emerged as the predominant Christian political group in parliament, effectively challenging their Christian counterparts. The Sunni Future Movement, under the leadership of former prime minister Saad Hariri, abstained from participating in the election, creating a political vacuum that other Sunni politicians were compelled to address.

The severity of the Lebanese crisis prompted the departure of several boats from the shore, carrying migrants who sought to escape the dire situation in the nation. Numerous attempts had unfavorable outcomes, resulting in loss of life. From April 2022, when a tragic incident occurred near Tripoli, Lebanon, resulting in the loss of six lives and the successful rescue of around 50 individuals, due to the sinking of an overcrowded boat, to this summer incidents and irregular migration indexes have peaked as never before, with an alarming increase in passengers of Lebanese origins. (to add further data)<sup>36</sup>

On 1 February 2023, the monetary authority of Lebanon implemented a significant depreciation, an almost 90% devaluation of the Lebanese lira in response to the persistent financial crisis.<sup>37</sup> Lebanon's official currency rate experienced devaluation for the first time in a span of 25 years. This depreciation is evident when comparing the official exchange rate, which remains set at 1,507.5 lira per US dollar, to the prevailing rate on the black market,

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<sup>34</sup> Beatrix Immenkamp and Kirsten Jongberg (Members' Research Service, EPRS | European Parliamentary Research Service), "Situation in Lebanon. Severe and prolonged economic depression" (Briefing), European Parliament, EPRS, April 2022, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2022/729369/EPRS\\_BRI\(2022\)729369\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2022/729369/EPRS_BRI(2022)729369_EN.pdf)

<sup>35</sup> "Conflict Analysis – Lebanon – National Level", Centre for Operational Analysis and Research (COAR), January 2022, <https://coar-global.org/2022/01/14/conflict-analysis-lebanon-national-level/>

<sup>36</sup> Jasmin Lilian Diab, Ibrahim Jouhari, "CONFLICT, CRISIS, AND MIGRATION: MARITIME IRREGULAR MIGRATION FROM LEBANON SINCE 2019", (Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom Madrid, 2023)

<sup>37</sup> "Lebanon devalues official exchange rate by 90% ", The Financial Times, February 2023, <https://www.ft.com/content/f37617e1-098b-459f-9502-50ffb50c6c0c>

which has reached over 95,000 liras per dollar (May and June 2023). As a result of this depreciation, the minimum salaries, those of the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), public teachers, and public workers in general, which stood at approximately 675,000 liras, would be now equivalent to approximately \$7/8; despite not being this low, wages for public employees are not higher than \$70 per month, forcing the population to perform multiple jobs. In 2021, the reserves of the national bank, Banque du Liban, were estimated to be around \$16 billion. By the conclusion of the year 2020, the inflation rate escalated to 145.8%, while the unemployment rate reached a level of 39.5%. In 2021, the public debt surged to a value of \$95.6 billion, representing 171.7% of the International Economic Position (IEP). A significant proportion of the population, over 55%, lives below the poverty threshold, subsisting on a daily income of less than \$3.84. Furthermore, there has been an increase in the percentage of individuals living in severe poverty, reaching 23%. According to the latest report titled "Hunger Hotspots" performed by FAO-WFP, Lebanon is among the top three countries in the area, with Syria and Yemen, that face significant risks of food insecurity.<sup>38</sup>

Additionally, as already stated before, Electricité du Liban, the public energy utility that was supposed to supply electric power to the whole country, uninterrupted, provides just two hours of electricity daily, all the rest is autonomously produced, via either solar panels or, in most cases, gasoline generators.<sup>39</sup>

***a. On elites, resilience and the risk of giving in to “victim mentality”: a deeper look to the Lebanese prism***

Previously, in 2020, A. Courban produced important insights into the population’s perceptions and responses to Lebanese elites. The Lebanese confessional system, based on the political identification of individuals and groups with their respective religious communities, serves the dominant clientelist system as a tool for mobilization and as a cover for the mafia-like management" of public affairs. "*The Lebanese state is hostage to a criminal network so extensive that it is mistakenly dubbed "political class" but should rather be called the "ruling caste" because those who are politicians are noble by definition*". For him, the visit of the French President, E. Macron, that same brought to light an indisputable fact: Lebanon is in the

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<sup>38</sup> "Hunger Hotspots FAO-WFP early warnings on acute food insecurity June to September 2022 Outlook", World Food Program (WFP), June 2022, <https://www.wfp.org/publications/hunger-hotspots-fao-wfp-early-warnings-acute-food-insecurity-june-september-2022>

<sup>39</sup>"RENEWABLE ENERGY OUTLOOK- LEBANON", International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), Abu Dhabi, June 2020, [https://www.irena.org/-/media/Files/IRENA/Agency/Publication/2020/Jun/IRENA\\_Outlook\\_Lebanon\\_2020.pdf](https://www.irena.org/-/media/Files/IRENA/Agency/Publication/2020/Jun/IRENA_Outlook_Lebanon_2020.pdf)

strange state of 'non-state' shared by what the criminal law calls '*criminal associations*.' In Lebanon the clientelist system is similar to that of 'mafia systems', but it is not perceived as such because elites have managed to engulf the confessional paradigm, as their cover and that no one dares to touch, but at the same time "*they do not hesitate, if necessary, to usurp the representativeness of a religious community in the service of their criminal activities.*"

The Lebanese intellectual goes so far as to liken the Lebanese political-confessional leader (*za'im*) to a mafia leader, who imposes himself on a group of '*wingmen*' through confessional or familial solidarity (*'asabiya*). Above all, Courban insists on the instrumental adoption by Lebanese elites of confessionalist identity representation: "*Any Lebanese mafia is necessarily adapted to the Lebanese confessional system, which serves as a springboard for its own economic expansion. It resists repression, either because it has an armed militia, or because it controls the instances of power, but especially because it controls the levers of command within the judiciary*"<sup>40</sup>. These identity representations based on ethnic and confessional group membership do not appear capable, by themselves, of triggering armed conflict. But in contexts such as Syria today or Lebanon yesterday (1975-1990), where violence is protracted and large-scale, involving actors endowed with means and resources and interested in prolonging the use of arms, community dividing lines become factors in the conflict itself, taking up space and body within urban and rural territories. In light of forced demographic relocations of groups of people, identified as belonging to the same community and forced to survive elsewhere, deprived of their rights, these identity representations fuel even more radical and exclusive forms of distinction between '*us*' and '*the others*'.<sup>41</sup>

The writer L. Trombetta reports in his book, that also in 2020, in January, the Lebanese writer Hala Moughanie<sup>42</sup> reflected on another important point regarding the Lebanese reality: how deleterious it has been to keep insisting on the '*resilience*' of the Lebanese at a time when there is a strong need to "*build the Lebanon of tomorrow*".

For the writer, as well as for so many Lebanese, ordinary people, continuing to insist on being "*resilient*" ultimately means continuing to be unwilling to face reality against the backdrop of a "*brutal resignation*." "*The civil war [1975-1990] is not over: warlords have become political*

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<sup>40</sup>Federica Zoja, "Who Can Save Lebanon? A Conversation with Antoine Courban", Reset Dialogue on Civilizations, October 2020, <https://www.resetdoc.org/story/who-can-save-lebanon-conversation-antoine-courban/>

<sup>41</sup> Lorenzo Trombetta "Negoziazione e potere in Medio Oriente- Alle radici dei conflitti in Siria e dintorni" (Mondadori Università, 2022)

<sup>42</sup>Hala Moughanie is also a member of the collective "Citizens and Citizens in a State" (Muwatinun wa muwatinat fi Dawla) led by former Economy Minister Charbel Nahhas; she was writing these reflections a few months after the worst Lebanese economic crisis in decades broke out in all its impetuosity.

*leaders and community divisions persist, all against a backdrop of an absence of memory, justice and forgiveness.*" According to Mughanie, the cause of this state of affairs lies precisely in the fact that Lebanese self-represent themselves, consciously or unconsciously, as resilient. *"On this idea, we have built our image as a people."* Lebanese insist on their resilience *"because we are survivors. Survivors of the horrors of war [...] self-sacrificingly survived the violence of our recent history. Survivors of the Israeli and Syrian occupations until 2005. Survivors of the Israeli wars in 1993, 1996 and 2006. Survivors of the well-orchestrated theft of public funds by the Mafia political-financial establishment at the head of the patronage system."*

They blame or congratulate themselves based upon this same resilience that has allowed the Lebanese People *"for thirty years to breathe, laugh, love and dance over the mass graves, despite water and electricity cuts, despite our land being increasingly gnawed and poisoned, despite our heritage being destroyed and plundered, despite our rights as citizens being eroded, despite confessionalist discourse pitting us against each other. And it is this same resilience that, today, as Lebanon sinks into a finally visible economic crisis, makes us accept the unacceptable: the rationing of our "cash/paper" money, galloping inflation, the devaluation of our currency, signs of extreme impoverishment such as old people rummaging through garbage and children wandering barefoot in the rain begging from motorists stopped at traffic lights, while all around, confessionalist discourse continues unabated."*

Survival in the post-war period (from the 90s on), for her, is not based upon their ability to resist, but on that of denying reality for what it is, *"putting the problems under the rug"*, as many Lebanese people say, getting used to everything, convinced that this ability is indeed their main strength, *"when in fact it is just a brutal form of resignation."*

Lebanese people have started to align their lifestyle with that of so-called developed countries, (a longing desire for connection with the West) adopting what they thought were the codes, products, and economic and social logics of those countries but which were deeply inconsistent with their realities: *"It was like dressing a hungry person in a silk coat."*

This attitude propelled the formation and catalysis of a duality, confessional and feudal in its logic, and so fragmented, where constant competition for access to goods deepened inequalities and contributed to a radical dismemberment of society.

The idea of the Lebanese People being different from the others of the region, in their contingencies and responses to the tumultuous occurrences that characterize the Middle East, was already presented by Lokman Slim, another influential voice of Lebanese civil society, killed in 2021 in the South of Lebanon by an unknown subject. *"The perception of feeling so different from others is perhaps one of the problems of our management of the war period and*



*the post-conflict period. In reality, Lebanon is like any other country: it needs time to be able to digest all that it has experienced during its history near and far. In the end, I believe that there is no life with some lasting stability without a certain amount of normalness. But we cannot get to this normality if we cannot digest our history, come to terms with our present, to also be able to digest quickly. Digesting means being ready to reexamine things (muraja'a), being ready to render account for one's actions (muhasaba, accountability). We can come to terms with all this without considering it a part of our body that hurts every time we touch it."*

From the article "*The emergency machine: Humanitarianism in Lebanon. An interview with Professor Estella Carpi*" written by Richard Salame and published on July 25, 2023, on "*L'Orient Today*"<sup>43</sup>, there is an additional insight that elaborates further on the Lebanese malady.

Lebanon is host to a multitude of humanitarian organizations, abundantly adorned with the emblems, trademarks, and indicators of humanitarian organizations, which provide financial resources, initiatives, and manpower to the nations that provide financial resources, implement projects, and deploy staff inside its borders. However, can these measures be consistently seen as beneficial?

Estella Carpi, an Assistant Professor of Humanitarian Studies at University College London, has researched the humanitarian interventions during the 2006 July War and the influx of Syrian refugees into Akkar from 2011 to 2013.<sup>44</sup>

She discusses the topic of "*Development-arianism*", and in particular the "*development-humanitarian nexus*", a conceptual framework, which seeks to integrate development work with humanitarian work, including time-sensitive relief efforts. In a nation such as Lebanon, characterized by recurrent crises, there are, on one side, organizations, many Italian NGOs, that were initially involved in social work activities such as volunteering, development initiatives, welfare capabilities, and similar endeavors, that in response to the outbreak of conflict, found themselves compelled to assume the role of humanitarians and engage in improvisation. Conversely, other humanitarian actors such as the Lebanese Red Cross have included some elements with longer-term implications, hence modifying the duration of certain initiatives.

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<sup>43</sup> Richard Salame, "The emergency machine: Humanitarianism in Lebanon. An interview with Professor Estella Carpi", *L'Orient Today*, July 2023, <https://today.lorientlejour.com/article/1344393/the-emergency-machine-humanitarianism-in-lebanon.html>

<sup>44</sup> Estella Carpi, "The Politics of Crisis-Making. Forced Displacement and Cultures of Assistance in Lebanon", (Indiana University Press, 2023). This research has been published as a book-length ethnography on humanitarianism in Lebanon, which was launched in May 2023.

However, it is important to acknowledge that the need to adopt a humanitarian perspective does not just stem from external circumstances. The allocation of money has a significant role in this matter: securing enough finance is essential to ensure the sustained operation of the organization at the grassroots level.

In this regard, several organizations failed to acknowledge the need to terminate their programs when they proved ineffective or useless. The humanitarian industry is potentially employing a significant portion of the workforce in Western countries who would otherwise be jobless.

The financial stakes associated with short-term programs are significant, primarily involving the provision of insecure but highly remunerative employment opportunities to the international bourgeoisie and the need for intervention.

The word "*developmentarian*" in this context refers to the persistent and detrimental cycles of development. In Lebanon, there are resources that are theoretically designated for the purpose of enhancing well-being. However, it is anticipated that they will undergo depletion by use of the emergency apparatus. If on one side welfare conditions have improved, they have done so as financial gains from external sources, serving to partially conceal the state's relinquishment of its obligations, without effectively establishing a durable and efficiently operating welfare system. Many organizations used a standardized set of tools and knowledge that may have not been well-suited for the Lebanese endeavor. Another issue pertains to the distinction between foreign and local employees, but also among local workers who own or lack a secondary passport enabling them to go during times of escalating crises; this creates a distance that is not just limited to the dichotomy between foreigners and those of Lebanese descent but relates to the professional authority, to the ability to operate without limitations, transcending boundaries. It is believed that maintaining neutrality is better achieved by refraining from forming enduring attachments with a particular location. However, this perspective might be seen as a significant contradiction within the context.

It is not being said that the appreciation for the ability to comprehend local languages and cultures is nonexistent. Individuals who possess proficiency in the Arabic language may have a higher propensity to engage in activities related to addressing the issue of displacement from Syria within the area, rather than pursuing employment opportunities in other locations. However, it is advisable to consider changing organizations since the act of diversifying employers is consistently seen as valuable.

Operating under the auspices of the United Nations, contractual agreements may impose restrictions on individuals, prohibiting their continued presence inside a certain nation beyond a designated period.

In Lebanon, one of the prevalent concepts asserts that Syrian refugees are entitled to foreign help, whereas impoverished Lebanese individuals are not. Even though this claim has become more inaccurate since 2016, it continues to persist. In that year, there was the implementation of Lebanon's inhabitants to the official reaction to the Syrian crisis, with an increase in the efforts of humanitarian organizations to broaden the scope of their programs and extend their assistance to economically disadvantaged Lebanese individuals, in addition to Syrian refugees. The establishment of the "*New Ways of Working*" coincided with a commitment by development and humanitarian actors to enhance their partnership.

This occurrence took place within the context of the United Nations' 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, which are focused on advocating for global development and welfare initiatives. In addition to these objectives, the matter of "*aid localization*" was also a significant concern, together with an institutionalization of the need to tailor humanitarian solutions to the specific environment.

Regarding the influx of Syrian refugees into Lebanon, the arrival of these individuals consistently introduces an element of newness and unpredictability, disrupting the stability of the local community; a significant portion of them was not considered recent arrivals in Lebanon, since they had previously engaged in seasonal employment inside the country. The presence of the immigrants also instilled concern due to its role as an indicator of the deterioration of welfare, which is part of a global phenomenon that occurs everywhere, it is crucial to situate Lebanon within a global context in order to counteract the inclination to see it as a unique case.

Particularly after 2014, humanitarian actors have initiated compensation systems due to their role in exacerbating tensions between local populations and migrants, attributed to their sole focus on providing assistance to Syrians within a vulnerable local setting, like Akkar. Furthermore, they started broadening their outreach to also include the Lebanese population. This compensating humanitarian endeavor, anyway, failed to provide any discernible advantages. Lebanese and Syrians did not want to be part of the same aid programs, sharing resources and spaces. However, the prevailing crisis narrative propagated by the media has overshadowed the significance of this aspect.

From the perspective of international humanitarianism, it may be argued that instrumentalization was primarily characterized by a technical approach. Prior to the crisis, several foreign humanitarian organizations did not operate. Moreover, a pressing concern is the basic and crucial consideration of local entities, maintaining the power system in place, in

the operational context: the *zu'ama'* and *makhahir* must engage with the whole populace, however, using local intermediaries does not inherently constitute the process of localization. It is important to acknowledge that within a patron-client culture such as Akkar, local corruption was undoubtedly prevalent. Consequently, some resources that were intended for distribution among the populace were regrettably diverted and did not reach their intended recipients. The partnership between the individuals in question and foreign humanitarian actors served to imbue their function with a sense of moral rectitude, authorizing them, somehow, some forms of transgression inside the communities.

For example, the *makhahir* normalized the act of excluding certain individuals from official beneficiary lists by asserting that their names were not included by foreign humanitarian organizations, a gatekeeping of local power holders.

The establishment of universal protection is improbable given the existing governmental structures. The transition from providing initial medical assistance to implementing more comprehensive and transformative initiatives is often seen as a significant milestone in the evolution of contemporary humanitarianism. The desired end-state is a societal transformation that focuses on influencing individuals, and fostering resilience in the face of crises, rather than primarily exerting efforts to alter the material conditions that shape people's lives.

For this reason, recently, there has been an observable increase in foreign assistance towards local infrastructure in response to the Syrian crisis, but belatedly and lacking durability.

Indeed, the entire population has been relying on geopolitical factors and foreign donors for the provision of essential services for too long, deceiving the difference between the priority of emergency measures and long-term requirements.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) prioritized efforts on enhancing the employability of a certain set of refugees, since it was believed that their fundamental needs had already been adequately met during a previous emergency response. However, they were never. The initial ability to achieve sustainable practices daily has not been restored.

In the case of the neighborhood of Hay el Gharbi, next to the Shatila refugee camp, home to individuals from several Lebanese sects, as well as Palestinians, Syrians, Dom, and other nations, this mix of people, all low-income households, lack a distinct national representation, risking to constantly escalate into violence, due to the inability to provide services, in absence of distinctive identitarian divisions. This shows the lack of attention given to many “*scales of neglected*” and the absence of a neighborhood-based approach over an identity-based approach in international programs. The provision of aid continues to be primarily influenced by geopolitical goals, with a focus on supporting certain identities.

In summary, several errors were made evoked from 2006 confrontations, like giving priority to the reconstruction of buildings in their pre-war locations and the emphasis on revitalizing commercial activities, rather than critically reconsidering spatial planning, and implementing additional green spaces.

The potential for fostering a state of reliance and a mindset of victimhood via long-term international humanitarian aid is a pressing issue that requires urgent consideration. In order to address this issue, it is essential to deliberately devise cooperative initiatives that aim to foster self-reliance and, a people-centric strategy, like the one applied to the Karantina neighborhood after the port's explosion. By including stipulations in the provision of assistance packages that promote governance changes, anti-corruption measures, and economic restructuring, it is possible to provide incentives for Lebanon's leadership to assume responsibility for the trajectory of the country.

### ***Concluding remarks***

Many times, in political science, the term “*ecosystem*” is borrowed from biology, to describe the complexity of human society. Considering each individual a highly complex system, society is the set of interactions between individuals and groups of individuals in a physical, social, and cultural environment. Following the reasoning of the American mathematician, John Casti, on the concept of complexity (1997), it is possible to apply it to the Lebanese reality, that, as it has been depicted is made up of many interacting components whose behavior or structure is difficult to understand: it is a “complex” reality, in which crises pile up one over the other, compounding.

Accepting this inherent complexity and the willingness to consider different perspectives and angles in looking at a given phenomena are the necessary groundwork to then understand where and how external either international or regional actors positioned themselves in the intricateness of the Lebanese state.<sup>45</sup>

The developments and societal movements in Lebanon spanning from 2005 to the present era, encompassing the Cedar Revolution, the impact of the Arab Spring, the fluctuating fortunes of political alliances, the refugee crisis, and the 2019 October Revolution, have been significantly shaped by a combination of internal dynamics and external interventions, which they have in turn shaped too, having had a lasting impact on Lebanon's political and social environment,

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<sup>45</sup> Lorenzo Trombetta “Negoziazione e potere in Medio Oriente- Alle radici dei conflitti in Siria e dintorni”, (Mondadori Università, 2022)

highlighting the need of diplomatic efforts and foreign intervention in effectively resolving the intricate issues confronting the nation.

## Chapter 2

### An overview on Italy's foreign policy

The second actor, co-protagonist in this analysis, is Italy. Once delved into the complex landscape of Lebanon to better comprehend the framework on which international and regional actors operate, it is necessary to present the groundwork on Italy's foreign policy and international stance: what have been the guidelines on which the country constructed its action, its priorities, and strategies for the Middle East and Mediterranean basin.

In this chapter, due reference will be paved to theoretical studies of foreign policy formation in conjunction with international relations theories, after the recollection of the historical turning points that have shaped the General Directives as they are nowadays: “*delibera missioni*”, “*atti parlamentari*”, “*documenti di programmazione*” issued by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, its agencies and also, for what concerns international military operations, the Ministry of Defense. By examining Italy's multifaceted approach to foreign policy, from diplomacy and cooperation to economic relations and military operations, this chapter sets the stage for a deeper understanding of Italy's specific actions in Lebanon within the broader context of its Middle East strategy.

In the late 20th century, Italy played a crucial role in the Cold War dynamics that defined the Middle East, being both a subordinate ally in the strategic plans of NATO and a, somewhat, controversial regional power. During that period the Italian foreign policy towards the Middle East built upon a balance between promoting dialogue, stability, and cooperation on the one hand, and, on the other, collaborating with global superpower maneuvers to exploit existing tensions and gain local influence, as a “middle power” Italy was seeking to find its lawful place within international dynamics in a period of constant change.<sup>46</sup> This yearning for a path to grow its power and weight on global decisions is recurrent and visible throughout the development of its peculiar approach to foreign policy which has progressed in a state of tension between the sphere of influence of the Americans, the Europeans, and the “*Mediterraneans*”: three worlds difficult to reconcile.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Luciano Monzali, Paolo Soave, “Italy and the Middle East. Geopolitics, Dialogue and Power during the Cold War” (Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, London, 2021)

<sup>47</sup> Emilio Diodato, Federico Niglia, “L’Italia e la politica internazionale. Dalla Grande Guerra al (dis-)ordine globale”, (Carrocci Editore, Roma, 2019)

## 2.1 The core of Italy's foreign policy: geopolitics, international position, tensions, and geography

First and foremost, to put the spotlight on Italy within world politics, it is necessary to state three factors that have been at the core of A. Panebianco reflection on the Italian Foreign Policy at the end of 70s<sup>48</sup>, which are nonetheless still applicable to present times' interpretations.

The first is the geopolitical collocations of Italy, the prosaic myth of Rome's grandeur paired with the Italian backwardness. During its liberal experience, the nation desired colonial status and recognition as a strong power. The failed experiment as a colonialist power was "*a means to an end*", not an objective in itself. Italy was trying to reach its lawful rank, and function as a 'proper big power', this was particularly exacerbated by fascist Italy's imperial ventures, in order to gain prestige and superiority in Europe and the Mediterranean. In a climate of delusion at the end of the 40s, Italy became a part of a broader European cultural West and sought recognition as a middle power. However, the struggle to find a new international role and a peculiar identity became harder after the end of the Cold War, largely due to its military commitment to preserving international peace and stability. Nonetheless, as the international system became more competitive and uncertain, the nation reached a point where it was no longer confident in its Western (more American than Western per se) vocation. This situation caused the myth of the past to reemerge step by step until nowadays, where, although it is no longer the Nation that is invoked (as the Mazzinian ideal), a rather generic "*Italian People*"<sup>49</sup> is reiterated, being the element that should be at the center of Italy's choices.

The second factor of a more structural nature is the Italian position within the international relations system. From a first overview of the history of Italy's foreign policy, the state has been almost always incorporated into the international system and infrequently isolated by its members. Particularly, Italy appeared to be nearly always in harmony with and responsive to the changes taking place in the international arena, adapting and, at the same time, trying to shape its identity accordingly to the other important '*players*' and '*friends*', them being European, Mediterranean or the United States of America.

The third factor, the level of international tension, since the end of the Cold War, is the more determining and pressing one, because it intrinsically requires preparedness. The structure of

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<sup>48</sup> Angelo Panebianco, "La Politica estera italiana: un modello interpretativo", (Il Mulino, Rivista bimestrale di cultura e politica, Bologna, anno XXVI, numero 254, 1977)

<sup>49</sup> Paving reference to the Facebook post of former Lega Leader, Matteo Salvini, published 27 May 2018, in which he launched the hastagh "#Primagliitaliani!".



the international system has been challenged and altered constantly in the last decades. On the one hand, the world shifted from optimism regarding the globalization processes led by the United States in the 1990s to dread due to terrorism and the war on terror after 2001, which paved the way for the emergence of the European Union as a proper alternative. On the other hand, it has witnessed a rise of new emergent powers that, aided by the 2008 economic crisis, have challenged the U.S. and EU's role. To the declining allure of established democracies, a rising appreciation of the developing, albeit authoritarian and illiberal, BRICS countries, China, Russia, South Africa, India, and Brazil, have taken place with the bloc aiming to double its membership.<sup>50</sup>

To these three aspects, a fourth one should be added: geography, in its basic definition, avoiding any form of determinism and epitomizing the basic acknowledgment to reveal the complexity of its geopolitical situation, its role in the international system, and how it dealt with periods of rising tensions. On the one hand, as a continental nation, Italy has always sought to maintain political and economic ties with the most potent Western nations. After World War II, when Italy was no longer a major military power, the general objective of this northwest direction of Italian foreign policy was to participate in the emerging community of the most developed nations, the Euro-Atlantic world, in order to protect national security and contribute to a common, integrated political and economic development. On the contrary, the majority of Italy, the peninsula itself, is primarily situated in the Mediterranean region, and it bears significant social and economic disparities. This area is open to external cultures from beyond Europe, being the Mediterranean a “*natural connector*” more than a stark border. Rather than representing a weakness, Italy's complex identity motivates a southeastern foreign policy approach that emphasizes fostering peace, multilateralism, and economic collaboration, especially in the Middle East, where energy supply and safeguarding the rights of Italian communities are key priorities. Additionally, due to its historical political instability, Italy has consistently strived, since the conclusion of World War II, to expand the scope of coalition governments in pursuit of international independence, particularly in its relations with Arab nations, distinct from the Atlantic Alliance's influence. Socialists, communists, cultural, and social elements supported this form of foreign policy, allowing for a broader consensus. However, a dual foreign policy was exceedingly difficult for a middle power to implement, particularly during the Cold War when international tensions were high.

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<sup>50</sup>“BRICS is doubling its membership. Is the bloc a new rival for the G7?”, Atlantic Council experts, August 2023, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/experts-react/brics-is-doubling-its-membership-is-the-bloc-a-new-rival-for-the-g7/>

Bearing in mind these, the historical development of Italy's foreign policy will be considered, with a particular focus on the Mediterranean region, and the regional and international tensions shaping Italy's role, particularly in the Middle East.

## **2.2 Notes on Italy's foreign policy: a historical perspective**

### *a. The Italian liberal experience (1901-1922)*

Since national unification, Italy's leaders have pursued a prominent international profile in an effort to transform the country into a new great power. Such an objective was fundamental to the Risorgimento's ideals: if a new nation had to be created through a hard and bloody struggle against Austrian dominance and reactionary kings, then such a struggle and its sacrifices had to lead to the rebirth of Italy's past glory, from the Roman Empire to the center of Christianity to the greatness of the Renaissance.<sup>51</sup> And until 1882, when Italy joined the Triple Alliance as a junior partner of the German and Austro-Hungarian empires, the new nation was isolated in a hostile international system.<sup>52</sup>

Despite all of its vulnerabilities, Italy's desire to be recognized as a great power necessitated an expansionist and aggressive foreign policy, particularly in the Mediterranean and on the African continent. It is common knowledge that Italy's early ambitions centered on Tunisia, but they were soon thwarted by France's decision to impose its protectorate over this territory. In the decades that followed, Italy attempted to join the most powerful European powers in the "*scramble for Africa*," with contrasting results: while the Italian state was able to establish its first colonies in Eritrea and Somaliland, its attempts to expand towards the Abyssinian Empire were thwarted by military defeats at Dogali and Adwa.

During the first decade of the twentieth century, Italy experienced a period of industrial expansion, economic development, social transformation, and partial political system stabilization. Diplomatically, while maintaining Italy's role in the Triple Alliance, Italian diplomats were able to reach agreements with France, Britain, and Russia, gaining recognition. Despite its vulnerabilities, Italy's aspiration to gain recognition as a major power led to an assertive and expansionist foreign policy, particularly in the Mediterranean and Africa. Italy initially set its sights on Tunisia but was thwarted when France established a protectorate over the region.

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<sup>51</sup> Christian Reus-Smit, "The Moral Purpose of the State. Culture, Social Identity, and Institutional Rationality in International Relations" (Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1999), pp. 63-84

<sup>52</sup> Federico Chabod, "Storia della politica estera italiana dal 1870 al 1896: Le premesse" (Laterza, Bari, 1951); Emilio Gentile, "La Grande Italia. Il mito della nazione nel XX secolo" (Laterza, Rome 2009).

In the ensuing decades, Italy sought to join the powerful European nations in the "*scramble for Africa*." This endeavor produced mixed results: Italy successfully established colonies in Eritrea and Somaliland but faced military defeats in attempts to expand into the Abyssinian Empire, notably at Dogali and Adwa.

In the early 1900s, Italy underwent a period of industrial growth, economic development, societal change, and some political stabilization. Diplomatically, while maintaining its role in the Triple Alliance, Italy's diplomats secured agreements with France, Britain, and Russia, securing recognition of Italy's interests in potentially expanding into the remaining Ottoman Empire territories in North Africa.

Italy declared war on the Ottoman Empire in October 1911 and, despite facing a more challenging military campaign than expected, managed to assert control over Libya and maintain authority over the Dodecanese islands. This expanded Italy's African empire and bolstered its position in the Mediterranean.

When World War I began in 1914, Italy, under the leadership of Antonio Salandra, initially chose neutrality. However, after signing the London Treaty with the Entente powers in May 1915, Rome aligned itself with the Allies in their conflict against the Central Powers.

Italy primarily waged an independent war against Austria-Hungary, officially declaring war on Germany only in 1916. Its war efforts were primarily focused on annexing and "*liberating*" territories along its northern and eastern borders, including Trentino, South Tyrol, the Istrian peninsula, and the Dalmatian Coast. Italy also sought complete control of the Adriatic Sea due to its influence over Albania.

In the aftermath of the First World War, Italy found itself in a position where it needed to reassess its ambitions. The rise of Turkish nationalism, under the leadership of Kemal Ataturk, prompted Italy to abandon its aspirations in the Anatolian peninsula. However, Italy did manage to maintain control of the Dodecanese islands in the years that followed. Italian troops withdrew from Albania, but, interestingly, during the 1920s, the newly formed Balkan state sought Italy's support and protection.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup>Fiorella Perrone, "La politica estera italiana e la dissoluzione dell'impero ottomano (1914-1923)" (I libri di Icaro, Lecce, 2010)

**b. Nationalism at its peak: the “fascist ventennio” (1922-1943)**

During the Fascist era, particularly in the mid-1930s, Italy renewed its expansionist policy on the African continent, resulting in the war against Ethiopia and its incorporation into the Italian Empire. During this imperialist ‘chapter’, Mussolini pointed out Italy's ambition to construct a new “*Mare nostrum*” in the Mediterranean<sup>54</sup>, concentrating Italy’s ambition on the Middle East in the hope of dismantling Britain's ‘informal empire’.

Such a policy was primarily founded on propaganda initiatives, such as the broadcasts in Arabic from an *ad hoc* radio station called ‘*Radio Bari*’<sup>55</sup> and the support of various anti-British nationalist movements from Egypt to Palestine to Iraq to Yemen. The alliance with Germany, the involvement in the Second World War, and the military defeats suffered as early as autumn 1940 revealed that Italy's aspiration to become a great power had been a tragic bluff that led to total defeat, its military occupation, and a punitive peace treaty, the result of which was the loss of some border areas (such as the Istrian peninsula, Fiume, Zara, etc.), as well as its African empire, with the exception of Somaliland. Despite everything, the majority of decision-makers in Republican Italy (both prominent politicians and diplomats) believed that the new democratic nation should strive to be recognized as a middle-rank power that could exert some influence in both Europe and an enlarged Mediterranean, which would include a portion of the Middle East and Africa. Through “*middle power diplomacy*” which is the inclination towards multilateral solutions when international crises occur, and the tendency to compromise and embrace “*good international citizenship*”<sup>56</sup>. Italy hoped that its policy could benefit from two contemporary historical dynamics: on the one hand, the Cold War, which would lead to Italy becoming an actor in the Western system under American hegemony; and, on the other hand, the rapid crisis of the British and French empires which gave the Italians room for maneuver, particularly in the Arab world.

**c. The First Republic: a growth of interest towards the Middle East**

From the late 1940s through the early 1950s, Prime Minister Alcide De Gasperi and his Foreign Minister, Count Carlo Sforza, dedicated their efforts to two main objectives. Firstly, they worked to establish Italy as a key participant within the newly formed American-led Western alliance. Secondly, they aimed to strengthen Italy's position in the emerging process of

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<sup>54</sup> Istituto di Studi Romani, “*I Moderni carthagi: Mare Nostrum II*” (Istituto di Studi Romani, Rome, 1940)

<sup>55</sup> Arturo Marzano, “Onde fascite. La propaganda araba di Radio Bari (1934-1943)”, (Carocci, Rome, 2015)

<sup>56</sup> Laura Neack “Middle Powers Once Removed: The Diminished Global Role of Middle Powers and American Grand Strategy”, (International Studies Association, 41<sup>st</sup> Annual Convention, Los Angeles, 2000)

European integration. Even during these challenging years, marked by the need for Italy to rebuild its role and reputation on the global stage, Italian diplomats closely monitored the development of the Arab world with the anticipation that Italy would eventually have a significant role to play in this region. The mid-1950s, particularly the final crisis of the French and British empires, marked a turning point in Italy's Mediterranean and Middle East policy, which became an important aspect of the country's international role.<sup>57</sup>

Italy, which was no longer a military power following the Second World War and whose national security through NATO was taken for granted, transformed its vulnerability into a new source of significance by emphasizing political dialogue and economic cooperation with Islamic nations. Its preference for that region, after an initial affinity for Israel, was evidence that it was a "*Mediterranean, unarmed prophet*"<sup>58</sup> whose origins were in promoting regional peace and prosperity.

Together with them, economy and policy were the two major objectives in Italy's initiatives towards this region, which, after the Suez crisis and the Six-Day War, became an issue in the "*global Cold War*"<sup>59</sup> and in particular "*Arab Cold War*" as Malcolm H. Kerr refers to it.

Italy and its authorities were then at a crossroads. They had to navigate the challenging task of balancing Italy's commitment to the Western alliance with its desire to cultivate friendly relations, especially on an economic level, with many Arab nations. This was particularly challenging because a significant number of Middle Eastern countries held strong anti-Western, nationalist, and anti-Israeli sentiments. In response to these dynamics, Italy demonstrated a degree of willingness to engage with Arab concerns, particularly regarding the Palestinian issue. Italy actively sought diplomatic compromise solutions and worked to enhance its relationships with moderate Arab nations, notably Egypt. Even with less-than-ideal partners like Libya and Iraq, Italy recognized the importance of maintaining and, in some cases, strengthening economic ties.

The Libyan nationalist revolution of 1969 was an additional source of concern for Italian politicians and diplomats, despite the fact that Italian citizens were expelled from Libya during this period, it did not hinder the signing of beneficial economic agreements between the Tripoli regime and major Italian corporations.

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<sup>57</sup> Elena Calandri, "Il Mediterraneo e la difesa dell'Occidente 1947-1956: Eredita imperiali e logiche di guerra fredda" (Il Maestrato, Firenze, 1997)

<sup>58</sup> Paving reference to Fra Girolamo Savonarola who was defined an "unarmed prophet" in Niccolò Machiavelli "The Prince" (Chap. 6, originally published in 1532).

<sup>59</sup> The term was coined by Odd Arne Westad in the homonymous book (2005).

The Yom Kippur War and the subsequent '*first oil shock*' had significant adverse effects on the Italian economy, but it conversely presented opportunities for Italy to solidify its interests in the Arab world. Italy was in dire need of Arab oil to support its economy. Additionally, the Western powers were growing increasingly concerned about the heightened Russian naval presence in the Mediterranean.<sup>60</sup>

As Prof. Varsori elucidates in the preface of the book "*Italy and the Middle East*", the distinctiveness of Italy's role in the Middle East was not solely a consequence of its general vulnerabilities and reliance on oil but also stemmed from a strong continuity with its historical legacy. While France pursued political independence, and the United Kingdom aligned with the Western Alliance, both aiming to leverage the Mediterranean to enhance their global influence, Italy functioned as a crucial link across the region. Its role was to preserve the Middle East's regional identity and support the Western bloc in maintaining its sway in the face of Soviet endeavors.

Throughout the Cold War, Italy's significant presence in the Middle East played a pivotal role in its resurgence as a Mediterranean power, highlighting the unique character of Italian foreign policy. Unlike the United Kingdom and France, which managed to sustain distinct international roles apart from their colonial legacies during their post-colonial transitions, Italy was compelled to distance itself from its historical baggage. It needed to establish new credibility based on its geopolitical position, all the while contending with limited resources for effective regional policymaking compared to France and the United Kingdom.

During the 1980s, the Mediterranean and Arab world were profoundly entangled in the '*new*' Cold War as a result of the policies pursued by the Reagan administration<sup>61</sup>, while local crises grew more severe (Lebanese Civil War, Palestinian terrorism, the Iraq-Iran war, etc.).

In the 1980s, Italy successfully navigated past the challenges of the 1970s and demonstrated a capacity to establish a more engaged and coherent foreign policy. This was evident in various spheres, including its involvement with NATO, the European Community, and its relationships in the Arab world. Notably, Italy took part in a multinational peacekeeping mission in Lebanon and fostered positive connections with the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), with a particular focus on its leader, Yasser Arafat; and, despite the military conflict between the

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<sup>60</sup> Daniele Caviglia, Massimiliano Cricco, "La diplomazia italiana e gli equilibri mediterranei. La politica mediorientale dell'Italia dalla guerra dei sei giorni al conflitto dello Yom Kippur (1967-1973)" (Rubbettino, Soveria Mannelli, 2006).

<sup>61</sup> Steven Spiegel, "*The Other Arab-Israeli Conflict: Making America's Middle East Policy From Truman to Reagan*" (University Of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1985)

United States and the Libyan regime, Italy managed to maintain robust economic partnerships with Tripoli.

### *I. Diplomatic outspring from 1946 to 1994*

From the early 1970s to the early 1990s, Italy's relationship with the Middle East represented a crucial period of long-term transition proving its unique characteristics, particularly in shaping modern diplomacy. Characterized by the so-called globalizing paradigm, following the end of the Cold War, as described by Westad, the international community went through the end of bipolarity, regional tensions, and superpower interference, all of which profoundly impacted the Arab region.

In the aftermath of the Yom Kippur War, which was a central occurrence in the modern history of the Middle East, many significant dynamics emerged. While Sadat's political and military prowess and the Soviet Union's loss of influence paved the way for the first historical step in the peace process, local oil producers fought against Western powers and their impositions on the oil market: using oil as a political instrument for the first time, leaving Western diplomats and politicians astonished and throwing as such Italy and the United States into disarray.

For the Italian foreign policy, the Yom Kippur War had a significant impact. The eminent diplomat, Roberto Gaja, noted that the 1973 Middle East crisis demonstrated that, although the military security of Italy could have been entirely guaranteed by the Atlantic Alliance, the same could have not been said for its manufacturing capacity and economic security. This resulted in a new Italian diplomatic activism between the 1970s and 1980s, partially disregarding the efficacy of European collective initiatives, however, Euro-Arab dialogues were focused on strengthening or establishing long-lasting and trustworthy bilateral relations as well as rigorous economic cooperation with such energy producers as Libya, Algeria, Iran, and Saudi Arabia. The search for energy supplies, partners, and markets was a key objective in the Mediterranean policy of Italy. Indeed, the support of multilateral peace initiatives in Palestine, even with its strong commitment and public interest, was motivated by the need to maintain cooperation between oil producers and Western nations.

Related to this aspect, there was the pursuit of political order and stability in the region, trying to avoid instability and conflict that would have meant additional difficulties, like the oil retaliation, which was the product of the Yom Kippur War, before, and the Iranian Revolution, after. As the region grappled with the rise of political terrorism, which eventually had repercussions in the Western world, the global community advocated for collaborative

multilateral efforts to establish political stability. Lebanon, serving as a robust and functional model for future endeavors, was a prime example.

Italy's ambition to position itself as the primary mediator between Western powers and Middle Eastern states was driven not merely by the desire for prestige, especially as a "*peripheral*" nation, but rather by the urgent need to safeguard its own political and economic interests within a Mediterranean region that was safer and more stable. Italian diplomats and politicians believed that the most effective guarantee of peace and stability lay in achieving a balance of power that did not result in the devastation or humiliation of certain local political actors. This '*overly friendly*' stance (e.g., establishing relations with Arafat and Gaddafi) on one side, and strongly confrontational, on the other, sparked tensions with those countries that had, as a basis of their alliance, the idea of seeking strategic superiority over Arab nations, an annihilation, but on the '*low end*'.

In the early 1990s, Italy faced a severe political crisis that led to the downfall of the country's major political parties, including the "*First*" party. This crisis had a profound impact on Italy's foreign policy, which paired with the onset of the first Gulf War. As the bipolar era ended, so did the conflict between the Soviet Union and the United States, marking the start of American hegemony in the Middle East. This shift diminished opportunities for Italy to continue its role as a diplomatic mediator in the Mediterranean. The multilateral military intervention against Iraq thwarted efforts to promote a diplomatic solution, resulting in Italy losing a significant portion of its regional significance, despite remaining the most influential Mediterranean European power.

From the 1970s to the early 1990s, Italy invested substantial political, economic, diplomatic, and strategic efforts in promoting a regional policy centered on principles like multilateralism, cooperation, respect, and understanding for all local countries. This approach aimed to counter the divisive policies of superpowers that had long exploited local tensions to gain influence. Although this endeavor was ambitious for a middle power, Italy's pursuit of regional credibility achieved some success.

During a period of significant local change and global transition into the post-Cold War era, Italy's interests in the Middle East covered a wide range of areas. Regional stability, peace, and secure access to energy resources became closely linked to Italy's national security, prompting the initiation of numerous comprehensive cooperation initiatives. Diplomacy was at the core of this ambitious strategy, emphasizing a regional and inclusive perspective. This approach set Italy apart and garnered favorable perceptions of its proposals, especially during times of crisis.



#### *d. The Second Republic*

The end of the Cold War and the subsequent institutional and economic crisis that defined Italy in the first half of the 1990s marked a turning point in Italy's policy towards the Arab world.<sup>62</sup> While Italy has made efforts, achieving some degree of success, in maintaining positive relations with the region, its foreign policy has become progressively interconnected with that of the European Union. To the extent that it has now become challenging to distinguish between foreign policy and domestic matters. The southern shore of the Mediterranean and the Middle East are now seen as potential sources of significant destabilization, encompassing issues ranging from the terrorist threat to migration concerns.

With the affirmation of a loosely bipolarity in the 1994 political elections, Italy entered a new phase. The '*Second Republic*' brought about domestic transformations: political and party system's process of reorganization; high party fragmentation at the far ends of the political spectrum which was progressively undermined by parliamentary practices, such as floor-crossing and defection; and a constant change in coalitions' compositions (that continued until nowadays).

The two coalitions embodied "*two Italy*", on complete opposite ends, diverging particularly on the interchange between foreign policy, internal politics, and international relations within the national context.

The Right was more "*nationalist*" and "*revanchist*," placing emphasis on the principles of responsibility and autonomy in the context of foreign policy, and propelling as such Euro-skepticism<sup>63</sup>, a strong sentiment that, during the first Berlusconi administration, has been relinquished by all political factions except for the Lega Nord.

On the other side of the political spectrum, the Center-Left was guided by a sense of urgency for introspection, regarding the more pressing sides of foreign policy, like the deployment of military force in humanitarian missions, which led to the adoption of the language proper of radical pacifism and internationalism (extreme left themes) in discussing the military campaigns taking place in Kosovo, Afghanistan, Iraq, and afterward, Libya.

Another hotspot regarded the involvement of the United States in the administration of worldwide security, developing anti-American sentiments, and open critiques of its misconduct.

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<sup>62</sup>Antonio Varsori, "L'Italia e la fine della guerra fredda. La politica estera dei governi Andreotti 1989-1992" (II Mulino, Bologna, 2013)

<sup>63</sup> The controversies over the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty are emblematic in this context.

The Center-Left coalition proved, anyway, to be able to manage and endorse interventions, even in cases when the United Nations' normative framework was absent, like in the case of Kosovo or Lebanon with UNIFIL II. Additionally, the coalition demonstrated an extremely strong commitment to Atlanticism.

In 2005, with the departure from Iraq of the Italian troops, a so-called '*parallel convergence*' took place, which reduced the gap between Right and Left. The potential of a bipartisan agreement on foreign policy was there, but the result, in the end, was the neutralization and depoliticization of foreign policy, its prominence significantly diminished in the political agendas put forth during the 2006 and 2008 elections by the primary coalitions, resurfacing solely in instances where it is explicitly linked to domestic political factors (e.g., the migration crisis).

For the future, it appears to be an essential requirement for Italy to play an active role in both the Mediterranean and the Middle East, but it is difficult to identify clear points of reference. Italy is a victim of the uncertainty of times, a characteristic also of the European Union as a whole, whose policies towards the Mediterranean's southern shore and the Middle East seem growingly confused and convoluted.<sup>64</sup>

### **2.3 A theoretical outlook on Italy's foreign policy history**

Foreign policy occupies a critical, interstitial space in world politics, as it is generated at the permeable interface of domestic politics and international relations, despite scholars' vastly divergent perspectives.

In 1987, J. Rosenau famously used the metaphor of a '*bridge*' to identify the location of foreign policy between the '*domestic*' and the '*international*', but it is also a distinct trait of a state in defining itself, its identity, in confrontation to the external alterity<sup>65</sup>: it is indeed a mixture of internal and external forces colliding in a set of competing but also collectively defined national objectives.<sup>66</sup>

Italy, as a medium-sized nation, has a long history of encountering a wide range of interactions between international relations and domestic politics. These interactions have, in turn, shaped the evolution of a diverse foreign policy. However, discussions regarding Italian foreign policy

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<sup>64</sup>Luciano Monzali, Paolo Soave "Italy and the Middle East. Geopolitics, Dialogue and Power during the Cold War" (Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, London, 2021)

<sup>65</sup> David Campbell, "*Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity*" (Minnesota University Press, Minnesota, 1998)

<sup>66</sup> Elisabetta Brighi, "Foreign Policy, Domestic Politics and International Relations. The case of Italy", (Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, London, 2013)

have typically revolved around a clash between two narratives: those who support an international and structurally driven interpretation of Italian foreign policy, and on the other hand, those who advocate for a more domestically focused perspective on Italy's foreign policy. For the former, one of the key factors is rooted in a fundamental aspect of Italy's foreign policy: since the country's unification in 1861, and in part because Italy was a relative latecomer in the international arena, foreign policy played a crucial role in Italy's very existence as a state, to the point that "*Italy as a united state could only maintain its existence through an active foreign policy*"<sup>67</sup>.

It's worth noting that both Italy's unification in 1861 and the eventual establishment of its capital in Rome in 1871 were largely the result of successful diplomatic maneuvers that took place in relatively favorable diplomatic circumstances. However, throughout its history, Italy's foreign policy has been burdened with high expectations and aspirations, often running up against the country's internal weaknesses, its struggle to keep pace with modernity, and its vulnerable external position.

The tension arising from the persistent gap between Italy's ambitions and its actual achievements, as well as the contrast between expectations and the realities it faced, highlights the inherent complexity of its foreign policy. Few other nations have experienced foreign policy as such a critical yet inherently imperfect or consistently frustrated endeavor.

Since the end of the Cold War, Italy has gradually developed a distinctive and assertive foreign policy. While it may still be seen as straddling the line between a small and middle power, there is no denying that since the 1990s, Italy has elevated its presence in European affairs, transatlantic relations, and various other global arenas. This includes deploying troops, safeguarding its interests, and allocating resources in regions such as the Mediterranean, the Balkans, and the Middle East. While Italy may not always be the easiest or most straightforward partner, it is a necessary and indispensable one. In contemporary international affairs, Italy cannot be taken for granted, especially in the "*enlarged Mediterranean*" context. Besides its peculiarities, Italy is a representative case of middle-sized, relatively prosperous European democracy caught between decline and defeat on the one hand, and reinvention and multilateralism on the other: sharing many commonalities with other middle powers such as Germany and France. Emphasizing similarities, rather than differences, with these countries is a crucial therapeutic step in curing Italy's long-standing inferiority complex vis-à-vis great

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<sup>67</sup> Bosworth, R. J. B. "*Italy and the Wider World, 1860–1960*", (Routledge, London, 1996)

powers that no longer “*exist*”: the more Italy perceives itself to be a normal country, the more it is so.<sup>68</sup>

Throughout the century, Italy experienced dramatic changes internally, experiencing destructive political dynamics (between a monarchy, an authoritarian regime, and tentative republics) while having to deal also with the two world wars, the Cold War, and the general turmoil of current times leading to multilateralism. These mutually changing patterns combined and produced the various directives of the Italian foreign policy.

However, analyzed, Italy’s foreign policy cannot be completely understood using a single logic, either being the inward one of domestic constraints and “moods” of the reeling elites or that looking at the ‘greater picture’ of the Mediterranean, the European continent, the world, where Italy struggles to find its identity, positioning, room for maneuvers.

In any period, there was a duality of logic, merging, even though one might predominate over the other.

In the liberal era, attempts to explain significant events like the Libyan intervention or Italy's diplomatic vacillation leading up to the First World War fall short when relying solely on either purely international or purely domestic explanations. During times of high international tension (First World War) there might have been a perceived primacy of the international component which, anyway, overlooks the particularly powerful domestic constraints (nationalism and the rise of the industrial-financial complex).

In the context of the “*ventennio fascista*” foreign policy, it's challenging to provide a comprehensive explanation for the troubled alliance with Germany or Italy's approach leading up to the Second World War by, again, relying solely on either international or domestic factors. This is because, as in the preceding period, these two forces clashed with significant complexity.

During the ‘*First Republic*’, there was not a single cause that could explain the entire trajectory of over almost five decades. The international arena was living the bipolar pike of the Cold War, while internally the intense domestic political dynamic of its party-political system does not completely account for the peculiar Italian trends, such as ‘*pacifist Atlanticism*’<sup>69</sup>, the

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<sup>68</sup> Elisabetta Brighi, “Foreign Policy, Domestic Politics and International Relations. The case of Italy”, (Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, London, 2013)

<sup>69</sup> Massimo De Giuseppe, “Italian Catholics and the Suez Crisis: Between Neo-Atlanticism, Pacifism, and Third Worldism.” in Barbara Curli (ed.) “Italy and the Suez Canal, from the Mid-nineteenth Century to the Cold War.” (Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-88255-6\\_21](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-88255-6_21)

neutralization of foreign policy around the mid-1970s, or episodes such as the Sigonella crisis<sup>70</sup> of 1985.

Lastly, Italy's foreign policy during the '*Second Republic*' also proved to be a response that couldn't be solely attributed to either international or domestic pressures. Various developments, including the shift in foreign policy initiated by the Berlusconi government in 2001<sup>71</sup>, Italy's involvement in military operations during the 'Global War on Terror' such as Iraq and Afghanistan, and its humanitarian interventions in the 1990s, along with more recent actions like the intervention in Lebanon (which will be discussed further in the next chapter), cannot be adequately explained by focusing solely on either international or domestic factors in isolation.

A single-cause method cannot be applied when analyzing Italian foreign policy as is the case for the complexity of the Lebanese context. This “*elasticity*” proper of the Italian external action is nevertheless a source of strength: if on one side, Italy is still trying to find its place in the international chessboard, on the other side, there is plenty of room for maneuver, that is being used at our advantage through encompassing Governmental Directives.

## **2.4 The guiding principles from the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs**

In the Report 2020<sup>72</sup> drafted by the “*Gruppo di Riflessione Strategica*” of the “*Unità di analisi e di programmazione*” of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, there was a clear reference to the utmost importance of a regionalist approach, especially in the “*enlarged Mediterranean*” that together with the Balkans represented regional priorities.

The former region underwent notable transformations, that did not fossilize yet, so when considering and planning actions there, a prerequisite is to consider its incredible fluid and ‘*explosiveness*’. The region is a powder keg between rising inter-connections, divisive factors, economic, and political polarization, in particular fundamentalist and terroristic movements

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<sup>70</sup> The October 1985 Sigonella crisis was a diplomatic incident between Italy and the United States of America. In the aftermath of a political rift between Italian Prime Minister Bettino Craxi and U.S. President Ronald Reagan over the fate of Palestinian terrorists who hijacked the Italian cruise ship Achille Lauro, killing a U.S. passenger, the incident threatened to escalate into an armed confrontation between VAM (Vigilanza Aeronautica Militare) and Carabinieri on the one hand, and Delta Force (a special branch of the U.S. armed forces) soldiers on the other.

<sup>71</sup> Emilio Diodato, Federico Niglia, “L’Italia e la politica internazionale. Dalla Grande Guerra al (dis-)ordine globale”, (Carrocci Editore, Roma, 2019)

<sup>72</sup> “Rapporto 2020- Le scelte di politica estera”, UNITÀ DI ANALISI E DI PROGRAMMAZIONE, Ministero degli Affari Esteri, GRUPPO DI RIFLESSIONE STRATEGICA, 2020, [https://www.esteri.it/mae/doc/Rapporto2020\\_SceltePoliticaEsteri\\_090408.pdf](https://www.esteri.it/mae/doc/Rapporto2020_SceltePoliticaEsteri_090408.pdf)

increased their influence over unsolved conflicts, such as the one between Palestine and Israel and the internal one in Lebanon.

Moreover, many changes occurred also at the international level, shifting roles, and spheres of interest between new, rising powers and traditional allies.

To be able to achieve an effective appeasement of this vast "*arc of crisis*," from Maghreb to Iran to Afghanistan, Italy is strongly convinced that it is indispensable to have an integrated vision and strategy, considering all the specificities of the various subregional theaters. The Italian vision is in between two others, as has been the case for much of its history: one coming from the European Union, and the other from the United States of America. The former is characterized by the Barcelona Process<sup>73</sup> and the Neighborhood Policy<sup>74</sup>, so formally based on the prospect of economic integration of the area as a whole and the political-normative rapprochement of those countries toward European standards: economy and institution-building as the crucial tools to foster evolution.

The latter kept leveraging on the centrality of Iraq, and the idea that, once a regime change would occur there, it would produce a virtuous regional spillover. The unrealistic ideal of "*exporting democracy*" in a rapid and forced manner retreated to a more reasonable approach supporting politically and militarily moderate regimes, reiterating the practice of forming "*pillow states*" as constraints, for example, in the case of Iran and its regional allies, such as Hezbollah or, on the Palestinian front, Hamas.

Both strategies are lacking in one aspect or another, particularly in terms of effective engagement, and within their deficiencies, Italy can build on its foreign policy to overcome the European economy-first approach and the American security-first one.

In Italy's view the transatlantic strategy for the enlarged Mediterranean should be based, upon four guiding principles: an approach to security based on a mix of balance of power, mutual guarantees of trust, international commitments, and disarmament measures (certainly not on an identity key); the priority importance of resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, based on the two-state formula, and normalizing the relationship between Israel and Arab countries; the emphasis on good governance and the rule of law as conditions (as opposed to elections per se) for a gradual but solid transition to democracy in the Gulf countries as well; the importance of

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<sup>73</sup> The initial phase of the Barcelona Process took place in 1995, with the primary objective of enhancing the interconnections between Europe and the nations of the Southern Mediterranean region. The manifestation of goodwill and acknowledgment of the mutual benefits associated with enhanced relations subsequently paved the way for the establishment of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM).

<sup>74</sup> The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) is a foreign policy framework designed to foster closer relations between the European Union (EU) and its neighbouring countries in the Eastern and Southern regions. This framework seeks to promote mutual benefits and interests for all parties involved.

regional cooperation in the economic sector.

*a. Recent governmental directives: “delibera missioni”, “atti parlamentari” and “documenti di programmazione”*

The action of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation is part of a complex global scenario characterized by persistent and new international crises and frictional dynamics among the major powers. These fragilities, in a global socio-economic framework still grappling with overcoming the COVID-19 pandemic, have been accentuated by Russia's aggression against Ukraine, which has reshaped geopolitical arrangements and generated serious consequences on the dynamics of prices and supplies of raw materials and energy products, as well as on the European reception systems operated for Ukrainian displaced persons.

Recently, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs reiterated its continuity to the strengthening of bilateral relations, in the context of the European and transatlantic dimensions, the two essential coordinates of foreign and national security policy. The commitment to an integrated European defense with the Atlantic Alliance, also in light of NATO's new Strategic Concept, was confirmed.

In its relations with the European Union priority has been given to strategic interest including aspects particularly relevant to this analysis, such as the reform of economic governance, the coordination for common energy security, the management of migratory phenomena, and active participation in the EU negotiations on the New Pact on Migration and Asylum, with a view to a comprehensive reform of EU migration policy inspired by solidarity with the member states of first entry of migrants, including through the hoped-for overcoming of the Dublin Regulation.

The enlarged Mediterranean area (North Africa, Middle East, Sahel, all the way to Afghanistan) which have been highly impacted by the Ukrainian crisis is significant, in terms of stability, food security and energy supplies- remained the geopolitical quadrant closest to Italy. In the region multiple objectives are to be considered to prevent and solve ongoing crises, starting with Libyan stabilization.<sup>75</sup>

From a multilateral perspective, in enhancing the achievements of the Italian G20 Presidency and COP26 co-chairmanship in 2021, the areas of energy, environmental sustainability,

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<sup>75</sup>DM 4852/BIS/151, Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione, Signed by Antonio Tajani, March 2023, <https://www.esteri.it/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/DM-4852-BIS-151.pdf>

combating climate change, food security, anti-corruption, and equitable access to vaccines for the benefit of low- and lower-middle-income countries remained priorities. Furthermore, as witnessed by Italy's six-month presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, which ended in May 2022, the promotion of international law, the protection of the rule of law, and the universal safeguarding of human rights remained central elements of its foreign policy. Priority has been given to countering global threats and challenges such as terrorism, hybrid threats (primarily cyber and ICT network threats), nuclear proliferation risks, human trafficking, and transnational organized crime with numerous interventions, too.

In the recent programmatic documentations, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has also highlighted the significance of its commitment and participation to the UN fora and its specialized agencies in support of cultural heritage protection, education, and scientific cooperation activities, through a concrete contribution to resources, active presence, visibility, and planning. The contribution of Italy in multilateral forums and through political dialogue with partner countries is another crucial aspect of building effective global governance, in order to advance and promote the goals of Agenda 2030 and 2050 on sustainable development and international cooperation activities.

Regarding free trade, Italy is engaged in ensuring a constructive contribution to the European Commission's negotiating activity to strengthen its network of agreements and diversify outlet and supply markets, particularly with regard to Latin America, the Indo-Pacific, and Africa, meaning, in the current geopolitical context, the reduction of economic dependence on authoritarian regimes. The economic objective comprehends also the Italian contribution to strengthening trade multilateralism in relevant multilateral contexts (WTO, OECD, G7, and G20), and, on the other hand, its profound commitment to foster the growth of Italian exports and the revival of Made in Italy, ensuring the coordination of promotion activities abroad conducted by the various articulations of the “*Sistema Paese*”, applying an integrated approach which considers the effects generated, on many national productive sectors, by the war in Ukraine.

Cultural diplomacy is an additional point of strength of the Italian foreign policy, leveraging the national linguistic and cultural heritage by stressing on actions of promotion of Italy's language and culture, the returns of scientific and technological cooperation, and the recognition of Italian communities and communities of Italian origin around the world. The enhancement of the cultural dimension, the “*soft power*”, of the Farnesina's actions boosted the broader involvement of Italian and international civil society on foreign policy issues.



Regarding public diplomacy, the Rome Mediterranean Dialogues have served as the primary tool to foster this practice on a yearly basis. The event, which has been jointly organized with ISPI since 2015, facilitates the convergence of institutional representatives, experts, analysts, young individuals, and representatives from civil society, business, and media, with the key objective of engaging in discussions pertaining to the principal challenges encountered in the Mediterranean region and enhancing cooperation within the region. This is achieved through the exploration of four key pillars, namely "*Shared Security*," "*Shared Prosperity*," "*Migration*," and "*Culture and Civil Society*." Rome MEDs aim at facilitating a transparent and free discussion at a high level concerning all the difficulties faced in the area. The purpose is to substantiate the significance of regionalism and hence this strategic area for Italy's foreign policy by collectively establishing a "*Positive Agenda*" to revalorize the region: transforming the Mediterranean from a focal point of crises into a domain that fosters progress and advancement for its inhabitants. Additionally, it should serve as a tangible and conceptual platform for fostering connections between Europe, Africa, and Asia.<sup>76</sup>

Through a reinforcement of the national tools, Italy's image and role will continue to be enhanced<sup>77</sup>, and its vision of international relations and foreign policy objectives will be promoted in an increasingly widespread manner.<sup>78</sup>

#### ***b. Cooperation, economy, and military operations***

Italy's distinctive diplomatic approach has evolved over time, influenced by historical, geographical, and cultural factors.

Firstly, Italy's strategic location at the crossroads of Europe, the Mediterranean, and North Africa has historically rendered it a pivotal player in regional politics. Consequently, its foreign policy is informed by the imperative of preserving stability and addressing regional complexities.

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<sup>76</sup>“Rome MED – Mediterranean Dialogues 2022”, Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale, 2022, [https://www.esteri.it/it/politica-estera-e-cooperazione-allo-sviluppo/aree\\_geografiche/mediterr\\_mo/rome-med-mediterranean-dialogues-2022/](https://www.esteri.it/it/politica-estera-e-cooperazione-allo-sviluppo/aree_geografiche/mediterr_mo/rome-med-mediterranean-dialogues-2022/)

<sup>77</sup> This to be added to the recent, intense action to promote the candidacy of the city of Rome to host the EXPO 2030.

<sup>78</sup>“NOTA INTEGRATIVA AL DISEGNO DI LEGGE DI BILANCIO per l’anno 2023 e per il triennio 2023-2025”, MINISTERO DELL’ECONOMIA E DELLE FINANZE DIPARTIMENTO DELLA RAGIONERIA GENERALE DELLO STATO, Ispettorato generale del bilancio, MINISTERO DEGLI AFFARI ESTERI E DELLA COOPERAZIONE INTERNAZIONALE, 2023, [https://www.rgs.mef.gov.it/\\_Documenti/VERSIONE-I/attivita\\_istituzionali/formazione\\_e\\_gestione\\_del\\_bilancio/bilancio\\_di\\_previsione/note\\_integrative/2023-2025/ni\\_dlb/DLBNOT1C\\_060.pdf](https://www.rgs.mef.gov.it/_Documenti/VERSIONE-I/attivita_istituzionali/formazione_e_gestione_del_bilancio/bilancio_di_previsione/note_integrative/2023-2025/ni_dlb/DLBNOT1C_060.pdf)

Secondly, Italy's membership in the European Union profoundly shapes its foreign policy. The nation strives to align its interests with those of the EU while concurrently pursuing its distinct national objectives within the union's framework.

Lastly, Italy's rich cultural heritage and historical legacy contribute to its soft power diplomacy. Cultural diplomacy, art promotion, and heritage preservation are integral components of Italy's foreign policy, facilitating the projection of its unique identity and fostering international goodwill.

Its nuanced approach to diplomacy comprises both bilateral and multilateral dimensions. Bilateral diplomacy enables Italy to engage directly with other states to pursue specific interests or address distinct issues. Examples include trade negotiations, security agreements, and cultural exchanges conducted on a one-on-one basis.

In contrast, multilateral diplomacy is a hallmark of Italy's international engagement, as it actively participates in various global forums and organizations. The European Union, the United Nations, and regional entities like the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) are central to Italy's multilateral endeavors. Italy recognizes the efficacy of collective action in addressing complex global challenges and seeks to leverage these platforms to amplify its influence and contribute to multilateral solutions.

At the same time, Italy's foreign policy actions are characterized by a keen aspiration for cooperation and the cultivation of harmony in the international arena, as previously seen. This orientation is propelled by the imperatives of national security, economic interests, and broader global stability.

Cooperation materializes through Italy's active participation in diplomatic initiatives addressing critical global issues, including climate change mitigation, humanitarian efforts, and peacekeeping missions. Italy's commitment to such undertakings reflects its endeavor to contribute constructively to international harmony.

Nevertheless, Italy is not immune to discord in its foreign policy pursuits, which may emerge in its relationships, particularly with the European Union, where economic disagreements and divergent policy priorities occasionally surface. Furthermore, Italy's interactions with countries like Russia, China, and Turkey partially lead to discord as it navigates nuanced and sometimes conflicting interests.

Being a fervent advocate of multilateral diplomacy in addressing Middle Eastern issues, Italy reiterates its obligations as a member of the United Nations and the European Union, actively participating in international forums to shape regional policies, aligning itself with the main

European Union's directives concerning the Middle East: a commitment to a collective approach to address regional challenges.

### ***I. The Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS)***

The Italian Agency for Development Cooperation is one of the most significant innovations created by the Italian law on international cooperation (Law 125 of 2014). The Agency began operations in January 2016, with the intention of aligning Italy with its primary European and global development partners. Its fundamental model reflects that of the major European nations, and it must meet the demand for more professional and inventive forms of cooperation, requiring the methodological flexibility required by a scenario in constant evolution.

The Agency has twenty field offices around the globe to assess local requirements, implement development initiatives, monitor results, and establish local partnerships. According to the law, the Agency's purpose is to "*perform technical and operational activities associated with the examination, development, financing, management, and control of cooperation initiatives*".

International cooperation is not only "*an integral and qualifying aspect of Italy's foreign policy*" (article 1 of Law 125) for Italy, but also its fulfillment... essentially a new and more modern form of foreign policy.<sup>79</sup> In the initial sections of the Law, the primary aims of development cooperation are outlined, which encompass the elimination of poverty, the alleviation of inequality, the advancement of human rights and gender equality, the endorsement of liberal democracy, and the establishment of the rule of law. In essence, development is portrayed not merely as an "*economic agenda*" but as a program focused on enhancing human well-being and welfare.

Environmental sustainability, more equitable distribution of prosperity, and guaranteed access to quality healthcare and education are the major themes of the future. These are the challenges that cooperation, and the Agency, in particular, needs to confront and tackle, embodying a fresh approach characterized as an "*economy of human protection and promotion*." This approach is intended to engage both public and private entities, incorporating aspects like culture, education, employment, rights, business, and community, and is influenced by European and Italian precedents. Furthermore, international cooperation should offer practical solutions for individuals, including men, women, and children, fleeing conflict and destitution.

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<sup>79</sup> "Profile and Goals", Italian Agency for Development Cooperation, <https://www.aics.gov.it/home-eng/aics/profile-and-goals/>

Law 125 aims to modernize Italian cooperation efforts by building upon four key pillars. Firstly, it emphasizes the "*coherence of government policies*," which is overseen by the Inter-ministerial Committee for Cooperation and Development (CICS). This committee serves as the institutional platform for coordination among various Ministries such as Foreign Affairs, Interior, Environment, Economic Development, Culture, and others concerning international cooperation and development policies. The primary objective is to enhance the consistency and coherence of these policies in terms of their goals and outcomes.

The second pillar entails the appointment of a Vice-Minister for Cooperation who possesses extensive authority and a specific focus on cooperation matters. This individual is empowered to participate in cabinet meetings addressing cooperation-related issues.

The third pillar centers around establishing an "Italian cooperation system" that oversees the involvement and collaboration of new participants from the non-profit sector (including civil society organizations, foundations, charitable groups, and ethical finance) as well as the private sector.

Lastly, the fourth pillar is embodied properly in AICS, the Italian Agency for Cooperation and Development. Operating under the auspices of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, AICS possesses a broad mandate, independent legal status, its own budget, and a distinct organizational structure. These characteristics enable it to serve as a central hub facilitating connections between national and local institutions, as well as non-profit and for-profit organizations.

Law 125 outlines that the objectives of international cooperation encompass eradicating poverty, reducing inequalities, safeguarding civil rights and personal dignity (including gender equality and equal opportunities), and contributing to conflict prevention and support for peace processes. The Agency is required to develop a triennial plan outlining the direction and priorities of cooperation and development policies. This plan must receive authorization from the Italian government by March 31 each year.

On the domestic front, cooperation policies contribute to the evolution of new and shared migration policies, due in part to the Italian immigrant community. On the international stage, Law 125 identifies partner country stewardship of development processes as one of the pillars of all aid programs. Furthermore, the Law explicitly states that aid should never be employed for military purposes, whether directly or indirectly. Regarding multilateral endeavors, the law upholds the principle of aligning national cooperation policies with those of the European Union ("*harmonization*"). Concerning regional partnerships, it acknowledges the authority of regional governments and local institutions to engage in collaborative initiatives with their

counterparts in different regions. Additionally, actors engaged in development cooperation are also responsible for humanitarian aid and emergency efforts.

Since international cooperation is defined as "*an integral and qualifying part of foreign policy*," it will be the Vice-Minister's responsibility, with the assistance of the Ministry's General Direction of Cooperation, to supervise the functioning of this unified and coherent system. The overall economic resources allocated by the Italian government to international cooperation policies, which were previously dispersed among various departments and Ministries, are now explicitly outlined in the annual financial statement.

Law 125 allocates the function of "*The Italian Bank for Development*" to "*Cassa Depositi e Prestiti*", whose expertise, network of alliances, and relationships with international financial institutions can provide a significant increase to the Italian cooperation system. The law also grants a significant role to the Parliament for providing direction and supervision. It establishes the National Council for Cooperation and Development, a forum for discussion and consultation that allows for the engagement of various players involved in international cooperation, whether they are public or private, profit-driven, or non-profit organizations. This setup facilitates an ongoing connection among stakeholders.<sup>80</sup>

## ***II. The Italian Trade Agency (ICE)***

ITA, the Italian Trade Agency, is the government agency, under the supervision of both the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Enterprises and Made in Italy, that supports the international expansion of companies and encourages foreign investment in Italy.

It provides information, assistance, consulting, promotion, and training to Italian small and medium-sized enterprises through a network of overseas offices and a motivated, contemporary organization. Utilizing the most advanced multi-channel promotion and communication tools, it promotes the excellence of Made in Italy worldwide.

The Trade Promotion Agency operates globally with 79 offices in 65 countries. Its offices are the ideal entry point for businesses seeking to establish business relationships with Italian partners, ranging from procuring Italian products to investing in Italy.

It has a specialized division the Foreign Investments Attraction Department which assists countries interested in entering the Italian market, and it is also responsible for facilitating the establishment and growth of foreign companies in Italy. Promoting business opportunities,

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<sup>80</sup> "Profile and Goals", Italian Agency for Development Cooperation, <https://www.aics.gov.it/home-eng/aics/profile-and-goals/>

assisting foreign investors in establishing or expanding operations, supporting investors throughout the investment life cycle, and providing high-level mentoring for existing strategic investments are the Department's primary objectives.

Through its Foreign Direct Investment Unit, ITA facilitates the establishment and growth of international businesses in Italy. Its competencies comprehend the assistance of foreign investors from site selection to business establishment (visas, expansion projects, etc.), as well as aftercare services.<sup>81</sup>

### ***III. Ministry of Defense and international missions***

Italy's participation in UN missions, as well as European ones, is a significant element of the country's international engagement and a response to the need to protect national security against transnational threats. Italy's active engagement in UN peacekeeping missions aligns with its traditional commitment to multilateralism in foreign policy. It reflects the belief that the United Nations, due to its universal mission, holds a unique position in assisting the stabilization of numerous crisis areas, particularly in the Middle East and Africa.

Italy stands out as a leading contributor of military personnel and highly skilled police forces to UN peacekeeping missions among Western and EU nations. Moreover, Italy ranks seventh among nations contributing to the UN peacekeeping budget.<sup>82</sup> Italy's involvement in UN missions has garnered widespread acclaim and has become a noteworthy example, primarily due to the ability of its contingents to engage in dialogue with local populations and their effectiveness in bridging the gap between the civilian and military aspects of stabilization and peacekeeping efforts.

Italy's foreign policy priorities are reflected in its substantial commitment to international missions. This includes the deployment of more than a thousand soldiers to the UNIFIL mission in southern Lebanon, where their contribution is of significant importance. Italy also actively participates in UN missions across Africa, Asia, and Europe. Furthermore, Italy is actively engaged in training security personnel for peacekeeping missions. Since 2006, the Center of Excellence for Stability Police Units (CoESPU) in Vicenza has trained over 10,000 Police Units from more than 130 nations.

There has been training in international human rights, combating gender-based violence, protecting minors in conflict situations, and restoring the rule of law. In its capacity as a

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<sup>81</sup>“Chi siamo”, Agenzia ICE, Italian Trade & Investment Agency, <https://www.ice.it/it/chi-siamo>

<sup>82</sup>“HOW WE ARE FUNDED”, United Nations Peacekeeping, <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/how-we-are-funded>

"*Global Service Center*", the United Nations Logistics Base in Brindisi, Italy, provides logistical support to all UN peacekeeping operations, including in the fields of information technology and telecommunications. In addition, it is becoming a center of excellence and innovation for managing the environmental impact of UN operations.<sup>83</sup>

As of January 2023, more than 7,000 members of the Italian Armed Forces are deployed in 35 international missions under the auspices of multinational coalitions, the United Nations, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and the European Union, or bilateral agreements.

Italian militaries are stationed in 24 countries, ranging from the Arctic and Baltic to the Alliance's Eastern Flank, the Persian Gulf to the Horn of Africa and the Middle East, the Mediterranean, North Africa, the Sahel, the Gulf of Guinea, and Antarctica.

On the Eastern Flank, more than 1,250 Italian military personnel are stationed in Latvia, Hungary, and Bulgaria, with Army units leading the way in Bulgaria as part of NATO's enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) and enhanced Vigilant Activity (eVA) measures. In Romania, an Air Force task force equipped with EF-2000 "*Typhoon*" aircraft is conducting surveillance of allied airspace as part of NATO's enhanced Air Policing.

As part of Operation Prima Parthica/INHERENT RESOLVE, the armed forces are presently present in Iraq and Kuwait with 650 military personnel, 97 ground assets, and 11 aviation assets.

Tasks of the contingent include contribution to coalition staffs, training of Kurdish and Iraqi Security Forces, Air-to-Air refueling of Coalition air assets, and reconnaissance and surveillance with remotely piloted aircraft and planes, the latter provided by the personnel and equipment of Task Force Air, which is headquartered in Kuwait.

Regarding the Mediterranean, Navy operations are conducted within NATO Standing Groups and NATO Standing Naval Forces.

During the most recent World Cup, the Department of Defense participated in the interagency operation "*Oryx*", which involved 560 military personnel, 46 land assets, 1 ship, and 2 air assets. This was a bilateral mission carried out by two distinct task forces: one with a strong land-based component, based on the Army's "*Sassari*" Brigade, which included personnel from the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Carabinieri Corps, and the other for maritime operations, with the Navy's "*Thaon di Revel*" patrol vessel.

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<sup>83</sup>"Il ruolo dell'Italia nel peacekeeping", Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale, [https://www.esteri.it/it/politica-estera-e-cooperazione-allo-sviluppo/organizzazioni\\_internazionali/onu/onu\\_ruolo\\_italia\\_nel\\_peacekeeping/](https://www.esteri.it/it/politica-estera-e-cooperazione-allo-sviluppo/organizzazioni_internazionali/onu/onu_ruolo_italia_nel_peacekeeping/)

Italy is currently in charge of the missions in Iraq (NMI), Kosovo (KFOR), where the Carabinieri Corps is present with the Multinational Specialized Unit (MSU), the EU Mission in Somalia (EUTM), EUNAVFORMED Irini in the Mediterranean, and "EMASoH," which operates in the Strait of Hormuz.

With 1169 military personnel, 368 ground assets, and 7 air assets, the Italian Defense continues its robust commitment to the command of the Western Sector of UNIFIL (United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon) in Lebanon.<sup>84</sup>

### ***Concluding remarks***

In sum, Italy's diplomacy and foreign policy reflect a multifaceted interplay of international relations theories and are informed by its historical, geographical, and cultural context. Italy's diplomatic approach oscillates between cooperation and discord, and its engagement encompasses both bilateral and multilateral dimensions, each tailored to meet the exigencies of the global arena. This unique model has emerged from Italy's intricate geopolitical positioning, European integration, and the influence of its cultural heritage on foreign policy. It is essential to acknowledge that foreign policy is inherently dynamic, shaped by evolving geopolitical dynamics and shifting international priorities. For the most up-to-date insights into Italy's diplomatic stance and foreign policy in the Middle East, especially regarding its engagement with Lebanon, it is advisable to consult recent academic and policy publications. Italy's foreign policy decisions are also influenced by its alignment with the European Union and NATO, as well as broader global alliances and strategic interests.

The foreign policy of Italy should not be oversimplified or reduced to stereotypical interpretations. It has proven to be considerably more intricate and nuanced than commonly acknowledged, demanding comprehensive explanations. Additionally, if Italy's case is indicative of a broader category encompassing Western, medium-sized, democratic political systems, it suggests that foreign policy in such instances should be seen as a multifaceted political endeavor necessitating complex analyses. Moreover, traditional perceptions of Italian foreign policy have frequently reinforced two contrasting and predominantly one-sided interpretations. In one view, Italy's foreign policy is portrayed as perpetually overwhelmed by formidable international pressures, while in the other, it is depicted as entirely self-determined

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<sup>84</sup>“Riepilogo Missioni/attività in corso”, Ministero della Difesa,  
<https://www.difesa.it/OperazioniMilitari/Pagine/RiepilogoMissioni.aspx>



and innocent of external influences. In essence, the discourse surrounding Italy's foreign policy often vacillates between portrayals of powerlessness and omnipotence.

As the thesis proceeds to its conclusion, an analysis of the way the Italian foreign policy has been carried out in the Lebanese context amidst its compound crises will follow these detailed presentations of the two states, both influenced and influential depending on the standpoint chosen to observe them; the final aim is to better grasp of the intricacies of Italian foreign policy in a context that has been particularly responsive and in many aspects, approach, organization, and delivery, represent a stark win for Italy.

## Chapter 3

### Italy in Lebanon: the past, the present and the future of their bilateral relations

In the previous chapters, the analysis focused on creating a sounder acknowledgment of Lebanon, its crises and weaknesses until current days, and Italy, the development of its peculiar foreign policy as a “*middle power*” that has nonetheless the potential to play an important role in the “*enlarged Mediterranean*” for its special position and relation with many countries bordering the “*Mare Nostrum*”.

In this regard, the second crucial subregion for Italian action cited in many ministerial plans is the one centered on Lebanon, where, due to many emergencies, the migration and refugee crisis, the impact of the Ukrainian war, economic and political strenuous situation... the security problems of the Middle East now tend to unload.

The objectives, stated by Minister A. Tajani in 2023, clearly highlight Italy’s role as a bridge between the Mediterranean countries and the European Union, and in this comprehensive strategy work towards the resolution of the institutional and economic fragility of Lebanon.<sup>85</sup>

The maximization of the positive effects of peacekeeping and collateral actions and the growing responsibility around UNIFIL II have the potential to mark a stronger European presence and, in perspective, a contribution to the resolution of the Arab-Israeli problem, generating a positive spillover effect, that for long has been hoped for. It is in Italy’s interest to effectively transform the European Union from a payer to a player in reaching peace, or at least help in the process, with full synergy between humanitarian support action, economic aid, and the potential peacekeeping role in the assumption of a post-Annapolis agreement<sup>86</sup>.

Regionalism should be at the center when programming Italy’s foreign activities and actions because of its applicability to numerous dimensions - diplomacy, politics, and economic relations – particularly in the Middle East, and its possibility to establish deep, more meaningful, and enduring relations; it represents an alternative perspective which proves to be

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<sup>85</sup> DM 4852/BIS/151, Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione, Signed by Antonio Tajani, March 2023, <https://www.esteri.it/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/DM-4852-BIS-151.pdf>

<sup>86</sup> The Annapolis Conference refers to a significant peace conference that took place on November 27, 2007, at the esteemed United States Naval Academy located in Annapolis, Maryland, inside the United States. The primary objective of the conference was to reinvigorate the Israeli-Palestinian peace process and facilitate the implementation of the "Roadmap for Peace". The meeting concluded with the issuance of a collective statement by all participating entities. Following the Annapolis Conference, the negotiations were subsequently resumed.

intrinsically more respectful of local factors and identities than others and in turn more effective.

Lebanon, being on the brink of the Syrian crisis, is a country in precarious equilibrium in which Italy is able to effectively play a leading role due to its comprehensive presence, being able to create coherence between the various dimensions of the mission: political-diplomatic, military, civilian, and development cooperation. The Italian intervention in Lebanon has unique characteristics, which deemed it to be a "*model*" that has been successfully replicated in other crisis zones, which rely primarily on the capacity to listen to and dialogue constructively with a multi-religious, sectarian, reality, like the Lebanese society, an integral aspect of a regionalist approach.<sup>87</sup>

### **3.1 Bilateral relations between Italy and Lebanon: the past**

The bilateral relations between Italy and Lebanon represent a dynamic narrative of diplomatic engagement, multifaceted interactions, and evolving partnerships.

Lebanon, historically serving as a testing ground for Italian policy in the Arab region, emerges as a prime example of proactive Italian politics: an approach, living the familiar dilemma in Italian politics of abundant ideas, aspirations, and insights juxtaposed with limited resources. The policy characterized by the juxtaposition of ideals and means, form and content, aspirations, and reality, thought and action, which has historically prevented Italy from assuming a prominent role in the Mediterranean, has notably, albeit unusually, found an exception in Lebanon.

The strategies pursued by both countries have never been stringent and inflexible; on the contrary, they adopted the concepts of mediation and moderation as cornerstones of their foreign policy, both constantly compelled to juggle complex conditions resulting from being borderlands, "*bridge-countries*", "*middle-cultures*" between two different worlds.<sup>88</sup>

This historical excursus delves into the trajectory of their relations, from the first ever interaction between the two regions, once the Kingdom of Sardinia, and a reign under the Ottoman Empire<sup>89</sup>, which happened in 1825 when a third-class consulate was established in

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<sup>87</sup>Gianni Rufini, "Il Libano e la crisi siriana: le lezioni di UNIFIL per l'Italia e la Comunità internazionale", CeSPI (Centro Studi di Politica Internazionale), Osservatorio di Politica Internazionale, June 2013, <https://www.parlamento.it/application/xmanager/projects/parlamento/file/repository/affariinternazionali/osservatorio/approfondimenti/PI0076App.pdf>

<sup>88</sup>A. Roberta La Fortezza, "Italy and Lebanon (1943 – 1958)", PhD Diss., Università degli studi di Bari 'Aldo Moro', 2018, [https://www.academia.edu/34996664/Italy\\_and\\_Lebanon\\_1943\\_1958](https://www.academia.edu/34996664/Italy_and_Lebanon_1943_1958)

<sup>89</sup> The signing of the "*Capitolazioni*" on October 25, 1823 established the beginning of diplomatic and trade relations between the Ottoman Empire and the Kingdom of Sardinia, which was interested in extending its

Beirut, moving towards Lebanon's independence in 1943 until the contemporary era, invoking pivotal treaties<sup>90</sup>, diplomatic personalities, and critical junctures.

*a. Independence and diplomatic recognition (1940s)*

The beginning of modern diplomatic relations between Italy and Lebanon coincided with the emergence of the latter as an independent nation-state in 1943. Italy was among the first nations to recognize Lebanon's sovereignty, thus establishing an auspicious foundation for future interactions, which would subsequently culminate in the exchange of ambassadors and the signing of consular agreements.

The years 1943 to 1949 define the precise framework of Italian-Lebanese relations following the rift caused by fascism and World War II. In 1946, when Adolfo Alessandrini began his tenure as chargé d'affaires in Beirut, diplomatic relations between the two nations were established. In fact, a significant exchange of reports, notes, and observations between the two nations began in the second half of 1945 and then accelerated in 1946. As evidenced by diplomatic documents of the time, the issue of the Italian pre-fascist colonies and Lebanon's support for Italian wishes and interests on numerous occasions and in various international fora, such as the Arab League and the United Nations, dominated the relations between the two countries during the three-year period from 1946 to 1949.

Already, in March 1947, the Lebanese government officially recognized the then Legation of Italy, which became the Embassy of Italy in 1955. The first bilateral agreement, which marks a significant milestone being the first instance of such a diplomatic accord between an Arab nation and a Western counterpart subsequent to the conclusion of the Second World War, the Treaty of Amity, Trade, and Navigation, was signed by Alessandrini, the Italian Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary in Lebanon, and Hamid bey Frangie, the Lebanese Minister of Foreign Affairs, on February 15, 1949.<sup>91</sup> In this context, the friendship with Lebanon and the 1949 Treaty seemed to foreshadow the breakthrough that Atlanticism, the belief in the necessity of cooperation between North America and Europe regarding the securitization of particular areas, should have been achieved during the latter half of the 1950s.

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relations in the Mediterranean basin after the annexation of Genoa (1815). By Royal Decree No. 1786 of Jan. 12, 1825, the Savoy government drew the "*Pianta degli Ufficiali consulari di S.M. in Affrica e Levante*", including the third-class Consulate in Beirut, which began operating on Sept. 12, 1825, with the arrival of the appointee.

Further information on: [https://www.bv.ipzs.it/bv-pdf/0061/MOD-BP-16-081-015\\_2242\\_1.pdf](https://www.bv.ipzs.it/bv-pdf/0061/MOD-BP-16-081-015_2242_1.pdf)

<sup>90</sup> "Portale ATRIO- Archivio dei trattati Internazionali Online", Nuovo portale gestito dall'Ufficio Idel Servizio per gli Affari Giuridici, del Contenzioso Diplomatico e dei Trattati, Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale, <https://itra.esteri.it/Home/Search?chart=1&arg=117>

<sup>91</sup> Selim Cattani, "IL LIBANO D'OGGI E IL TRATTATO DI AMICIZIA E DI COMMERCIO ITALO-LIBANESE DEL 15 FEBBRAIO 1949" (*Oriente Moderno* 29, no. 1/3, 1949), pp. 1–8, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25811752>

In some respects, Lebanon served as a sort of precursor to the renewed Italian autonomy in foreign policy: a response to the impatience of some rising classes who desired a more expansive foreign policy with more room for maneuver. From 1949 on, anyway, Italy was freed from the burden of colonialism and began its anti-colonial action, which allowed the country to further deepen its friendship with the ex-colonialist countries, especially in the Arab world; creating, however, quite a few difficulties in the country's relations with the former co-belligerent countries, and in particular with the two former mandatory powers.

Lebanon, becoming an extremely privileged partner to Italy, would play a key role in its entire post-World War II foreign policy, in its quest to cultivate a profound affinity with the Arab world.

#### ***b. Post-World War II era (1950s-1960s)***

During the post-World War II period, Italy's approach toward Lebanon became more proactive, driven by a desire to forge economic ties. The Treaty signed at the end of the 40s stands as a testament to their burgeoning partnership. Both nations derived benefits from this agreement: Italy could use it as a prototype for forthcoming deals with other Arab nations, while Lebanon might employ it as a reference point for engaging with other Western nations. The salient part of this agreement is in its inclusion of fair trade provisions. Italy, being one of the nations that experienced defeat, saw the need to establish a fresh relationship with the countries situated in the Mediterranean region. Consequently, it was imperative to initiate a political accord as the first stage, followed by an economic and trade agreement. The United Kingdom and France expressed reservations about Italy's establishment of a new relationship with Lebanon, with France in particular displaying a sense of unease due to its historical association with the region as a former mandate holder. However, throughout the 1950s, Italy managed to establish a very favorable link with Lebanon.<sup>92</sup> In this climate of diplomatic goodwill, the two crises of the 50s, the Suez Crisis and the 1958 Lebanon crisis, despite putting in a strenuous condition this strong partnership, represented also for Italy the culmination of the process of affirmation of a foreign policy line well-structured and openly pacifist.

Amintore Fanfani assumed the role of "*Democrazia Cristiana*" secretary and pursued the adoption of a "neo-Atlantic" foreign policy strategy with the objective of enhancing Italy's significance and independence in the realm of international affairs. Due to this rationale,

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<sup>92</sup> Giampaolo Conte, "Economic Relationship between Italy and Lebanon in the Fifties." *Oriente Moderno* 94, no. 1 (2014), pp. 99–112, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44280739>

Fanfani conveyed his dissent to U.S. President Dwight Eisenhower regarding the use of armed conflict, asserting that, in his perspective, the act of nationalizing the Suez Canal did not warrant the commencement of military intervention, which could have potentially led to unforeseeable ramifications and escalated into a global dispute. Fanfani was able to make Italy effectively assume the long-longed role of a mediator and conciliator between Western nations and the Middle East, in international diplomacy.

Despite facing opposition from traditional *Atlanticists* who accused him of adopting a neutralist and pro-Arab position, Fanfani's neo-Atlanticism ultimately proved advantageous for Italy in the aftermath of the Sinai conflict, due to the weakened positions of France and England, which allowed Italy to project itself as the European state with the least colonialist tendencies in the eyes of the Eastern world.<sup>93</sup>

In regard to Lebanon, a particular process began to undermine the country's stability in 1956, which would eventually lead to the catastrophic events of 1958. The adoption of the Eisenhower doctrine in 1957 was the proximate cause of this process, but within a few months, a multitude of concomitant causes contributed to Lebanon's descent into civil conflict, a sensation of plummeting into the abyss for the first time that it would have felt again in less than twenty years, with even more catastrophic results.

Despite the advantageous role played by Lebanon's moderation in supporting diplomatic policy, it was necessary to acknowledge the ongoing decline of the internal situation, mostly attributed to the guerilla warfare conducted by Palestinian armed groups. The internal condition of Lebanon may be understood within the broader regional backdrop, which was experiencing widespread and unmanageable turmoil.

The reevaluation of Italy's foreign policy, initiated in 1965 with Fanfani's reinstatement at the Farnesina, culminated in 1967 due to the Six-Day War, which brought about a resurgence of hostilities, being both the briefest armed conflict in the annals of Israel, but, simultaneously, the most calamitous in terms of its far-reaching repercussions. Italy was compelled to reassess its position within the surrounding geopolitical landscape, recognizing the necessity of carefully considering the Middle East in its political decision-making process, indeed, during the transitional period from the late 1960s to the early 1970s, Italian politics exhibited a heightened emphasis on recurring and significant issues related to the region. Specifically, the

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<sup>93</sup> It is interesting to note that after the Suez Crisis, Fanfani and La Pira promoted ENI's initiative for the economic recovery of Egypt, guided by Enrico Mattei. Another element attesting Italy's commitment and goodwill in dealing with the "enlarged Mediterranean".

focus was on the Palestinian question, which was perceived as both central to the region and, obviously, a significant obstacle to the Arab-Israeli dialogue.

During the Fifth Special Emergency Session of the General Assembly on June 17 and 18, 1967, Moro played a significant role in shaping Italy's stance. The emergency session provided an opportunity to address the persistent issue of Palestinian refugees, highlighting the notable shift in Italy's approach to the matter, developed in response to the Six Days War. Moro's address revisited the Palestinian issue using language that has become well-known. Specifically, he highlighted the presence and distressing circumstances faced by Palestinian refugees as a significant contributor to the region's instability and tension. The issue at hand might be characterized as a multifaceted concern including human, societal, and political dimensions, necessitating a resolution that calls for acts of benevolence, creativity, and bravery. According to the Italian Prime Minister, the Palestinian issue emerged as a significant factor contributing to the recent Middle East crisis: a decisive political resolution was an utmost necessity, as relying just on humanitarian efforts would have not yield any chances of success.<sup>94</sup>

The Middle East remained at the center of Italian foreign policy, albeit its weight in the international context was reduced with the emergence of the bipolar system.

### *c. Lebanese Civil War and Italian peacekeeping (1970s-1980s)*

Between the end of the '60s and the beginning of the '70s, the new Head of the Foreign Ministry, Pietro Nenni, gave new life to Italian foreign policy in the Mediterranean region after that almost forced interest resulting from the war of 1967, as previously noted. He planned and met the Israeli Ambassador after the bombing of Beirut in 1968, carried out by the Israeli army, and he strongly advocated for the innocence of moderate Arab countries, e.g., Lebanon and Jordan, in perpetuating "*Palestinian terrorism*": those countries simply did not have the potential to oppose military actions.

Minister Nenni advocated for the need for a "*political solution*" to the situation of the refugees; moreover, taking up what had already been the positions of Fanfani and Moro, he reiterated the idea that such action, made of attacks and reprisals, would only complicate the situation.

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<sup>94</sup> Discorso di S.E. l'On. Prof. Aldo Moro Presidente del Consiglio dei Ministri, Capo della Delegazione Italiana alla Quinta Sessione Speciale di Emergenza dell'Assemblea Generale delle Nazioni Unite, New York, 21 giugno 1967, on F. Imperato, R. Milano, L. Monzali (ed.) "*Tra diplomazia e petrolio. Aldo Moro e la politica italiana in Medio Oriente (1963-1978)*" (Caccucci Editore, Bari, 2018), pp. 177

But the Middle East, at large, and Lebanon, in particular, had already embarked on a path of no return: 1970 was the year in which a series of conditions occurred, the death of Nasser, the Black September in Jordan, and the Palestinian *fedayn* becoming more and more confrontational, all of them would have contributed to the Lebanese civil confrontation in just five years, due to an almost complete deconstruction of regional balances that reverberated from the Palestinian question and its politicization within national contexts. This knot was already clear to the Italians. In the general framework designed by Moro, Lebanon occupied a very peculiar place: he saw in the country the main elements of a possible process of pacification of the Middle East. Due to its capacity to overcome the difficulties of coexistence between populations of different confessions and establishing a State based upon freedom, harmony, and mutual respect for all of its People, Lebanon was perceived as an element of stability, and as such it should have been in everyone's interest to safeguarded it, not to make it a prey to the harmful consequences of the Palestinian question.<sup>95</sup>

At that time while searching for peace, it was probably unclear to Italy, the level of disarray in Lebanon: upheavals were multiplying, and the country could hardly have been a regional stabilizer. On the contrary, the Lebanese situation was about to further "*fuel the flames*" of the already complex Middle Eastern powder keg. The situation resulted in a real war between the Lebanese army and the *fedayn* around the Palestinian camps in Beirut in May 1973, but at that point, the attention of the international community would no longer be directed to Lebanon but rather to the oil crisis that had resulted from the Yom Kippur war, or Ramadan War for the Arabs.

In the context of the events of October 1973 and especially of the subsequent Arab embargo on Western countries, Lebanon was completely forgotten by international diplomacy. In the context of the newly inaugurated "*diplomacy of small steps*", there seemed to be no place for a problem perceived as secular at a time when pivotal ones, more pressing for international politics, and economically important, such as oil, were being touched. When Moro became Prime Minister in 1974, he was almost immediately faced with the beginning of the civil war in Lebanon. The Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990) per se posed a significant challenge to their

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<sup>95</sup> Camera dei Deputati, Seduta del 23 luglio 1971, in F. Imperato, R. Milano, L. Monzali (ed.) "Tra diplomazia e petrolio. Aldo Moro e la politica italiana in Medio Oriente (1963-1978)", Caccucci Editore, Bari, 2018, pp.191 Moro also resumed what was the eternal dilemma of Italian foreign policy, the double soul of his very existence: the European continent and the Mediterranean. He would have specified, almost forever putting an end to that long debate about the possibility to have these two souls live together, that they not only were not excluded but rather were completed «harmoniously».



bilateral relations. The protracted conflict saw the evacuation of Italian citizens and the suspension of diplomatic ties.

In February 1976, when Syria had already intervened forcefully in the Lebanese conflict, Moro would have expressed his concern for the situation of the Levant in a parliamentary intervention. Even Italian public opinion was particularly touched by those events that were destroying a friendly country; the Italian authorities themselves stressed on several occasions, in both institutional and less formal frameworks, how worrying the situation in Lebanon was. It was deemed to be a “*dangerous hotbed of war in the Mediterranean*”<sup>96</sup> and in this situation, Italy, for its vocation of peace and for the interests of the Mediterranean peoples, had “*a precise task of being the promoter of the adoption of interventions and measures to put an end to a tragic situation in human terms and now of clear violation of the international norms of human rights*”<sup>97</sup>. Italy's involvement in the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) in 1978<sup>98</sup>, alongside its contributions to peacekeeping efforts, underscored its commitment to stability in the region. Italy's early commitment to UNIFIL was evident during Operation Litani in 1978. Italian troops, part of the multinational force, played a vital role in pushing armed Palestinian groups north of the Litani River. This operation aimed to create a buffer zone and prevent cross-border attacks into northern Israel.

The government's response would have strengthened at the beginning of the 80s years when, following this line, Italy would have begun its more than thirty-year commitment in Lebanon, with the military mission ITALCON<sup>99</sup>, active between 1982 and 1984, and through development cooperation, active since 1983.

In that operation, the “*1st Regiment Carabinieri Paratroopers TUSCANIA*”, with a contingent of 200 personnel, showcased the Italian government's unwavering dedication to helping the Lebanese Government to restore its sovereignty and authority over Beirut, and the country and to ensure the protection of the local population.

The parachutist Carabinieri were strategically positioned along the access roads leading to the Palestinian camps of Sabra and Chatila after the massacre that occurred inside those areas from September 16th to 18th, 1982, and they were involved in the provision of surveillance and control services at the designated “*checkpoints*”, as well as in the defense operations of the

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<sup>96</sup>Camera dei Deputati, Seduta del 10 agosto 1976, in F. Imperato, R. Milano, L. Monzali (ed.) “Tra diplomazia e petrolio. Aldo Moro e la politica italiana in Medio Oriente (1963-1978)”, Caccucci Editore, Bari, 2018, pp.195

<sup>97</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>98</sup>“La partecipazione italiana alle missioni in Libano” (Scheda di lettura), Camera dei Deputati, Servizio Studi, XVIII Legislatura, September 2020<http://documenti.camera.it/leg18/dossier/Testi/DI0286.htm>

<sup>99</sup> The Italian military troops deployed in Lebanon out of the framework of UN mandate of UNIFIL.

"Rubino" base and the Italian Embassy in Beirut. The intricate environmental conditions and numerous risks stemming from the heightened political and social instability were prevalent in the operational area. Following the devastating incident that occurred on October 23, 1983, there was a continuous and unwavering commitment to the retrieval of those who had been trapped under the debris.

The ITALCON mission has thus consistently shown remarkable flexibility, bravery, and a strong sense of responsibility. The parachutist Carabinieri have paved the way for the use of the Carabinieri in humanitarian endeavors, as they have been at the forefront of peacekeeping efforts over the last four decades.<sup>100</sup>

The President of the Republic, Sandro Pertini, addressed as such the Italian commitment:

*“I soldati italiani hanno saputo compiere il loro dovere con umanità, cosa che molti italiani non comprendono, bisogna vedere come erano amati dalla popolazione Palestinese. Gli altri contingenti si chiudevano in se stessi e basta, loro no: andavano incontro alla popolazione, aiutavano la popolazione. Sono stati umani verso la popolazione. Questa è l’umanità del popolo italiano. Vi ringrazio. Tutti avete fatto onore alla bandiera italiana. Si può essere fieri soldati e nello stesso tempo uomini generosi.”<sup>101</sup>*

The historical trajectory of sympathy, cooperation, and collaboration between Italy and Lebanon widened in that same year, when the two governmental bodies entered into an initial agreement pertaining to the provision of Italian financial support for the process of reconstructing Lebanon, after its extensive devastation. The allocated funds were used to construct a pumping station on the periphery of Beirut, serving as a crucial hub for the provision of water to the capital city.<sup>102</sup>

#### ***d. Post-Civil War reconstruction (1990s-2000s)***

In the post-civil war era, Italy shifted its focus toward supporting Lebanon's reconstruction endeavors.

Despite peace was supposed to be reached, in 1996, the tragic Qana incident happened: an Israeli artillery shell struck a UN compound in Qana, killing over 100 civilians, including

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<sup>100</sup>“Tuscania, 40 anni fa la missione in Libano, all’anniversario 200 veterani in congedo”, Livorno Press, October 2022, <https://livornopress.it/tuscania-40-anni-fa-la-missione-in-libano-allanniversario-200-veterani-in-congedo>

<sup>101</sup> This speech was delivered by Sandro Pertini to a group of 1,107 Italian troops, which included the Tuscanian parachutist Carabinieri, on 26 February 1984 in the port of Livorno, when the soldiers returned from their mission.

<sup>102</sup> Presently, this facility continues to play a critical role in the water supply infrastructure.

refugees sheltering there, there Italy took a lead role in demanding a ceasefire and a thorough investigation. This stands as a stark reminder of the challenges, risks, and complexities faced by UNIFIL peacekeepers.

A confluence of factors, including Italian development aid and cooperation projects committed towards the rehabilitation and reconstruction of Lebanon's primary infrastructures and basic services, through the signing of several project agreements, as part of the 1997 and 1998 Soft Loan Agreement (total value of more than 130 million Euro), facilitated the rehabilitation of Lebanon's infrastructure and institutions.<sup>103</sup>

In 1999, Lebanon submitted an application to join the World Trade Organization (WTO), where it currently holds observer status. The process of adjusting to WTO rules still requires a number of measures, including those related to intellectual property protection legislation and TRIPs (Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights) compliance.

The bilateral cultural partnership has gained momentum since the signing of the Agreement on Cultural, Scientific, and Technological Cooperation in November 2000. The Agreement also instituted the instruction of Italian as a second foreign language in several Lebanese secondary institutions.

While, in 2001, it signed the Treaty on Investment Promotion and Protection, bolstering economic ties and facilitating Italian investments in Lebanon. In 2002, after years of bilateral engagement, it was signed the Cooperation Framework Agreement, which mandate and projects were carried out by the Embassy itself, until 2006, when the AICS local technical office was opened; it started its independent activities two years afterward.

Bilateral ties and Italy's engagement in Lebanon have further grown since the 2006 war.

Italy, during the D'Alema government, hosted the Rome Conference on Lebanon in July 2006, aimed at renewing the international community's commitment to peace in the region. The Rome Conference was co-chaired with the United States; it represented a crucial diplomatic effort, and its significance lies in several key aspects. At the time of the conference, Lebanon was in the midst of a devastating conflict between Hezbollah, a Shiite militant group based in Lebanon, and Israel. The conflict had caused significant casualties and destruction. The Conference provided a diplomatic platform for addressing the immediate need for a ceasefire and finding a resolution to the conflict. It played a pivotal role in initiating a ceasefire agreement, which was a crucial step in ending the hostilities. Secondly, the Conference brought

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<sup>103</sup> "Italian development aid in brief", OPENAID Italia, <http://openaid.esteri.it/en/code-lists/recipients/555/?year=2008>

together a broad range of international actors, including European and Middle Eastern countries, as well as representatives from international organizations such as the United Nations<sup>104</sup> and the European Union. This demonstrated a collective commitment to addressing the crisis in Lebanon and finding a peaceful solution. The involvement of various stakeholders underscored the international community's dedication to peace and stability in the region. It exemplified the importance of multilateral diplomacy in addressing complex conflicts, showcasing how countries with diverse interests and perspectives could come together to find common ground and work toward a peaceful resolution. Beyond the immediate ceasefire, the Rome Conference aimed to address the broader stability and security issues in the region, particularly in Lebanon. It emphasized the need for political solutions, support for Lebanon's government, and efforts to disarm militias, including Hezbollah. While these goals remained challenging, the conference set a framework for addressing long-term stability in Lebanon (which is still undergoing). This multilateral approach was instrumental in achieving the ceasefire and paving the way for the deployment of UNIFIL II.

In this context, Italy reactivated and expanded its presence, deploying the second largest military contingent, in UNIFIL (United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon), the UN interposition mission present in southern Lebanon since 1978, to which UN Security Council Resolution 1701<sup>105</sup>, in August 2006, gave a new and broader mandate: UNIFIL II.<sup>106</sup> The Italian commitment was reinforced during this conflict also by the establishment of an Italian Cooperation Office in Lebanon.

Italy's contribution to UNIFIL extended to the maritime domain with the establishment of the Maritime Task Force (MTF). The MTF, led by Italy, contributed to the implementation of the mentioned Resolution, aimed at maintaining a ceasefire between Israel and Hezbollah and preventing arms smuggling into Lebanon.

In its multi-level efforts, Italy has been supporting the unity, sovereignty, and independence of Lebanon and working to achieve the full implementation of UN Security Council resolutions concerning the country.

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<sup>104</sup>“ Secretary-General's remarks to the International Conference on Lebanon”, United Nations Secretary-General, July 2006, <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2006-07-26/secretary-generals-remarks-international-conference-lebanon>

<sup>105</sup> “Resolution 1701”, UNSCR- Search engine for the United Nations Security Council Resolutions, August 2006, <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/1701>

<sup>106</sup> “Political Cooperation”, Ambasciata d’Italia Beirut, [https://ambbeirut.esteri.it/ambasciata\\_Beirut/en/i\\_rapporti\\_bilaterali/cooperazione\\_politica](https://ambbeirut.esteri.it/ambasciata_Beirut/en/i_rapporti_bilaterali/cooperazione_politica)

In 2006, Lebanon signed an association agreement with the European Union concerning the Euro-Mediterranean region, additionally, the state is part of both the Greater Arab Free Trade Area (GAFTA) and the European Free Trade Association (EFTA).

Moreover, the Italian Cooperation System has gained momentum with the presence, involvement, and promotion of projects for a total amount of nearly 26 million euros, and of several national NGOs within the three phases of the Emergency Programs ROSS 2007-2009.

*e. Resilience amidst regional turbulence (2010s)*

The tumultuous regional landscape of the Middle East, characterized by the Syrian Civil War and its resultant refugee crisis, introduced a new dimension to bilateral relations. Italy, cognizant of Lebanon's precarious position, extended humanitarian aid and assistance.

Since 2011, AICS Beirut has significantly increased its humanitarian and development efforts to assist the sectors and people in Lebanon that have been most impacted by the consequences of the Syrian crisis, and in Syria, being entrusted with the responsibility of overseeing the national programs there. Furthermore, Italy's persistent commitment to UNIFIL, for which in recent years, four times an Italian General has been given the Head of Mission/Force Commander's role, is the main funder of local development projects, has been controlling, with its contingent, the entirety of the Sector West, the more extensive one, and fully provides the helicopter support component (ITALAIR), demonstrated its dedication to upholding regional stability.

Moreover, Italy is a member of the International Support Group - ISG, which was established in 2013 at the initiative of the UN Secretary-General and the then President of the Republic of Lebanon to facilitate coordination and assistance to Lebanon and its institutions by key partners (UN, Permanent Members of the Security Council, Italy, Germany, EU, World Bank, Arab League).

In the ISG framework, Italy oversaw the preparation of two International Conferences for the support of Lebanese security forces, which were held in Rome in 2014 and 2018.<sup>107</sup> Regarding military cooperation, in 2015 the Italian government launched the Bilateral Training Mission MIBIL, which conducts specialized training courses for units of the Lebanese armed and security forces, thus helping to strengthen the country's stability.

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<sup>107</sup> "Political Cooperation", Ambasciata d'Italia Beirut, [https://ambbeirut.esteri.it/ambasciata\\_Beirut/en/i\\_rapporti\\_bilaterali/cooperazione\\_politica](https://ambbeirut.esteri.it/ambasciata_Beirut/en/i_rapporti_bilaterali/cooperazione_politica)

In the 10s, there was a strong commitment towards cultural diplomacy, strengthening the bond between the two countries: indeed, in 2010, the Lebanese University and the University for Foreigners of Siena signed an agreement to establish a Master of Intercultural Communication (Italian-Lebanese Studies) for the training of Italian teachers in Lebanese educational institutions and universities.

***f. Contemporary relations (2018-present)***

On 15 March 2018, the Italian government organized the second ministerial conference in support of the Lebanese security forces at the behest of the Lebanese government, with the participation of then-Prime Minister Hariri and UN Secretary-General Guterres. The conference provided impetus for the strengthening of Lebanese security institutions (including the police) and urged greater commitment from Lebanese parties to ensure a tangible dissociation from regional crises. On April 6, 2019, the Italian government supported the CEDRE conference organized by France to increase investment, enhance infrastructure, and promote the nation's economic development.

In the contemporary context, Italy and Lebanon continue to maintain diplomatic relations despite challenges. Italy remains a prominent trading partner, solidifying economic ties with Lebanon within the framework of the European Union. Cultural exchange programs and educational initiatives continue to facilitate people-to-people connections, indicative of the enduring nature of their relationship.

On the bilateral level, mutual support between Italy and Lebanon for various international candidacies and the exchange of high-level visits are frequent. Since 2009, more than 40 institutional visits have taken place, including, most recently, those of Minister of Defense Lorenzo Guerini (Nov 15, 2019, Aug. 24, 2020, and then Dec 24, 2021), Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Emanuela Del Re (Sept. 3, 2020), Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte (Feb 5, 2019, and then Sept. 8, 2020)<sup>108</sup>, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Marina Sereni (May 15-18, 2021), Minister of Foreign Affairs, Antonio Tajani (Dec 23, 2022), Minister of Defense, Guido Crosetto (Apr 7, 2023) and General Francesco Paolo Figliuolo, COVI's Commander (Feb 2, 2022 and then Jun 8, 2023).<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> "Political Cooperation", Ambasciata d'Italia Beirut, [https://ambbeirut.esteri.it/ambasciata\\_Beirut/en/i\\_rapporti\\_bilaterali/cooperazione\\_politica](https://ambbeirut.esteri.it/ambasciata_Beirut/en/i_rapporti_bilaterali/cooperazione_politica)

<sup>109</sup> "Visite Ufficiali dal 2020", Ambasciata d'Italia Beirut, [https://ambbeirut.esteri.it/ambasciata\\_beirut/it/ambasciata/news/visite-ufficiali/visite-ufficiali.html](https://ambbeirut.esteri.it/ambasciata_beirut/it/ambasciata/news/visite-ufficiali/visite-ufficiali.html)

### **3.2 Bilateral relations between Italy and Lebanon: the present (2019-2023)<sup>110</sup>**

Already from the historical perspective, it is possible to acknowledge the extremely privileged relations that Italy and Lebanon have built up since ancient times, a relation based upon cultural bonds, humanitarian actions and assistance, economic agreements, and mutual respect, sharing the ‘burden’ and the ‘pleasure’ of being seen as a bridge, or at least a door, toward the ‘*opposite side of the Mediterranean*’.

From 2019 on, the Italian presence strengthened despite the multiple difficulties to bear; all the traditional aspects of foreign policy, diplomacy, culture, economy, cooperation to development, and defense, became intrinsically connected to one another.<sup>111</sup>

Many necessary steps had to be taken, adapting was the main one.

The protests that broke out in October 2019 and mobilized a huge portion of the population to take back the center of Beirut, were only symptoms of the deep crisis the State was living into, which causes can be traced back or sought in the flaws and faults that distinguish the thirty years after the civil war and the assumptions of the growth of the country in that period.

As of 2019, the fundamentals that had held up in the country no longer held up. What was taken for granted was no longer. Progressively but quickly the institutions slipped into a process of paralysis, a dynamic of progressive spin: the technically failed banks; the energy and health crisis; the governments that have been blocked by cross vetoes; and negotiations with the IMF on a dead end. Then the devastating explosion of the port of Beirut on August 4, 2020. Rapidly, Italy had to review its priorities and means of intervention: measures to mitigate the banking blockade, reorientation of cooperation interventions towards first aid and humanitarian emergencies, protection of Italian exports falling due to the economic crisis, and the blocking of bank payments.

#### **a. Diplomacy: Italian objectives, guidelines, and priorities in the current context**

The first question to be asked, and which guided the new Italian foreign policy’s choices in this protracted phase of turbulence, was what and how to safeguard the complex of past and present

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<sup>110</sup> The information presented in this subchapter and in subchapter 3.3 are part of a round of interviews conducted during a period of internship at the Italian Embassy in Beirut. Five mission’s experts have been interviewed to grasp how the last 4 years created challenges, but also opportunities to Italy in Lebanon, and additionally to understand best practices and deficiencies in a complex landscape, constantly evolving.

<sup>111</sup> In this respect, a betterment of their coordination would be necessary, starting from Rome, within governmental and institutional fora (e.g., a roundtable between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Defense) to promote information-sharing in a timely and accurate manner which, in turn, would materialize in improved, more responsive planning and delivery.

interventions in Lebanon, including infrastructure investments in cooperation and development projects. Bilateral cooperation has had to adapt to new objectives and new modalities. Additionally, a second question was how to redirect dialogue and interaction with the Lebanese government and authorities, in a framework of discontinuity and political-institutional precariousness.

Amidst crises, Italy confirmed its commitment to Lebanon, trying to never fail to support the country in those times of hardship. But, to maintain Italy's actions in line with the international partners and norms, as to safeguard the principle of sovereignty, the expectation was entirely put on the Lebanese ruling, which was and still is expected to take responsibility for leading the country on the path out of compound crises.

Maintaining open and continuous channels of dialogue with all political and confessional components was and is key to Italy. In doing so, through the Embassy and its Ambassador, Nicoletta Bombardiere, and her team of diplomats, Italy continued to advocate the need, as a priority, for all the components to make a real effort towards strengthening the institutions of the state, which must be considered a common good. To seek, beyond confessional divisions, what unites and on which to base dialogue, rather than exalt what divides.

Actions started from public services and infrastructure, so lacking everywhere in this country: water, electricity, education, health, and environment.

Furthermore, a second level of dialogue in the country touches on more sensitive issues, such as the political model and the system of power-sharing and its future: this debate, which focuses on the advantages and limitations of confessionalism, is up to the Lebanese people to address, avoiding partisan interferences. Concerning this national issue, what Italy must do is encourage the preservation of a consensual spirit and the renunciation of sectarianism in conflict, as in the search for more effective models of coexistence, of governance, based on the defense of the common and public interest, of a jurisdiction capable of fighting corruption and elitism.

Italy's action does not concentrate only on bilateral relations with the country, but also on multilateral coordination with the European Union, recognizing its macro-regional strategies<sup>112</sup>, and the other international entities on the ground, which is continuous, since Italy is among the top ten donors in Lebanon.

In this respect, as Italian NGOs are present almost all over the territory of Lebanon and in a wide range of sectors (social protection of the most vulnerable groups, schools, agriculture,

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<sup>112</sup>“Le Strategie Macroregionali dell’UE”, Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale, [https://www.esteri.it/it/politica-estera-e-cooperazione-allo-sviluppo/politica\\_europea/dossier/le-strategie-macroregionali-dellue/](https://www.esteri.it/it/politica-estera-e-cooperazione-allo-sviluppo/politica_europea/dossier/le-strategie-macroregionali-dellue/)



emergency interventions...) they provide direct contributions to UNRWA for Palestinian camps, UNHCR for Syrian refugees, WFP for child nutrition support, UNICEF for education<sup>113</sup>, OCHA for emergency care, WHO for public health support<sup>114</sup>.

Moreover, Italy directly manages requalification programs of the main archaeological sites, a top priority of the Italian foreign policy and “*soft power*”.

Italian interventions are differentiated between emergency and development. International coordination takes place through a dense network of working groups. After the explosion, a new mechanism was created, called “3 RF”, Recovery, Reform and Reconstruction Framework<sup>115</sup>, which for the first time involved the Lebanese Government and, in particular, Lebanese civil society in the debate on sector-by-sector intervention strategies. Unfortunately, mainly because of the political and governmental stalemate, this mechanism is struggling to become a true form of coordination of intervention strategies, lacking a governmental counterparty capable of making commitments. There are two issues on which the partners are confronted together today, and on which dilemmas are open. The first concerns how to combine the conditionality of aid, in a functional way to the reforms and the assumption of responsibility of the government, with the need for humanitarian interventions in support of primary services for the population. What is exclusively humanitarian, therefore free from conditionality, and what belongs instead to the sphere of development or reconstruction, which should remain conditional on the reforms that the Lebanese government must implement. The distinction is not always so clear.

Hereof, Italy financed the construction of the largest wastewater treatment plant in Lebanon. At the time when the changeover was planned, the local authorities were unable, owing to a lack of funding and staff, to ensure its operability. To prevent the closure of the infrastructure, which would have caused a huge health and environmental problem, Italy decided to finance a further technical assistance activity for two years. A strict application of the conditionality criterion would have required the closure of our project, in the absence of

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<sup>113</sup>“Italian Government funds the rehabilitation of five more public schools in Lebanon”, UNICEF, June 2022, <https://www.unicef.org/lebanon/press-releases/italian-government-funds-rehabilitation-five-more-public-schools-lebanon>

<sup>114</sup>Hala Habib, “WHO and Italian Embassy Sign Agreement to Strengthen Hospital Care”, United Nations Lebanon, May 2022, <https://lebanon.un.org/en/182743-who-and-italian-embassy-sign-agreement-strengthen-hospital-care>

<sup>115</sup> “*Lebanon Crisis Response Plan 2022-2023*”, Government of Lebanon, United Nations, January 2022, <https://www.undp.org/lebanon/publications/2022-lebanon-crisis-response-plan-lcrp>

For further information on: <https://lebanon.un.org/en/227158-reform-recovery-and-reconstruction-framework-3rf-co-chair-statement-prime-minister-lebanon>

Lebanese reforms in the water sector; however, the emergency need has led Italy to a different choice, namely to continue its efforts.

The second guideline of the Italian projects is based on first getting out of the humanitarian emergency and then redirecting aid towards sustainable development interventions. Lebanon is experiencing a historical crisis which, however, can only be marginally attributed to shock, exogenous, or war factors. The effects of the Syrian conflict on the Lebanese economy are undeniable. But this is not enough to explain it. In several reports, the World Bank has described the Lebanese crisis as "*deliberate depression*", the result of thirty years of public debt, lack of fiscal space, and Ponzi scheme; and of a "*negationist*" attitude of the ruling classes ("*the great denial*").

Lebanon was never a low-income country, completely devastated by war, it is historically a middle-income country, once "*the Switzerland of the Middle East*", and with huge positions of financial income, which has been impoverished mainly because of the lack of reforms that were necessary, so that the socio-economic model of the country could hold.

Consequently, it would be wrong to indulge in contemporary times in an "*eternalization*" of international humanitarian assistance interventions, which would create and are already creating an unhealthy dependence on aid and an attitude of irresponsibility on the part of the political and government system: the "*victim mentally*" previously highlighted.

On the contrary, it is necessary to move quickly, and deliver in a timely manner an assistance scheme that points to the economic development of the country, while being aware of the limits still represented by the absence of a rescue and recovery plan agreed with the IMF, and thus drawing on the productive sectors and private entrepreneurial initiatives, on human capital, on the creativity of which Lebanese society is capable. So, many programs are dedicated to young people, others to vocational training, start-ups, and the development of promising sectors, such as renewable energy or agri-food.

Italy's priorities in Lebanon are to contribute to the stability of the country and its security. The stability of Lebanon is a key element and at the same time a reflection of regional stability. In multiconfessional Lebanon, a country in which the multiple geopolitical faults of the region are reflected, the effects of the recomposition rather than the explosion of internal conflicts are reverberating in the region. And vice versa: tensions rather than regional detentions discharge themselves on the inter-confessional dynamics of Lebanon.

But the second keystone of stability is internal. In this sense, the stability of Lebanon requires the completion of a process of change and profound reforms that the country desperately needs. Economic and social reforms, based on criteria of sustainability of public expenditure, fiscal

space, social security, a transition from an income system based on imports to one based on productive activities; reform of public administration by introducing meritocratic criteria to overcome the confessional; efficient and independent justice; effective management of borders in contrast to smuggling and illegal trafficking. The objectives of Italy are therefore linked to a process of facilitation and accompaniment of Lebanon towards a more sustainable economic, social, and security model. Sustainability and stability mean overcoming the current state of crisis and precariousness that the country is going through.

Sustainability and stability also mean understanding that Lebanon is directly connected to the fate of the Mediterranean and the "*wellbeing*" of Lebanon affects the "*common Mediterranean goods*"<sup>116</sup>: like the environment, energy resources, and the fight against irregular migration flows.

Through the agreement on the maritime border between Lebanon and Israel of October 2022<sup>117</sup>, the first exploratory activities to search for gas fields can begin, entrusted to a consortium in which also ENI participates, together with Total and Qatar Energy.

While, in the fight against irregular migration<sup>118</sup>, it is fundamental for Italy to launch a project, financed by the Italian Migration Fund (Fondo Migrazione Italiano), and carried out in coordination with IOM, on one side, to improve socio-economic and employment conditions among the most vulnerable groups, and, on the other, to strengthen Lebanon's capabilities in the prevention and management of irregular migration flows, which have been increasing for about two years, with clandestine departures from the Lebanese coast to the central Mediterranean of Syrians, Palestinians and even Lebanese in conditions of poverty. The activities of the project also include measures to.

#### **b. Italian Trade Agency: opportunities in the unstable economic sector**

In recent times, from 2019 until 2021 there was a paralysis in almost every sector of the Lebanese economy, paired with the transformation of a flourishing middle-class, public workers mostly that used to have a secure revenue, in a low-class with a highly deteriorated purchasing power. However, the Lebanese market adapted: informal movements coming from ex-pats, international Lebanese diaspora, or other regional states (Qatar and Gulf states, but

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<sup>116</sup> As cited also in the Italian foreign policy regional agenda: [https://www.esteri.it/it/politica-estera-e-cooperazione-allo-sviluppo/aree\\_geografiche/mediterr\\_mo/](https://www.esteri.it/it/politica-estera-e-cooperazione-allo-sviluppo/aree_geografiche/mediterr_mo/)

<sup>117</sup> "Israele-Libano: un accordo storico", Istituto per gli Studi di Politica Internazionale (ISPI), October 2022, <https://www.ispionline.it/it/pubblicazione/israele-libano-un-accordo-storico-36547>

<sup>118</sup> "Regional leaders, including Mikati, attend Med migration conference in Rome aimed at creating donors' fund", AFP and L'Orient Today, 24 July 2023, <https://today.lorientlejour.com/article/1344313/italy-says-med-migration-conference-paves-way-for-donors-fund-wrap.html>

also African ones) that see Lebanon as a “*tax-free zone*” reinvested in hospitality, entrainment, and luxury goods propelled the development of a black market, which is nowadays the one that dictates the exchange rate and many other economic dimensions of the country.

Those aspects affected the feasibility of Italian projects for investments and trade; however, the Italian commercial presence was able to maintain its well-established relationship with the country, nonetheless. Claudio Pasqualucci, the Head of the Italian Trade Agency with headquarters in Beirut, who took charge of the post in 2019, albeit seeing the deterioration of the economic situation firsthand, has seen also how the bilateral tie encompasses a wide range of industries, including investment products, consumer goods, and intermediary goods. Despite the market exhibits a low volume of commerce, it demonstrates a significant level of openness to international trade and engages in numerous triangulations. It particularly focuses on high-quality segments and serves as a gateway to the Middle East, facilitating its connections with the Western world and its industrial systems. Lebanese enterprises have built a strong presence in the Gulf nations and Iraqi Kurdistan, mostly operating within the building and engineering industries, alongside other service sectors.

Economic relations between Italy and Lebanon have traditionally centered on Italian exports to the Lebanese market, which is highly open in sectors with high added value. This is also due to the involvement of the internationally dispersed Lebanese diaspora. In 2022, Italy’s position was in 4th place, reaching 80-85% of exports’ value pre-crisis, behind China, Turkey, and Greece<sup>119</sup>, confirming its second position as a European partner<sup>120</sup>, with a share of approximately 5% and import value of US\$ 46 million. However, the Arab countries remain the primary market for Lebanese exports, absorbing approximately 41% of the total, followed by the EU with a share of approximately 9%. However, the Arab countries remain the primary market for Lebanese exports, absorbing approximately 41% of the total, followed by the EU with a share of approximately 9%.

Italy is consistently one of Lebanon's leading suppliers. Through distribution and franchising agreements, Italy exports a wide variety of products to the Lebanese market, including refined petroleum products, machinery, chemicals, jewelry, furniture and design, textiles and clothing, metals, plastic products, and agri-food products.

The manifestation of Italian presence is achieved via an intricate network of agents and franchise connections. Italy is widely regarded as a very favorable business partner, mostly due

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<sup>119</sup> Russia used to be among the most significant suppliers, but with the Ukraine-Russian war their relations deteriorated as it happened with almost all the other regional powers.

<sup>120</sup> Nearly 40% of Lebanon's imports come from the European Union.

to the exceptional quality of Italian goods available in the Lebanese market. Additionally, the professionalism shown by Italian operators further enhances the positive perception of our nation among Lebanese customers, leading to a significant degree of favorability and preference.

Another aspect of their economic relations is related to the Syrian market, which could offer incredible opportunities related to the reconstruction sector and that of energy, particularly natural gas, and its subsequent storage and distribution. Furthermore, the active involvement of Italian Cooperation, along with the extensive recognition at various levels of the significant role played by our nation in assisting Lebanon, and Syria, through numerous development initiatives across the country, as well as the various promotional endeavours organized by the Commercial Office of the Embassy and the ITA Office - Agency for Promotion Abroad and Internationalisation of Italian Companies, have played a crucial role in strengthening the already favorable perception of Italy in Lebanon.<sup>121</sup>

Many initiatives are indeed promoted to build and strengthen partnerships in the energy and infrastructure sector. Lebanese offshore energy exploration<sup>122</sup> commenced in 2020 in a few sections of its territorial waters with the participation of Italian corporations. On the same trajectory, in June 2023, the ITA Office promoted a round of workshops related to technology and energetic infrastructures, as part of a collaboration with ANIE<sup>123</sup>, ANCE (Associazione Nazionale Costruttori Edili), and Confindustria Assafrica & Mediterraneo, in which Italian companies presented their offers to the Lebanese counterpart. The initiative is part of the efforts made by “Sistema Italia” (or “*Sistema Paese*”) towards Lebanon to present the most advantageous aspects of the Italian offerings in relevant fields, but also the potential and opportunities resulting from the ongoing reforms in the electricity production and distribution system for Italians. The objective was to facilitate the advancement of commercial and industrial cooperation by establishing joint ventures and fostering industrial, technical, and scientific collaborations, and, additionally, facilitate the exchange of knowledge and expertise between Italian and Lebanese enterprises operating in the energy sector, infrastructure development, and design.

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<sup>121</sup>“Rapporti con l'Italia- LIBANO”, infoMercatiEsteri, Osservatorio Economico, [https://www.infomercatiesteri.it/section7\\_exp.php?id\\_paesi=108#](https://www.infomercatiesteri.it/section7_exp.php?id_paesi=108#)

<sup>122</sup> Geographically, the region is part of the so-called "Levant Basin," which encompasses neighbouring nations that have been the focus of numerous initiatives to extract and commercialise oil and natural gas resources. Lebanon anyway is not a member of the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum.

<sup>123</sup> One of the largest trade associations belonging to Confindustria that represents 1300 companies in the electrical and electronic sector.

The energy market has enormous potential, but it is also one of the most critical due to its high polarization and the collusion between the public and private sectors.

This impedes the creation of a stable Italian business community; besides, the creation of a Chamber of Commerce, which would have institutionalized and structured the bilateral partnership, has been delayed many times due to the political impasse in Lebanon, which makes hard to find reliable interlocutors and negatively affects the formation of a long-term strategy for Italy.

Both the severity of Lebanon's economic crisis and the general decline in imports are however influencing bilateral trade trends<sup>124</sup>. In 2019, the Lebanese government imposed a 3% horizontal duty on imports of all products subject to VAT, excluding petroleum, machinery, and agricultural and industrial raw materials, for a period of three years. In order to protect domestic industry, existing tariffs on the import of certain goods were increased by 7 to 20 percent for a period of five years.

In recent years, Italian exports to Lebanon have declined in volume, on par with all those of other supplier nations, but Italy still manages to preserve its relative market share compared to its competitors.

The crisis in the Lebanese economic system highlights the need for a transition from a model based primarily on imports and services (the latter accounting for 83% of GDP, with banking, real estate, and tourism as the main sectors) to a model with a larger role for productive sectors that is more sustainable. In this light, the framework of Italian exports may increasingly include capital and intermediate goods in addition to traditional consumer goods, fostering opportunities for the formation of productive partnerships between Italian and Lebanese firms, for instance in the agrifood, re-creating a middle class that might be the cornerstone for the economic recovery and new life, and low environmental impact technology sectors, related to natural gas, renewable energies, transports, but also on the gastronomy sector, with the idea of promoting biological, locally produced products that would foster the requalification of many impoverished or underdeveloped areas. Other potential opportunities involve development cooperation initiatives financed by Italy and the European Union.

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<sup>124</sup>“Scambi Commerciali (LIBANO)”, infoMercatiEsteri, Osservatorio Economico, [https://www.infomercatiesteri.it/scambi\\_commerciali.php?id\\_paesi=108](https://www.infomercatiesteri.it/scambi_commerciali.php?id_paesi=108)

*c. “Beauty will save the world”: cultural diplomacy in Lebanon*

In a country like Lebanon, with such a rich and varied social fabric, and an innate predisposition to creativity and artistic expression, the cultural lever is a powerful instrument of interaction, collaboration, and solidification of the ties between the two countries. Italy has the primacy of having always invested in cultural promotion, "*in good as in bad luck*", in dark times and in the most stable stages of the country's history. In the conviction that culture is not a luxury but a public good, Italy has tried not to take away resources to invest in this field even in the face of obvious competition with needs more exclusively humanitarian. Many projects of recovery and redevelopment of archaeological and cultural sites are undergoing, in collaboration with UNESCO, like the rehabilitation and valorization of the Qadisha Valley, the restoration of Jupiter Temple, and the requalification of the archeological site of Baalbeck, to name a few.

This is united to the contribution of resources and artists to the most important music festivals, like the participation of Roberto Bolle with its ballet play "*Roberto Bolle and Friends*" to the opening night of the Baalbeck Festival 2023<sup>125</sup>, the support to the Department of Italianism in the only Lebanese public university. After the explosion at the port of Beirut in August 2020, faced with the deep wounds inflicted on the urban and historical fabric of the city, Italy launched two new projects: the renovation of the damaged Sursock museum, together with UNESCO, completed last June; and the recovery of the area of the former railway station of the late nineteenth century, in a popular district of Beirut, to transform it into a park of industrial archaeology. Lebanon has an extraordinary and diverse historical and cultural heritage. Striving to protect and return it to communities means speaking a language that everyone understands and appreciates, beyond divisions.

The promotion of cultural bonds, albeit in view of the recent crisis the prerogatives are different, remains a collateral aspect of the bilateral relations between the two countries, and there is still a really strong commitment to culture creation and promotion which is pivotal throughout the Italian foreign policy.

In promoting Italy abroad, the Embassy and the Cultural Institute encourage and spread Italian language and culture through inter-university cooperation and the organization of language courses and events, in a virtuous circle of circulation of ideas, arts, and sciences as well as cultural exchanges between Italy and Lebanon.

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<sup>125</sup>“ROBERTO BOLLE AND FRIENDS”, Baalbeck International Festival, Program 2023, July 2023, <https://www.baalbeck.org.lb/programs/roberto-bolle/>

Italian is taught in many educational institutions, either primary, secondary, or university level, like at the Lebanese University (where there is a tenured reader), Saint-Esprit University in Kaslik (which has participated in the Graduates for Italian initiative since 2017), and Haigazian University (where there is a contracted reader). There are also active language courses at the Italian Cultural Institute in Beirut, which has a branch office in Tyre and is present in a number of localities (Dbayeh, Jounieh, Nabatieh, Sarba, Sidon, and Zahleh) due to agreements with local public and private institutions; and, in Tripoli, the Dante Alighieri Society Committee is active.

Several inter-university agreements have been signed as a result of the cooperation between Italian and Lebanese universities: an agreement between the University Institute of Architecture of Venice and the Saint-Esprit University of Kaslik in the field of architecture and urban planning; three agreements between the Politecnico di Milano and the American University of Science and Technology (AUST) of Beirut in the field of engineering.

Saint-Esprit University in Kaslik has offered a joint bachelor's, master's, and doctoral program with the University of Urbino in Conservation and Restoration of Cultural Heritage and Sacred Art since 2016. This is the only academic-level conservation and restoration program in the Middle East.

Additionally, four Italian archaeological missions have been deployed in Lebanon, one in the north, one in Chouf, and two in the region of Tyre.

Through the organization and participation in events such as art, design, photography, and video art exhibitions, book fairs, concerts of opera, chamber, jazz, and popular music, film reviews and retrospectives, conferences, seminars, and roundtable discussions, theatre performances, and poetry recitals, cultural promotion is accomplished.

Various Lebanese public and private institutions, such as the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education and Pedagogical Research and Development Center, the Lebanese University, the General Directorate of Antiquities, municipalities, the Tripoli Committee of the Dante Alighieri Society, the Baalbek International Festivals, Al Bustan, Beirut Chants, BAFF (Beirut Art Film Festival), SOL (Organ Society of Lebanon), BAFF (Beirut Art Film Active collaboration exists in Lebanon with the Delegation of the European Union to Lebanon and the extant foreign embassies and cultural institutes.<sup>126</sup>

In Italy, in addition to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, there is constant collaboration with the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, the Ministry of Education and

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<sup>126</sup> “Chi Siamo”, Istituto Italiano di Cultura (IIC) Beirut, [https://iicbeirut.esteri.it/iic\\_beirut/en/istituto/chi\\_siamo](https://iicbeirut.esteri.it/iic_beirut/en/istituto/chi_siamo)



Universities, CIDIM (Italian National Music Committee), and a number of other institutions, regions, and local governments.

*d. AICS: Development cooperation between the Lebanese crisis and the Syrian one*

Since the initiation of the first project, Italian Cooperation has consistently remained engaged in the nation, collaborating with Lebanese institutions and civil society in efforts pertaining to post-conflict rebuilding and assistance for marginalized socioeconomic segments. Italy, with the support of the Italian Cooperation, has emerged as a significant partner for Lebanese institutions. It has earned a privileged position in various domains, particularly in the development of intervention strategies aimed at alleviating the repercussions of the Syrian crisis on Lebanon.

In accordance with Law 125/2014 on Cooperation Reform, AICS Beirut now provides financial support for programs and projects carried out by International Organizations and Civil Society Organizations. These initiatives are executed within a network that involves many actors from both the public and commercial sectors and are focused on activities taking place in Lebanon, Italy, and Europe. The AICS initiatives play a significant role in Italy's efforts to promote the gradual stabilization and growth of the nation's socio-economic and political landscape. AICS provides financial support for various initiatives in several important sectors, including social policies (such as assistance for minors, women, and gender-related matters, as well as improvements in healthcare services), environmental protection (such as efforts to enhance environmental conditions, promote renewable energy, ensure sustainable use of natural resources, and manage waste disposal), construction of essential infrastructure (such as water purification plants, wastewater treatment facilities, and agricultural canalizations), agricultural and rural development, and preservation and promotion of Lebanon's cultural and archaeological heritage. These initiatives are funded through the bilateral channel.

Italy's involvement in the international community's efforts has transitioned from initial emergency assistance to initiatives focused on enhancing the resilience of both refugees and host communities.<sup>127</sup>

From 2007 on the development cooperation played an important role in Lebanon, as previously highlighted. Deputy Chief of AICS Lebanon, Rosa di Simone, together with the expert for the

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<sup>127</sup>“COOPERAZIONE INTERNAZIONALE PER LO SVILUPPO DOCUMENTO TRIENNALE DI PROGRAMMAZIONE E DI INDIRIZZO 2021 – 2023”, Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale, 2021, <https://www.esteri.it/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Schema-di-Documento-triennale-2021-2023.pdf>

social sector, Marie Helene Kassardjian, described AICS's main directives of engagement and projects nowadays. Albeit being wide-ranging, they focus mainly on two aspects: the infrastructural rehabilitation in the aftermath of the Syrian war, and the structural work with the Lebanese government and ministries, signing bilateral agreements in numerous sectors, from social protection of the most vulnerable fringes of the population and welfare creation to governance, education, water-management (with a big credit program), agriculture, environmental protection, and cultural heritage's conservation (the last two being at the forefront of its initiatives).

While the response to the humanitarian crisis linked to the war in Syria is implemented through structured partnerships part of the 3RP, Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan, with local civil societies, Italian and international NGOs, and UN-led agencies, the engagement with '*solely Lebanese*' issues is based upon bilateral programs, in a conjoint work with institutions. This is both a strength because it avoids the risk of prevailing over state sovereignty, facilitates the creation of ad-hoc emergency plans and long long-term sustainable development policies, and a weakness, due to the disruption and incapacity of the Lebanese institutions to further maintain the projects over time. In this respect, the Italian Agency promoted a series of coordination and technical assistance projects following the people-centered recovery track and the reform and reconstruction one, part of the *Reform, Recovery and Reconstruction Framework* (3RF) promoted by the World Bank, the UN, and the EU. An example is the "Call for Proposals" of September 2022<sup>128</sup> which had the objective of employing Lebanese and refugee labor in projects for the construction or rehabilitation of public works, the provision of municipal services, and the implementation of environmental protection measures in municipalities most affected by the consequences of the Syrian crisis and the economic crisis in Lebanon. The projects carried out under the initiative have proved to increase the income of economically vulnerable Lebanese and refugees, but just in the short-term remaining as such a "*buffer*" initiative.

There is a recurrent request for reforms at the national level, but the lack of resources, generated by the compound crises, made their realization impossible or at least too hard to fully achieve/implement. What the AICS' office in Beirut is committed to do is to be effective in short-time periods, being the entity that directly follows all implementations and programming, to accompany step-by-step the Lebanese actors, and to limit a further loss of human resources

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<sup>128</sup> From an initiative of LRRD, "Resilienza e stabilita' sociale: creazione di opportunita' d'impiego temporaneo per sostenere le municipalita' libanesi a gestire le conseguenze economiche e sociali della crisi (fase IV)", AID 12249, <https://beirut.aics.gov.it/home-ita/opportunita/bandi/>

in pivotal areas, a deficit that in the case of state administration (civil servants) has meant a slower decision-making and policies' actuation process, when there is no time to waste.

The absence of a solid state remains a common problem for the establishment of a rewarding system of development and cooperation, to whom it adds its duality, that of the black market in the economy, and of political impasse due to the outdated sectarian model, in the government.

Nonetheless, the Agency acting as a purely technical institution has been able to keep going on the administrative level, despite the absence of working national institutions, finding local, civil society interlocutors, fostering Italy's image and level of approval.

Concerning the parallel initiatives related to the Syrian conflict, there have been a series of projects, a lot still undergoing, which operate within refugee camps either solely Syrian or mixed. A fundamental component of AICS's planning is diversification, which seeks equilibrium and proportionality between the vulnerabilities of the Lebanese community and that of the Syrian ones.

The two AICS experts highlighted also the best practices of those last years, serving as a model for the upcoming ones: training triangulation, between technical assistance at the institutional and at the local level, which spurs connections and ensures a long-term perspective on projects, albeit having limitations on this aspect, since the '*humanitarian help and assistance*' is configured as an emergency measure with an at most a three-years programming (moreover objectives are aligned to the main stakeholder in the group of donors for a determined project); the Italian expertise in the sector and their support to Lebanese institutions, also at a communitarian level; and the requirements and output-based approach for projects implementation or continuation.

#### ***e. UNIFIL & MIBIL: Italy's military commitment***

In the memory of the Lebanese themselves, there is still a vivid memory of the role played by Italy in the darkest years of the civil war: the deployment of many contingents in 1982 and 1983, along the sensitive line of contact, frontier, the so-called "*Blue Line*"<sup>129</sup>, preventing

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<sup>129</sup> The Line in no way represents an established and internationally recognized border, it was constructed artificially in conjunction with the United Nations, to solve the problems related to the encroachment within the sovereign space of each country, the consequent territorial claims and, ultimately, to facilitate the establishment of full bilateral relations between the two neighbors. In drawing this line, the most precise possible approximation was made between the 1923 border (border of the Franco-British territory), the so-called Green Line (defined by the 1949 armistice) and the withdrawal line of the Israeli troops in 2000. Although in the future the Blue Line could be a basis on which to build a real national border, currently this operation is impossible since the two countries have not yet formally ceased their mutual hostilities.

border skirmishes and maintaining stability; and the political-military-diplomatic initiative that led effectively, after the Israeli-Lebanese conflict of July 2006, the resolution of the CDS n. 1701 of August 2006 and the creation of UNIFIL II.

The Mission has been traditionally and still is a positive and continuous expression of the Italian approach to "peacekeeping"<sup>130</sup>: the professionalism of its armed forces, in half-yearly rotation, the ability to analyze and understand the political dynamics that characterize the operating context, the respect for local culture and proactive use of Civic-Military Cooperation (CIMIC) cell to respond to the immediate needs of the population.

CIMIC has assumed increasing importance within the activities of the UNIFIL contingents, alongside the fundamental operations of patrolling and control of the territory, thanks to a prolonged situation of substantial stability reached around 2006.

Within low-medium risk scenarios, like the Lebanese one, civil-military cooperation activities play a very important role in force protection. Interacting positively with the civilian population does not just mean building a social terrain (a human terrain) within which it is easier to move and operate. Building a relationship of mutual trust and collaboration means enjoying the protection of the locals, thus hindering hate movements that could result in real attacks on the military.

Italy has long understood the centrality of CIMIC. In particular, Lebanon, due to its social configuration, has proved more than other theaters a real laboratory for this type of activity, where to experiment and evaluate, over a period of time that spans several decades, different tools and methodologies.

The accumulated experience, together with a natural predisposition for this type of exercise, have meant that today Italy, within UNIFIL, represents a real model for the CIMIC sector. It is a question of both resources and methods. Currently, the Command Operativo di Vertice Interforze (COVI), which coordinates the Italian missions abroad, spends every year about 1.3 million euros to finance CIMIC projects within Sector West. This item of expenditure represents about 62% of all funds allocated by the Italian Defense for CIMIC projects abroad, as well as about 80% of all CIMIC funds allocated by the entire UNIFIL mission on Lebanese territory.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> "La partecipazione italiana alle missioni in Libano" (Scheda di lettura), Camera dei Deputati, Servizio Studi, XVIII Legislatura, September 2020, <http://documenti.camera.it/leg18/dossier/Testi/DI0286.htm>

<sup>131</sup> Paolo Crippa, Lorenzo Marinone, "UNIFIL: 40 ANNI DI MISSIONE STRATEGICA PER IL LIBANO E PER L'ITALIA", Ce.S.I. – Centro Studi Internazionali, in collaboration with the Stato Maggiore della Difesa, Rome, 2019

Two examples of those projects have been: the realization of a project for the Hygiene and Health sector, in 2021, when the *Brigata Aeromobile Friuli* built a waste composting station, a light building with a metal structure used for the collection of waste and the supply of a compactor<sup>132</sup>; and the completion of construction of photovoltaic systems for the Shiite Mosque of Tyre and the Cultural Center of Tibnin, in the southern region, by the *Brigata Aosta*, the operating Italian Contingent, in January 2023.<sup>133</sup>

Out of a total of 110 Lebanese villages, Italy currently has around fifty cooperation projects. The activities are of various nature and generally range from the organization of public events to road and infrastructure maintenance works, medical assistance, training activities, installation of wells, water systems, or generators' installations for villages in need.

Net of the resources involved, the Italian military's approach to civilian-military cooperation activities is an indisputable success factor. As for the training and capacity-building activities mentioned above, the Italian military demonstrates commitment to operational effectiveness but also a sensitivity, humility, and empathy that are hardly found in the other contingents: a great source of pride throughout decades.

The enthusiasm and affection shown by the local population is a testament to the success of this approach. From year to year, in fact, the events organized by ITALBATT attract an increasing number of participants, adults and children, without any incident.

Even today this method and these characteristics remain unchanged and contribute daily to maintaining a situation of relative stability along the blue line. On this line, Italy's UNIFIL contingent has been involved in humanitarian efforts, particularly during the Syrian Civil War and the subsequent refugee crisis. They provided medical assistance, distributed humanitarian aid, and supported education and healthcare services, demonstrating Italy's commitment to addressing the evolving challenges in the region.

However, tensions and incidents are not lacking, and at times they touch the trigger of escalating dynamics on a wider scale and conflict, and UNIFIL, per se, does not have the task of solving the causes but of maintaining relative stability in a situation of "*no peace*" between the parties. Indeed, it is important to acknowledge that there are inherent limitations to the extent of responsibilities that may reasonably be assigned to a peacekeeping team. It is imperative for both Israel and Hezbollah to actively endorse and collaborate with UNIFIL

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<sup>132</sup> "Missione in Libano: attività CIMIC dei Caschi Blu", Report Difesa, DiRE, September 2021, <https://www.reportdifesa.it/missione-in-libano-attivita-cimic-dei-caschi-blu/>

<sup>133</sup>"Libano: il Contingente italiano impegnato in attività CIMIC", Ministero della Difesa, January 2023, [https://www.difesa.it/OperazioniMilitari/op\\_intern\\_corso/UNIFIL/notizie\\_teatro/Pagine/Libano\\_il\\_Contingente\\_italiano\\_impegnato\\_in\\_attivita\\_CIMIC.aspx](https://www.difesa.it/OperazioniMilitari/op_intern_corso/UNIFIL/notizie_teatro/Pagine/Libano_il_Contingente_italiano_impegnato_in_attivita_CIMIC.aspx)

while refraining from engaging in actions that have the potential to incite the opposing party. In the event of such a failure, enduring assumptions that both parties are averse to engaging in warfare may gradually give way to a much bleaker emerging reality, whereby the likelihood of a conflict becomes progressively more tangible.<sup>134</sup>

To be noted, there is also a strong commitment towards the promotion of gender diversity within the mission, indeed Italian female peacekeepers have assumed leadership roles and have been actively engaged in community outreach programs, a comprehensive idea of women's empowerment within the peacekeeping framework.

In the military field, another important Italian intervention has been the articulated, first aid, one implemented by Italy after the devastating explosions at the port of Beirut in August 2020: civil protection, army engineers (“*GENIO*” component), and military field hospital, shipments of humanitarian cargo of Italian Cooperation but also of many private associations, in a concerted effort to respond in a generous, immediate, and exhaustive manner.

The Italian military commitment to Lebanon does not stop at UNIFIL. The relatively more recent Italian Bilateral Military Mission in Lebanon (MIBIL), deployed in 2015, unfolds within the broader framework of the actions undertaken by the "*International Support Group for Lebanon*" (ISG) under the auspices of the United Nations. The primary goal of the mission is to serve as a catalyst for fostering a strong commitment from the international community to provide help to Lebanon.

The mission further testifies the pledge of Italy to the military training of the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), Internal Security Forces (ISF), and other specialized security agencies, providing many educational targeted activities: presidential guard, CBRN, military engineering, health and first aid, Marines, Special Forces, and Air assurance regiment, technical course (e.g., search and rescue) ...

The primary objective, in the beginning, was the establishment of a Training Center in the southern region of Lebanon, that, due to its unfeasibility and an utmost necessity to be flexible and adapt to the context, has been changed to providing all the tools to the military to “*stand on its own feet*”, in view of a future withdrawing of the international armies from Lebanon.

Three key areas of involvement have been highlighted, namely, providing assistance to refugees, bolstering the national economy, and strengthening the military forces.

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<sup>134</sup>“UNIFIL is Needed More than Ever to Keep the Peace in Southern Lebanon”, OCHA Services, Relief Web, August 2023, <https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/unifil-needed-more-ever-keep-peace-southern-lebanon>

Italy has undertaken bilateral initiatives focused on providing training for military personnel from Lebanon. While the UNIFIL military provides the LAF with general and extensive training, the Commander in Chief of MIBIL, General Angelo Sacco, attested the high quality of the MIBIL personnel, coming mostly from elite units of the Italian Armed Forces, such as the regiments of the COFS (Joint Forces Command for Special Forces Operations), which contributes to the capacity building of the Lebanese military in very specific areas, putting at the forefront the end state which is the valorization of the Lebanese Armed Forces, and their ability to independently act as a pillar for the whole country.

The mission has been deepening its presence in the territory and creating more profound links with the Lebanese population with the newly established CIMIC cell<sup>135</sup> that since its establishment has been already able to assist the Lebanese population in many projects cooperating on the ground with sector-specific organizations, ranging from agriculture<sup>136</sup> and sustainable development to female empowerment<sup>137</sup>.

Considering the request made by the Lebanese authorities to expand training and its activities, there has been a gradual increase in the personnel and scope of action of the national contingent, rising from 25 units in 2017 to more than 140 in 2020.<sup>138</sup>

The enlargement of the mission also meant a new commitment towards all the problems facing the LAF, emerging from the privileged relationship established; the Lebanese Forces indirectly have been pivotal in targeting and addressing particular problems of local-municipal communities (Lebanese micro-systems). Those include: health with training and assistance by Italian military doctors to Lebanese ones at the Beirut Governmental Hospital, Karantina; INFOPS (and PSYOPS) towards the international community, to raise awareness regarding the level of poverty and the need to build a properly equipped and functioning first aid; agriculture

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<sup>135</sup> A.C. 795, “Ratifica ed esecuzione dello Scambio di Note verbali concernente il rinnovo dell’Accordo di cooperazione nel settore della difesa tra il Governo della Repubblica italiana e il Governo della Repubblica del Libano del 21 giugno 2004, fatto a Beirut il 3 agosto 2021 e il 21 aprile 2022”, Camera dei Deputati, Servizio Studi, XIX Legislatura, Dossier n.38- Schede di lettura, February 2023.

Approved on April 4, 2023, for the full document: <https://documenti.camera.it/Leg19/Dossier/Pdf/ES0040.Pdf>

<sup>136</sup>“MIBIL: il Contingente italiano dona materiale a supporto dell’agricoltura in Libano”, Ministero della Difesa, May 2023,

[https://www.difesa.it/OperazioniMilitari/op\\_intern\\_corso/MIBIL/notizie\\_teatro/Pagine/MIBIL\\_Contingente\\_Italiano\\_supporto\\_agricoltura\\_in\\_Libano.aspx](https://www.difesa.it/OperazioniMilitari/op_intern_corso/MIBIL/notizie_teatro/Pagine/MIBIL_Contingente_Italiano_supporto_agricoltura_in_Libano.aspx)

<sup>137</sup>“Libano: ultimato il corso CIMIC Enhanced Female Engagement Team”, Ministero della Difesa, May 2023, [https://www.difesa.it/OperazioniMilitari/op\\_intern\\_corso/MIBIL/notizie\\_teatro/Pagine/Libano\\_corso\\_Cimic\\_Enhanced\\_Female\\_Engagement\\_Team.aspx](https://www.difesa.it/OperazioniMilitari/op_intern_corso/MIBIL/notizie_teatro/Pagine/Libano_corso_Cimic_Enhanced_Female_Engagement_Team.aspx)

<sup>138</sup> With respect to the financial resources allocated for the mission, it was approved to get a funding of roughly 6.7 million euros for the year 2020, which remained relatively consistent in comparison to the previous year’s allocation of 7.2 million euros in 2019. In 2018, the mission received a funding of 7.2 million euros, while in 2017, the allocated amount was around 3 million euros.

and sustainable development as previously mentioned; infrastructural and engineering component, for reconstruction...

Small-focus projects relying on building bonds with the population would be the key to long-term effectiveness, preventing the risk of victim mentality and subservience to humanitarian aid.

### **3.3 Bilateral relations between Italy and Lebanon: looking at the future**

In Ambassador Bombardiere's view, to properly interact with the complex Lebanese context, it is compulsory to first respect some fundamental assumptions. First, clarity in objectives, posture, and method of cooperation: the international community should work cohesively to avoid creating confusion or the wrong expectation that the assistance or the active role of a partner country in a specific context can take over the responsibilities that must continue to remain with the Lebanese institutions. Therefore, although weak and malfunctioning, it is essential to continue to involve and empower Lebanese institutions as much as possible in the projects. Contrarily to the approach of other partners who, due to distrust of the institutions, rely only on cooperation solely with the civil society. Secondly, sharing, meaning to seek as far as possible to identify common interests, priorities, and challenges to which common solutions could be found together. Sharing a Mediterranean origin largely also dictates a common agenda, on security, environment, resources, and so on. Third, awareness of the deep, multidimensional crisis and complex mutation ongoing in Lebanon. High expectations should be maintained that the necessary changes will decline shortly into a concrete set of measures and reforms. However, due care and attention must be taken not to confuse what is necessary to put in place immediately to stabilize the country economically and socially from visions and aspirations related to broader political projects. Economic and social stabilization is urgent and cannot be delayed, while the re-foundation of the political-constitutional system of the country is another thing, which implies the start of a national dialogue between all the components, and the awareness that the stakes are of another type: the change of the political-confessional balance established during decades.

Over the years, Italy has earned a position of authority in Lebanon. A virtuous role is recognized by the country: an unbroken thread of trust and appreciation, from the past to nowadays, the political dialogue between the two countries has never been interrupted.



Italy's historic commitment to UNIFIL<sup>139</sup>, the decades-long presence of cooperation for development in the infrastructural sector, social, and humanitarian projects, have consolidated its image of reliability, seriousness, and friendship.

The military intervention model thus conceived has become an integral part of the "wide peacekeeping" approach adopted by the United Nations and constitutes the foundation of NATO's Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC) activities. The success of UNIFIL II - a mission that was initially considered doomed to failure by almost all commentators - confirms the correctness of a choice that was born in Lebanon thirty years ago and that today finds its most advanced concretization. A choice that over the years has been enriched, deepened, and articulated in ever more sophisticated forms, and that has had an influence on various aspects of defence, and cooperation policies, as well as on Lebanon's foreign policy.

It is a model of intervention that has been developed and tested with substantial success in various post-war contexts since the early 1990s: from Central America to the Balkans to Mozambique. In this sense, it is a "*properly Italian*" model: putting together resources, coordinating interventions, and providing the required technical skills, but leaving the decision-making and management processes in the hands of the communities concerned, favoring governability, participation, and transparency.

Indeed military actions, particularly peacekeeping missions are being reiterated through an exchange of notes between the Government of the Italian Republic and the Government of the Republic of Lebanon, which renewed the Cooperation Agreement of June 12, 2004, in the field of defense and extended it for a further 5 years.<sup>140</sup> It is noteworthy that the Lebanese government convened for the first time since October of the previous year in the days leading up to the ceremony where the Italian Defence Summits played a prominent role. Regarding the Syrian crisis, which is another of the focuses of the Italian action in Lebanon in the future, the absence of a political resolution to the problem cannot be adequately substituted by any humanitarian aid or protective services. Due to this peculiarity in the framework of

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<sup>139</sup> There is a general commitment to international peacekeeping mission, as: atti parlamentari (deliberazione del Consiglio dei ministri in merito alla partecipazione dell'Italia a ulteriori missioni internazionali, adottata il 1° maggio 2023:

[https://documenti.camera.it/leg19/resoconti/assemblea/html/sed0125/leg.19.sed0125.allegato\\_a.pdf](https://documenti.camera.it/leg19/resoconti/assemblea/html/sed0125/leg.19.sed0125.allegato_a.pdf)

<sup>140</sup> A.C. 795 "Ratifica ed esecuzione dello Scambio di Note verbali concernente il rinnovo dell'Accordo di cooperazione nel settore della difesa tra il Governo della Repubblica italiana e il Governo della Repubblica del Libano del 21 giugno 2004, fatto a Beirut il 3 agosto 2021 e il 21 aprile 2022", Camera dei Deputati, approved on April 4, 2023.

For the full document: <https://documenti.camera.it/Leg19/Dossier/Pdf/ES0040.Pdf> (Feb 14, 2023)

action, the safeguarding of individuals who have been impacted or are vulnerable is seen by the Italian Cooperation as the fundamental principle guiding the planning and implementation of the humanitarian response.

As part of ISG, Italy has recently reiterated (August 3, 2023) solidarity and support to the Lebanese state, despite expressing dissatisfaction with the limited advancements in the legal processes, it has urged the Lebanese authorities to remove any barriers that impede the pursuit of justice, and it has emphasized the need for an unbiased, comprehensive, and transparent inquiry to be promptly concluded.

The restoration of legitimacy in Lebanon's governmental institutions necessitates the vital task of ensuring judicial accountability and combating impunity. The current impasse in the investigation of the port explosion highlights the pressing need to protect the autonomy, fairness, and ethical standards of the Lebanese court. Italy, together with the other members, urged the Lebanese Parliament to expedite the enactment of requisite legislation aimed at enhancing the autonomy of the judiciary in accordance with globally recognized norms, meanwhile committing to support Lebanon and its population.<sup>141</sup>

The mission of the team of the Embassy, as a whole, remains that of preserving and strengthening this image, through everyday work, in the many areas of intervention in which Italy is called to operate.

### ***Concluding remarks***

The bilateral relations between Italy and Lebanon, characterized by a trajectory punctuated by treaties, diplomatic figures, and historical junctures, embody the complex interplay of geopolitical factors and the quest for regional stability. While they have navigated periods of conflict and uncertainty, both nations have found opportunities for cooperation and mutual support, contributing to the nuanced and resilient nature of their contemporary relationship.

Italy's bilateral relations with Lebanon have evolved over time, with the country facing various crises and weaknesses. Italy's role as a middle power in the enlarged Mediterranean is crucial, particularly in the region centered on Lebanon. The country faces numerous emergencies, including the migration and refugee crisis, the impact of the Ukrainian war, and economic and political strenuous situations. Italy's objectives in 2023 highlight its role as a bridge between Mediterranean countries and the European Union, working towards the resolution of Lebanon's

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<sup>141</sup>“Statement of the International Support Group for Lebanon”, UNSCOL, UN Missions, August 2023, [https://unscol.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/isg\\_statement\\_3\\_august\\_2023-english.pdf](https://unscol.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/isg_statement_3_august_2023-english.pdf)

institutional and economic fragility. The country's precarious equilibrium makes it an effective role for Italy due to its comprehensive presence and coherence between political-diplomatic, military, civilian, and development cooperation. The Italian intervention in Lebanon has unique characteristics, relying on the capacity to listen and dialogue constructively with a multi-religious, sectarian reality. It has been characterized by mediation and moderation, despite the challenges posed by their different cultures and borders.

Italy has adapted its foreign policy by focusing on safeguarding past interventions and redirecting dialogue with the Lebanese government. It has advocated for open and continuous channels of dialogue with all political and confessional components, focusing on strengthening state institutions and addressing sensitive issues like the political model and power-sharing system. Being a leading donor to Lebanon, focusing on bilateral relations and multilateral coordination with the European Union, Italian NGOs are present in various sectors, including social protection, schools, agriculture, and emergency interventions, providing direct contributions, together with the Embassy, to UNRWA, UNHCR, WFP, UNICEF, OCHA, and WHO. The interaction and collaboration between military entities extend beyond technical matters, and, as it is frequently observed, propelling diplomatic dynamics that have proved and may prove to be, also in the future, beneficial in fostering an internal framework capable of reversing the uncertain political trajectory.

## Conclusion

This thesis has surveyed Lebanon, Italy, and their reciprocal, bilateral relation. The longstanding relationship between Italy and Lebanon has been shaped by a series of treaties, diplomatic figures, and historical events. These ties reflect the intricate interplay of geopolitical factors and the pursuit of regional stability. Despite facing periods of conflict and uncertainty, both nations have managed to find opportunities for cooperation and mutual support, contributing to the resilient nature of their current relationship.

Italy, as a “*middle power*” in the “*enlarged Mediterranean*” region, plays a crucial role, especially in the context of Lebanon, which is located in one of the “*hotspots*” of the world, confronting several pressing challenges, including the migration and refugee crisis, the repercussions of the Ukrainian war, and challenging economic downturn, political impasse, and social disaggregation.

In 2023, Italy's objectives emphasize its role as a “*bridge*” between Mediterranean nations and the European Union, with a focus on addressing Lebanon's institutional and economic instability. This area has had utmost importance within Italian foreign policy since the First Republic and, nowadays, it has consolidated as a strategic prerogative to engage functionally and extensively in a regionalist approach.

Italy's distinctive position enables it to effectively participate in a range of avenues, such as political diplomacy, military involvement, civilian initiatives, and development cooperation. When it comes to its involvement in Lebanon, Italy is known for its skill in engaging in constructive dialogues with Lebanon's varied religious and sectarian communities. Despite disparities in culture and borders, Italy's strategy has consistently prioritized mediation and a balanced approach.

Over time, Italy's bilateral relations with Lebanon have evolved, with Lebanon experiencing various crises and vulnerabilities.

Italy has modified its foreign policy to place a high priority on safeguarding previous interventions and revitalizing its interactions with the Lebanese government. It promotes the importance of maintaining open and ongoing lines of communication with all political and religious groups, with a specific focus on enhancing state institutions and tackling sensitive topics such as the political structure and power-sharing system. Italy also plays a significant role as a major contributor to Lebanon and maintains a close partnership with the European Union while preserving its independence in its actions. Italian non-governmental organizations

(NGOs) operate across various sectors, including social protection, education, agriculture, and emergency relief, and work in conjunction with international organizations such as UNRWA, UNHCR, WFP, UNICEF, OCHA, and WHO.

The multi-level approach typical of Italy, although criticized for not always being target-conscious, is controversially its source of strength, characterized by flexibility and dynamism that ensured Italy's presence both bilaterally and internationally.

Italian foreign policy had and is still having the ability to resist the compound crises that invested Lebanon because its approach was not just focused on diplomatic, economic, humanitarian, or military actions, per se, but it was a mix of all of that.

Albeit being a "*middle power*", Italy in its relations with Lebanon, displayed those features of foreign policy and engagement, most of "*super/bigger powers*" lack: the ability to deeply integrate within the host country itself. One thing is to have a diplomatic representation, trade agreements, with imports and exports that yearly grow, humanitarian missions with comprehensive and extensive development and cooperation objectives, and military projects within the amplitude of UN, NATO, or the EU peacekeeping initiative. Another is to have a population, a government, and many civil society, private and public organizations that actively and willingly communicate with the representative institution of the foreign country.

For this reason, Italy is an "*exemplum sequi*", that has somehow been able to enter Lebanon, seeking opportunities, while supporting the country in many different areas.

The Italian approach to crisis management and reconstruction has been recognized and integrated as a set of "*best practices*" within NATO's doctrine for peacekeeping missions. UNIFIL, in particular, stands out in this regard. The Italian contingent, in addition to its standard security responsibilities, such as border patrolling, military training, and demilitarization efforts to de-escalate rivalries among militias, has also consistently prioritized the humanitarian and civilian aspects of the mission. Collaboration between military entities goes beyond technical matters and often contributes to diplomatic dynamics that have proven and may continue to prove beneficial in shaping Lebanon's unpredictable future trajectory.

When considering the "*lessons*" drawn from the Lebanese experience, numerous valuable insights can be gleaned. These insights can be broadly applied to enhance foreign policy in the future, ensuring a stable presence in conflict-prone areas. The goal is to promote sustainable development and resilience in the face of persistent crises, a priority not only for Italy but for

the entire international community. Here are the general guidelines that have been identified, as a result of this thesis analysis:

- **Legitimate Political and Diplomatic Basis:** Any political and diplomatic initiatives aimed at pacification or stabilization must be grounded in a legitimate legal and political basis, complementing UN Security Council mandates with broad consultations with relevant stakeholders.
- **Protection of Civilians:** Military actions should prioritize the protection of civilian populations, adhering to the principles outlined in the UN Charter and international humanitarian law. Adequate police and law enforcement measures should accompany military actions.
- **Impartial Humanitarian Assistance:** Humanitarian assistance must adhere to principles of impartiality and neutrality and be entrusted to civilian organizations perceived as neutral and impartial by the population.
- **Community Participation:** International aid for reconstruction and development should involve active participation and consensus of beneficiary communities.
- **Building Self-Reliance:** Cooperation projects should not be devoid of conditions. While maintaining a supportive approach, there should be attached requirements to aid packages that incentivize the country's government to implement necessary reforms. By linking aid to specific actions, there is an encouragement to shift from dependency to self-reliance, mitigating the risk of perpetuating a victim mentality.
- **Proactive Grassroots Initiative:** Cooperation projects should prioritize grassroots initiatives that empower the middle class—the driving force behind economic growth (e.g., vocational training, skill development, and innovation incubation, instilling a culture of resilience and resourcefulness.)
- **Educational Partnerships and Youth Empowerment Initiatives:** Foster educational partnerships, with student exchange programs, joint research initiatives, and academic collaborations that facilitate the transfer of knowledge and expertise in various fields. While, developing initiatives to empower youth to become active agents of change (e.g., leadership workshops, civic engagement projects, and youth-led community development initiatives, cultivating a sense of ownership and responsibility for their nation's future).
- **Localized Infrastructure Projects:** Collaborate on infrastructure projects that directly impact communities, such as renewable energy installations, water management systems, and technology centers. Ensure that these projects are

designed and executed with local input and adhere to sustainable practices, benefitting the middle class and contributing to long-term development.

- **Civil-Military Coordination:** Diplomatic, military, and cooperation actions should be pursued in a coordinated manner, respecting different mandates, and promoting transparency on objectives, strategies, and management. Civil-military (CIMIC) coordination is vital for the success of international missions.<sup>142</sup>
- **Coordination Table:** Italy, or any other state lacking one, should establish a "*Coordination Table*" between the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Defence, NGOs, the United Nations, and other humanitarian actors, possibly with the participation of independent experts and think tanks. This table would facilitate constant dialogue and case-by-case evaluation of interaction modalities (from coexistence to cooperation, respecting the different mandates and principles).
- **Joint Training:** To enhance effectiveness, joint training for civilian and military components should be provided, with a focus on civil-military cooperation.

In conclusion, it is essential to acknowledge that Italy's engagement has its limitations since the volatile and unpredictable nature of Lebanese politics and the region's overall instability pose significant challenges, Italy's influence is not immune to shifts in the geopolitical landscape, and its capacity to bring about substantial change in Lebanon's domestic politics is constrained.

However, the principles, drawn from Italy's experiences in Lebanon can serve as a guiding framework for its foreign policy, ensuring that its policies, initiatives, and projects are well-grounded, responsive to the needs of affected populations, '*emphatic*', and effective in promoting long-term development and securitization-appeasement. Empowering the middle class, fostering self-sufficiency, and promoting ownership are the keys to breaking the chains of crisis dependency, and mitigating the risk of spiraling into a "*victim mentality*".

Italy's role transcends bilateral cooperation; it embodies the potential to reshape global paradigms of international assistance, laying the groundwork for a future that champions empowerment, adaptability, and sustainable progress in the face of adversity. While the future remains uncertain, Italy's best practices, I believe, could serve as a benchmark for the global community.

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<sup>142</sup> The principles and guidelines governing this coordination include the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid (2007) and the Military Civil Defence Assets Guidelines (2003), signed by governments, humanitarian organizations, and UN agencies.

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## **Appendices**

The interviews were conducted with 4 main representatives of the comprehensive action of the Italian Government in Lebanon: the Ambassador, Nicoletta Bombardiere, the Head of ICE (Italian Trade Agency), Claudio Pasqualucci, the Head of AICS (Italian Agency for Development Cooperation), Alessandra Piermattei (and her Chief Rosa di Simone and Marie Helene Kassardjian), and the Command General of MIBIL, Angelo Sacco.

### **Questions to the Ambassador Nicoletta Bombardiere**

1. How has Italy's diplomatic approach adapted to Lebanon's composite crises, and what specific strategies has Italy employed to maintain its influence during these challenging times?
  - How has Italy engaged with various political factions in Lebanon during times of political instability, and what approaches have been successful in maintaining constructive dialogue?
  - In what ways has Italy coordinated its actions with other international actors, such as the UN and the EU, to address Lebanon's compound crises and reinforce its presence and influence in the region?
  - How has Italy leveraged cultural diplomacy and people-to-people exchanges to enhance its soft power in Lebanon and foster mutual understanding between the two nations?
  - Can you highlight specific instances where Italy's proactive crisis management and conflict mediation efforts have contributed to de-escalating tensions and promoting stability in Lebanon?
  - How would you describe the historical background and evolution of Italy's diplomatic relations with Lebanon?
  - What are the main objectives and priorities of Italy in its diplomatic engagement with Lebanon?
  - How does Italy navigate the complexities of the current crisis in Lebanon and maintain effective communication and cooperation with the Lebanese government and other stakeholders?
  - What challenges has Italy faced in its diplomatic efforts in Lebanon, and how have they been addressed or mitigated?

- In what ways does Italy support Lebanon in times of crisis, and how have the Lebanese government and public perceived this assistance?

**Question for Alessandra Piermattei, Head of AICS (Italian Agency for Development Cooperation) in Lebanon**

1. Could you provide examples of successful development cooperation projects initiated by Italy in Lebanon, and how have these projects contributed to reinforcing Italy's presence, particularly in light of the country's compound crises?
  - What are the key focus areas of Italy's development cooperation in Lebanon, and how have these priorities evolved in response to the changing crisis landscape?
  - How has Italy adapted its development projects to address the needs of vulnerable communities and provide sustainable solutions to the challenges faced by the Lebanese population?
  - Can you provide examples of projects that have had a significant positive impact on Lebanon's socio-economic development and improved Italy's standing in the eyes of the Lebanese people?
  - In what ways does Italy engage with local civil society organizations and institutions to ensure the effectiveness and ownership of development initiatives?
  - What are the key development projects and initiatives that Italy supports in Lebanon through AICS?
  - How does AICS work in collaboration with the Lebanese government and other international organizations to address the humanitarian and development challenges in the country?
  - What measures has AICS taken to ensure the effectiveness and sustainability of its projects amidst the ongoing crisis in Lebanon?
  - How do you assess the impact of Italy's development cooperation efforts in Lebanon, particularly during challenging times?

**Question for Claudio Pasqualucci, Head of ICE (Italian Trade Agency) in Lebanon:**

1. In the face of Lebanon's economic challenges, how has Italy leveraged its economic cooperation initiatives to strengthen its position in Lebanon and foster long-term economic ties?
  - How has Italy promoted trade and investment opportunities in Lebanon despite the economic downturn and political uncertainties, and what measures have been successful in attracting Italian businesses to engage with Lebanon?
  - How does Italy navigate the challenges posed by corruption and bureaucratic obstacles in Lebanon's business environment, and what steps has it taken to mitigate risks for Italian investors?
  - In what sectors has Italy found comparative advantages for trade and economic cooperation with Lebanon, and how have these partnerships contributed to Italy's broader foreign policy objectives?
  - How does Italy support Lebanon's private sector and entrepreneurs to foster economic growth and strengthen bilateral economic ties?

**Italian Trade Relations with Lebanon:**

- Can you provide an overview of the trade relations between Italy and Lebanon, including the major sectors involved and the scale of trade activities?
- How has the ongoing crisis in Lebanon impacted bilateral trade and economic cooperation between the two countries?
- What strategies have ICE employed to navigate the challenges and complexities of the crisis while promoting Italian exports and investments in Lebanon?
- How does ICE support Italian companies and investors operating in Lebanon, and what measures are taken to address potential risks and uncertainties?

#### Trade Promotion and Market Access:

- What specific initiatives and programs does ICE implement to promote Italian products and services in the Lebanese market?
- How does ICE assist Italian companies in accessing the Lebanese market, and what are the main obstacles they encounter during these processes?
- In light of the crisis, how does ICE adapt its trade promotion activities to seize potential opportunities in Lebanon and overcome existing barriers?

#### Collaboration with Lebanese Partners:

- How does ICE collaborate with Lebanese trade and business organizations to foster economic ties between Italy and Lebanon?
- What are the key areas of cooperation and joint projects between ICE and its Lebanese counterparts?
- How do you assess the effectiveness of these collaborative efforts in strengthening economic relations and mutual benefits between the two countries?

#### Investment and Economic Development:

- How does ICE facilitate Italian investments in Lebanon, and what are the main sectors that attract Italian investors?
- Considering the current crisis, how does ICE address concerns and uncertainties related to investment opportunities in Lebanon?
- What role does ICE play in supporting economic development projects and initiatives in Lebanon that involve Italian businesses and expertise?

#### Future Prospects and Strategies:

- What are the long-term prospects for Italy-Lebanon trade and economic relations, and how does ICE envision overcoming challenges to seize potential opportunities?

- What strategies and policies does ICE recommend for both Italy and Lebanon to enhance economic cooperation and navigate through the complexities of the crisis effectively?

**Question for Angelo Sacco, the Commander General of MIBIL:**

1. How has Italy's military engagement through MIBIL and UNIFIL contributed to maintaining stability and influence in Lebanon amidst the evolving security landscape, and what are the key lessons learned from these engagements?
  - How does Italy's participation in MIBIL and UNIFIL align with its broader security objectives in Lebanon and the Middle East region?
  - What challenges has Italy encountered in its peacekeeping missions, and how has it adapted its strategies to maintain its commitment to Lebanon's security and stability?
  - How does Italy engage with the Lebanese Armed Forces and other security agencies to enhance capacity building and promote cooperation in areas of mutual interest?
  - Can you provide examples of successful collaborative efforts between Italy and other international peacekeeping forces in Lebanon and the lessons learned from these joint operations?
  - How does Italy's participation in MIBIL and UNIFIL contribute to its broader diplomatic objectives in Lebanon?
  - What are the main security challenges that Italy's armed forces have encountered during their missions in Lebanon, and how do they address these challenges?
  - How does Italy coordinate its efforts with other international peacekeeping forces, particularly those within UNIFIL, to maintain stability and peace in the region?



- How do the Italian armed forces engage with the local community and authorities in Lebanon to build trust and support for their peacekeeping operations?
- How do the Italian forces assess the overall effectiveness of their contributions to peace and security in Lebanon, especially in the midst of the ongoing crisis?

## **UNIFIL:**

1. How has Italy's military engagement through the UNIFIL mission contributed to maintaining stability and influence in Lebanon in an ever-changing security environment, and what are the main lessons learned from these commitments?
  - How does Italy's participation in UNIFIL align with its wider security objectives in Lebanon and the Middle East region?
  - What challenges has Italy encountered in its peacekeeping missions and how has it adapted its strategies to maintain its commitment to the security and stability of Lebanon, especially during the crisis periods of the last 20 years? (Rewording it as follows: What were the critical issues for the mission and how were they addressed? Were there particular problems for the Italian contingent? What are the main security challenges that the Italian armed forces encountered during their missions in Lebanon and how have they faced them?)
  - How does the mission engage with the Lebanese Armed Forces and other security agencies to improve capacity building and promote cooperation in areas of mutual interest? What are the lessons learned from these joint operations?
  - How do they engage with the community and local authorities in Lebanon to build trust and support for their peacekeeping operations?
  - How does Italy coordinate its efforts with other international peacekeeping forces, in particular those of UNIFIL, to maintain stability and peace in the region?
  - How do the Italian armed forces assess the overall effectiveness of their contribution to peace and security in Lebanon (and vice versa, how do they evaluate UNIFIL and, more generally, the United Nations, the Italian contribution), especially amid the current crisis?

- What is the perception of LAF and population and what parameters are considered to 'certify' the success of the mission?