Postprint von: Rosiny — Power Sharing in Syria. Lessons from Lebanon's Taif Experience. In: Middle East Policy 20,3 (2013). 41–55.
https://doi.org/10.1111/mepo.12031

Power Sharing in Syria: Lessons from Lebanon's Taif Experience

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This paper is part of the comprehensive research project "Power-Sharing in Multi-ethnic Societies of the Middle East: What Can Bahrain and Syria Learn from Iraq and Lebanon?" which is funded by the Volkswagen Foundation, Germany.

A vicious circle of increased sectarian sentiment, escalating violence and outside support has so far prevented any serious attempts to resolve the conflict between the warring factions in Syria. The regime and the opposition disavow each other as rivals in a competitive struggle, but regard one another as an existential enemy to be toppled or destroyed. In 2012, Lakhdar Brahimi, the UN and Arab League special envoy for Syria, warned that the violence could turn Syria into another "failed state" like Somalia.[1] Others drew a comparison with neighboring Lebanon, given that ethnic and sectarian identities had turned into deterministic markers for violence and thrown the country into a devastating civil war. Only after sixteen years did the Taif agreement help end the circle of violence there. Could a similar power-sharing model be applied to today's Syria?

Critics of a "Syrian Taif," a power-sharing arrangement between ethnic and confessional communities[2] similar to the Lebanese model, hold that there are fundamental differences that make power sharing inapplicable to Syria. First, Lebanon is a liberal society with a free-market economy that already had an established tradition of power-sharing democracy before the war, whereas Syria has been ruled by an authoritarian one-party regime with socialist leanings since the Baath coup of 1963. Second, sectarian bickering has deep roots in Lebanon, while Syria is often portrayed as a secular, multiethnic society by its inhabitants.[3] Third, the demographic distribution differs between the two countries. Sunni Muslims form an overwhelming majority of the population in Syria, whereas no single community holds a distinct majority in Lebanon. Fourth, the Lebanese civil war involved mainly nonstate militias, while Syria's civil war is predominantly between state forces and rebel militias. Fifth, the stalemate in Lebanon was finally dissolved by the third-party intervention of Syrian troops that crushed the last opponents of Taif and guaranteed the disarmament of the militias. No such external force shows readiness to

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intervene in Syria at the moment.

Despite this qualified skepticism about transferring Lebanon's model to Syria, a comparison also discloses remarkable parallels. The two countries share some significant similarities in their socio-historical geneses and the politicization of their ethnic and confessional compositions. Furthermore, the dynamics of the violent escalation in Syria and the country's breakup into sectarian enclaves strongly resemble the events of Lebanon's civil war. The conflict in Syria threatens to deteriorate into a regional conflagration, given that violence has already spread into Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq, Jordan and the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights. Both internal and external actors may conclude that a power-sharing deal is a reasonable solution, as "further escalation of the conflict will result in mutually damaging outcomes."[4] This "self-negating prophecy" stands at the core of any agreement for consociational power sharing.[5]

Lebanon was regarded as an exemplary case of consociational power sharing, at least until the outbreak of civil war in 1975.[6] Nevertheless, Lebanon's corporate consociationalism was too weak to prevent — if not partly responsible for — the outbreak of a civil war between militias increasingly mobilized along sectarian cleavages. Therefore, a reworked power-sharing model was introduced to end the civil war in 1989. Under Baathist rule, Syria pretended to deal with cultural pluralism by following a unitary nationalist approach, insisting that a neutral state should neither address ethnicity and religious affiliation nor grant any specific rights to communities, as this would strengthen subnational identities and weaken national unity. The Syrian government claimed to have defused the tensions of primordial antagonism, but — like Lebanon — clearly failed to do so for the long term. Rather, its critics allege that it even instigated and utilized sectarian tensions in order to discredit the opposition as "Sunni fundamentalists" and to rally the minorities around the ruling regime. Parts of the opposition likewise foment sectarian hatred against the "apostate" Alawite sect that dominates the relevant high ranks of the state and security apparatus and the minorities serving as their lackeys, if not their agents. The hostile demonizing of different communities' members as terrorists, apostates, traitors and foreign agents has gained a most destructive momentum in the ongoing conflict escalation, dehumanizing the counterpart as the "other."

In view of the similarities between the two countries, it is worth investigating the potential lessons that Syria could learn from the Lebanese experience of power sharing. A consociational division of power between the different communities may help as an instrument of immediate crisis intervention to overcome the fear of extermination and the deep mistrust that has been aggravated by the civil war. However, as the Lebanese example shows, it has to be complemented by institutions that boost centripetal mechanisms of interethnic cooperation. Otherwise, consociationalism perpetuates and deepens the trenches in a deeply divided society and weakens the capacity of the central state to create neutral institutions that serve citizens without regard for their sectarian and ethnic affiliations.

COMPARING LEBANON AND SYRIA

Historians have counted more than 38 different civilizations that have passed through the Levant. Furthermore, the region is the birthplace of three monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity and

Islam. Ethnic heterogeneity as well as orthodox and heterodox divisions continue to influence the cultures of Lebanon and Syria.[7] Under Ottoman rule (1516–1918) and the French Mandate (1920–1946), ethnic communities increasingly formed social entities and gained relevance as political actors. The French semicolonial divide-and-rule strategy promoted ethnic-sectarian minorities (Maronite Christians in Lebanon, Alawite and Druze Muslims in Syria) that helped them confront an Arab nationalism dominated by Sunni Muslims.[8]

After independence, Lebanon and Syria showed some notable similarities in their sociocultural development and the politicization of communal identities in spite of their differing political orders. Until the middle of the twentieth century, a strong dichotomy between the peripheral, underdeveloped countryside and the central cities marked a socioeconomic cleavage that often collided with sectarian affiliation. In the 1960s, the state-dominated development politics of the Baath party in Syria and President Fuad Shihab in Lebanon led formerly underprivileged areas to catch up quickly. Infrastructure reforms, the mechanization of farming and an improved education system mobilized peripheral communities and connected them to national development. An unintended consequence was the massive rural exodus and urbanization process that filled huge suburbs and shantytowns. This brought the peripheral communities into direct contact and, consequently, into competition with established urban communities that often resented the peasant newcomers. A still-partial modernization process did not dissolve traditional bonds. Communities preserved social cohesion through endogamy: family law in both countries is governed by the confessional system, which hinders interreligious marriage. Community-based solidarity networks prevailed in Lebanon because the state did not foster institution building and a modern bureaucracy. In Syria, however, such socioreligious solidarity networks were diluted by the state, although some of them were reintroduced in the early 2000s. Clientelism, nepotism and corruption dominate access to chances, resources and power in both countries. This vicious circle thwarts transparency and responsibility for universal state welfare, which in turn strengthens communal solidarity.

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In both countries, the rural-urban and newcomer-establishment dichotomies had a strong sectarian character.[9] Alawites, Kurds and Druze in Syria and Twelver-Shiites in Lebanon — the majority of whom originated in the countryside — started to migrate and settle in the emerging urban agglomerations, where they dominated some neighborhoods. In Lebanon, sectarian political mobilization in the 1970s was still concealed by a political dichotomy, but it soon degenerated into sectarianism between party militias on the left (Muslim) and on the right (Christian) during the civil war. In Lebanon, it is still popular to mock Shiites as "the ones with a tail" (*abu danab*), alluding to their supposedly "uncivilized" rural background. In Syria, "the people of the city" became

a code word for Sunni Muslims, whereas "the people of the coast" or "the people of the *qaf*" were hidden markers for Alawites, referring to their geographical origin and local dialect. In the 1970s, the oppositional Muslim Brotherhood mobilized urban Sunni resentment against the rural Alawite community's ascent to power. Sunni chauvinism is also evident in the current Salafist ideology of an "Islamic Emirate" that has to be controlled by Sunni Muslims. However, the demographic and power constellation has been turned upside down. The traditional Sunni urban elite that had been co-opted by the regime has largely remained tranquil, whereas Sunnis from the periphery (the countryside and rapidly growing shantytowns) form the backbone of the rebel militias.

Lebanon's laissez-faire state granted a great deal of autonomy to its subnational communities, neglecting the national development agenda that could have integrated peripheral areas and communities. After the civil war, this understanding reemerged with the neoliberal reconstruction policy of Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri (1992-2004, with some interruptions), who mainly focused on the central districts of Beirut while neglecting regional and social balancing. The lack of state protection and a welfare system allowed community-based party militias to resume their patronage networks. In Syria, a different path led to similar results. Under Bashar al-Assad, pervasive neopatrimonial rule was reduced in some domains, and he allowed NGOs with religious and communal backgrounds to fill some state functions. Under such circumstances, residents in both countries retreated into kinship relationships and religious-solidarity networks.[10]

The transfer of state functions — administration, taxation, education, charity, crime prevention, dispute settlement, economic development, and infrastructure maintenance — to community-based militias witnessed during the Lebanese civil war can already be observed in some areas of Syria. It may be a preview of the country's future in the event of continued fighting and state disintegration. Another similarity is the fact that most communities in the Middle East are linked to neighboring countries through religious, ethnic and familial ties. Ethnic entrepreneurs are tempted to forge such bonds in order to mobilize outside support for the implementation of their agenda or, at least, to strengthen their veto power. Inversely, regional and global actors exert their influence through local proxies. Therefore, internal rivalries may connect with regional conflicts. Such ethnosectarian considerations have been a decisive factor in forming regional alliances and inducing proxy conflicts — if not war — in Lebanon, Iraq (since 2003) and, recently, Syria.

For many Lebanese, following the news on Syria created a sense of déjà vu with regard to their experience of civil war — for instance, the disintegration of the state and its security agencies as well as territorial and ideological fragmentation. As in Lebanon, spiraling violence by snipers, artillery bombardment of residential areas, car bombs, kidnappings for ransom or prisoner exchange, assassinations, massacres, sexual harassment, the defilement of corpses, the torture and execution of prisoners as well as revenge killings are often carried out along sectarian lines in Syria.[11] Such acts are accompanied by dehumanizing language — "cleansing," "armed terrorist gangs," "dirty Nusairis." Sunni mosques, Christian churches and Shiite shrines and Hussainiyahs have become targets for desecration and van-

dalism. Fresh violent actors spring up to defend their (new) local spheres of influence. Civil wars are forming their own topography, economy and understanding of truth. The limits between the "inside" and the alien "outside" are volatile; the ally of today may become the enemy of tomorrow and vice versa. This forces the population to adapt to shifting masters. The use of new media, sometimes described as an innovation of the Arab Spring (the "Web 2.0 Revolution"), was also prevalent during the Lebanese civil war; 100 to 200 privately owned radio stations and 50 television channels were maintained mostly by party militias. They distributed biased reports and conspiracy narratives, supporting each group's selective narrative of "the truth," and promoted negative stereotypes of the other side. In Syria, the reporting of war crimes has become an instrument of propaganda used by both sides. The victims of massacres are filmed with mobile-phone cameras, the content of which is uploaded to websites or transmitted by professional television stations such as Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya or Syrian state television with the aim of mobilizing constituencies, discrediting adversaries and shaping world opinion.

Many Syrians in the first year of the uprising still held that their society, unlike Lebanon's, is not affected by sectarianism.[12] When sectarian violence became more visible, the opposition accused the regime of exploiting it in order to implement a divide-and-rule policy that sought to rally the support of minorities by creating fear. The regime, however, blamed external interference and Salafis for the escalation of sectarianism. Irrespective of the cause, sectarianism has become a reality — in the conduct of militias and in the minds of the people — that is threatening to tear Syrian society apart. The question is how to avoid further escalation.

Time is running out for a negotiated strategy that can put an end to this sectarian quagmire. No one knows what the limits of the use of force are, for the regime or the opposition. The regime, with its back against the wall, is operating with its tanks, air force, long-range rockets, cluster bombs and (allegedly) chemical weapons as a last resort. Fear of revenge killings will force communities associated with the regime, particularly the Alawites and Christians, to "rally round the flag" and prove their loyalty. Intracommunal pressure for group solidarity — to affiliate either with the regime or the opposition — increases, and members who refuse to take sides are regarded as traitors.

LESSONS FROM LEBANON

It took the Lebanese warlords a long time to realize that their mission to monopolize leadership was in vain and that their best chance would be to share power. None of them succeeded in dominating a territory big enough to survive as an independent state. Instead, they started fighting against competitors for territorial control, the right to represent their community and define its identity. This dynamic resembles recent developments in rebel-held areas of Syria where Kurds, Sunni opposition militias and even jihadists are plagued by splits and internal struggles.[13] As a consequence, the Lebanese warlords lost legitimacy among their clients and finally agreed to a power-sharing compromise. The Taif accord helped end the fighting between the Lebanese militias, but it ultimately failed to create a stable state and integrate the different communities into a united national entity. This ambiguous outcome may, however, provide us with a better

understanding of power sharing in multiethnic societies like Syria.

The Right Moment for a Compromise?

In November 2011, Lebanese Druze leader Walid Jumblatt was the first to mention a Syrian Taif, although he explicitly rejected the Lebanese concept of power sharing along confessional lines.[14] Russia's deputy foreign minister, Mikhail Bogdanov, brought up the idea again in an interview with *Le Figaro* on September 10, 2012.[15] The notion gained some momentum when Lakhdar Brahimi was appointed the joint special envoy for Syria of the United Nations and the Arab League in August 2012; in 1989, Brahimi headed the Higher Tripartite Committee of the Arab League that drafted the Taif accord.[16] But the proposal to transfer Lebanon's model to Syria also provoked strong objections; sectarian power sharing is widely considered responsible for exacerbating Lebanon's ongoing sectarian fragmentation.[17] In any case, the opponents in Syria were still far from willing to negotiate a solution in 2012. The opposition alliances — the Syrian National Council (SNC) and later the Syrian National Coalition — refused to enter into negotiations with a regime that "has blood on its hands," while Bashar al-Assad excluded armed opposition forces that he regarded as "foreign-paid terrorists" from his half-hearted offers for dialogue.

Acknowledgement of the need for a negotiated solution grew toward the end of 2012, given the escalating cycle of violence and the enormous risk of regional repercussions. The number of people killed had surpassed 60,000 and more than one million refugees had left for neighboring countries by spring 2013.[18] On January 30, 2013, the then-head of the Syrian National Coalition, Ahmad Mouaz al-Khatib, offered to directly negotiate with regime representatives for the first time. In its meeting in Cairo in mid-February, the National Coalition formally agreed to a "political solution," while imposing some negotiating conditions. On February 25, 2013, Syrian Foreign Minister Walid al-Moallem announced for the first time the government's willingness to engage in dialogue with the opposition, "including those who are carrying arms."[19] On May 7, 2013, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov proclaimed their joint effort to organize a conference in June 2013 that would include representatives of the government and the opposition for the first time. Although the date for such a peace conference has been postponed several times and there are still immense differences concerning the preconditions for who should be included in any potential negotiations — Iran being the most contested actor — this initiative indicates that more and more stakeholders are coming to the same conclusion: a continuation of hostilities will destroy far more than will ever be gained by the victory of one side. It could, therefore, be an "alliance of common fear"[20] that pushes the regime and opposition out of their stalemate.

After 16 years of civil war, it was a similar self-negating prophecy that helped Lebanon's politicians start serious negotiations and finally end the war. A precondition was that the external actors who had supported proxy forces in Lebanon were also interested in ending the fighting.[21]

Demographic Bickering, Consociational Balancing

The participants of the Taif assembly in 1989 approved a power-sharing formula that came close to consociational democracy and guaranteed a fixed share of partici-

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pation for all relevant groups. One of the basic elements of consociational democracy is the demographic distribution of ethnic communities, because it suggests a commensurate sharing of power and positions. Nonetheless, the Lebanese experience demonstrates how the claim of proportionality runs the risk of endless bickering. Different birth rates, naturalization policy, emigration, internal relocation, rapid urbanization, violent expulsion and remigration are permanent stumbling blocks to evaluating census data. The disproportionate distribution of power between the communities was a serious defect of the Lebanese prewar formula. The contested census figures of 1932 gave the impression that Christians were the majority, entitled to a 54.5 percent share of parliamentarians compared to Muslims' 45.5 percent. This split continued until 1990, even though Christians' share of the population further decreased to less than 40 percent. In the Taif accord,[22] the participants finessed this problem by agreeing upon a fixed-parity quorum of 50 percent Christians and 50 percent Muslims (Taif II.A.5), guaranteeing that neither side would be overruled by the other. Such agreed-upon arrangements can adjust numeric imbalances and may be more effective for a transitory period than pseudorealist proportionality, in which too much energy is spent on how best to adapt numbers and shares.

In Syria, the conditions do not seem appropriate for proportional consociational power sharing because Sunni Muslims constitute a dominant majority of about 75 percent of the population. However, several factors weaken this argument. First, it is unlikely that Sunni Muslims will act as a homogeneous group; their ethnic composition, territorial fragmentation, socioeconomic splits and multiple belief practices generate different (and sometimes contradictory) collective identities. Ethnic minorities such as the Kurds (10–15 percent) and Turkmens and Circassians (1–3 percent) are predominantly Sunni, but their political aspirations differ from those of their Arab coreligionists. As a result, the Arab Sunni share drops to around 60 percent of the population. Even so, a majoritarian (winner-take-all) democracy would still pose the risk of allowing Sunni Arabs to completely overrule the minorities. Second, power sharing offers several tools that can adjust such disparate numerical distributions. For instance, proportional representation in parliament and government guarantees minorities adequate participation in the exercise of power. Furthermore, the obligation of grand coalitions and consensus rule on essential topics are tantamount to providing minorities with veto power. This could be complemented by reserving some key posts (the presidency or the prime ministry) for minority representatives. Following the Lebanese example, a weighted quota of representation in favor of minorities could further counteract Sunni Arab predominance.

In the biggest cities (Damascus, Aleppo, Homs and Hama), [Sunnis] share their traditional strongholds with significant numbers from various other communities that relocated there in the process of urbanization.

Third, internal fragmentation will prevent Arab Sunnis from acting as a homo-

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geneous group. Sunni Arabs do not have their own coherent territorial stronghold like the Druze and the Alawite communities; apart from a few largely monosectarian Sunni Arab areas, they constitute a slight majority in some areas and a minority in others. In the biggest cities (Damascus, Aleppo, Homs and Hama), they share their traditional strongholds with significant numbers from various other communities that relocated there in the process of urbanization. Moreover, these four principal cities compete with each other. The industrial and commercial city of Aleppo is oriented toward Turkey and Iraq, while the capital, Damascus — identified with the (Alawite-dominated) state authority and bureaucracy — has more connections with Lebanon and Jordan. Homs and Hama suffer from their peripheral situation, which has led to resentment of Damascus and Aleppo, where an urban Sunni bourgeoisie has backed the regime. Fourth, socioeconomic stratification inside the Sunni community is significant. It includes nomadic tribes, agrarian villages, shantytowns with subproletarian elements, former rural dwellers uprooted from their community life, workers, merchants, urban-based civil employees and professionals, rich merchants, and an industrial elite. Therefore, Sunnis have not developed the same sense of "sect class" associated with the Alawite community.[23] Fifth, Sunni Muslims' religiosity differs in terms of creed, practice and intensity. It includes secularists, largely apolitical mystics (Sufis), conservative believers, fundamentalist Salafis and militant Jihadis. Once their common enemy (the regime) is gone, it is likely that Arab Sunnis will split along political, socioeconomic and ideological lines.

No Alternatives Left

There are many parallels between the Lebanese and Syrian experiences, not least that there is no real alternative to power sharing. In the unlikely event of a victory for the Assad regime, it will struggle in vain for the legitimacy and force needed to regain control over the whole country, in light of the bloodshed and destruction it has caused. Many non-Alawite members have left the regime, making its Alawite character even more substantial and its power base less representative. This has led to its growing isolation inside Syria and in the Sunni-dominated region. On the other hand, the opposition is very ambiguous about what will follow should Assad be removed from power. The draft programs of moderate forces demand democracy and respect of human and minority rights, as well as religious and cultural freedom.[24] However, they remain vague on how to implement these principles and are yet to prove that their programs are more than window dressing for a Western public.

The insecurity about the outcome of a regime change keeps relevant segments of society, especially the minorities, scared and partly supportive of the regime. This, in turn, raises suspicion among the rebels that they could be "agents" of the regime. The basic questions that need answering in a post-Assad Syria are how political power will be controlled and divided, and how confidence in the other side may be regained. Minorities may refuse a majoritarian democracy, as suggested by the opposition, out of fear that they will become marginalized by the Sunni Arab population. Militant Islamists increase such fear of Sunni dominance. Therefore, minority groups will request strong guarantees that they will be allocated a fair share of power

in any future arrangement. Otherwise, they will stick to veto strategies (blocking solutions, searching for external support, escalating violence, fighting for a separation of their territories or leaving the country).

Based on the assumption that homogeneous ethnic communities share common interests and may be easily differentiated due to clear-cut identities, culturalists and ethnic entrepreneurs suggest the separation of ethnic entities into distinct mini-states. But neither condition applies to Lebanon, nor to Syria; a separation would have far-reaching ramifications. Only crude grid-reference maps make it appear as if new states can easily be cut out of Syria's territory; a closer look reveals a colorful mosaic.[25] Even if ethnically homogenous communities once existed, rural migration and urbanization have mixed the population in the last decades. Attempts at resegregation could give rise to further "ethnic cleansing," which has characterized many massacres since 2011. Furthermore, while a territorial separation might be an option for Kurds, Druze and Alawites — who might retreat to their historic heartlands — it is definitely no option for the Christian communities that are spread all over the country.

Moreover, every territorial separation of ethnic groups creates new minorities that will come up with their own claims for cultural rights. Ethnically defined petty states could become even more chauvinistic toward the remaining members of other communities, given that they might no longer recognize the need for moderation and compromise. It would lead to social pressure for minorities to leave for "their" respective regions — for example, the one million Kurds settled in Aleppo and Damascus or the half-million Alawites in Damascus. Settlement areas are intertwined, and tensions between the new entities over borders and resources would likely continue — as evinced in Iraq by the territorial dispute between the Kurdish autonomous region and the central state.[26] Such a decomposition into small states is a taboo for many Syrian nationalists; it ties in with the former colonial project of fragmenting the Arab nation. It also corresponds to Israel's preference for a belt of ethnic/sectarian statelets in its immediate neighborhood, weakening the Arab and Palestinian national cause. Last, but not least, Syria's neighbors are unlikely to tolerate new entities that might encourage their own minorities to raise claims for autonomy.

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How can the regime and its supporters be convinced to give up their monopoly on power before the whole state is destroyed? How can the members of the Alawite and other minority communities identified with the regime be protected from revenge killings? How can radical exclusivist ideologies of superiority — such as those propagated by the Salafi and Jihadi Islamists — be prevented from taking power by force? How can historically rooted minorities be assured of their cultural freedom and rights, in order to convince them not to leave the country and, thus, protect its

cultural pluralism? Neither separation into ethnically homogeneous ministates nor a continued monoethnic dictatorship, nor a simple-majority democracy, nor secular society with vague guarantees of minority rights, is capable of solving these fundamental dilemmas.

Challenges of the Postwar Setting

In the power-sharing debate, consociationalism has been the preferential model, especially for postconflict societies, whereas centripetalism is better suited to societies with more moderate relations between communities.[27] In the transitional phase between war and postwar, memories of discrimination and violence along ethnic-sectarian cleavages still determine the perceptions and behavior of key actors. Each community fosters its own narrative of victimization and regards its own position as tenuous. There is still a lack of confidence in peaceful bargaining, a lack of experience with changing majorities, and hardly any social mobility that cuts across ethnic cleavages. Therefore, people stick to their own primordial identity and solidarity groups instead of moving on to a vaguely perceived intercommunal, national solidarity. Based on this wariness, ethnic entrepreneurs demand robust guarantees for their constituencies; otherwise they may spoil negotiations and pursue the separation of their territories. Under such conditions, consociationalism offers a relatively quick-fix solution; it guarantees all major groups participation and a reliable share of power for their elites.

After several failed attempts to negotiate a peace settlement in Lebanon without including all relevant actors, the Taif accord was negotiated by an inclusive committee of parliamentarians from all confessional groups. Many of its regulations were adopted in the revised constitution of 1990.[28] The negotiators at Taif were well aware of the negative effects of continued consociational power sharing, given that this arrangement was held responsible by many Lebanese for the outbreak of the civil war in 1975. Therefore, they included elements of centripetalism and formulated a clear demand to abolish the political representation of confessional communities. The members of the first elected postwar parliament were assigned to appoint a national commission with the mandate to eliminate "political confessionalism" "in accordance with a phased plan" (Taif I.2.G).[29] But this noncommittal phrase proved to be a serious flaw; there was no clearly defined timetable for the transition from consociationalism to centripetalism and, ultimately, a unitary society with equal rights for all. Instead, the provisional distribution of power based on religious affiliation became a structural barrier to political reform.

There were some external factors that kept Lebanon in a permanent mode of crisis. The Syrian troops and security forces that helped to disarm the militias and restore state authority became a permanent presence and an instrument for Syrian supervision of Lebanese politics. Many Lebanese regarded them as illegitimate occupiers; they were forced to withdraw in 2005 after massive popular protests. Another obstacle was the continued Israeli occupation of parts of South Lebanon, which gave justification to Hezbollah and other nonstate forces to keep their "weapons of resistance." Guerrilla violence escalated into three wars with Israel (1993, 1996 and 2006) that led to thousands of casualties and widespread destruction in Lebanon.

These external factors, however, were not the only — nor even the most impor-

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tant — reasons for the failure of Lebanon's power-sharing agreement. Rather, communal pressure and the tenaciousness of the political elite prevented the implementation of the reform agenda to overcome sectarianism, because deputies elected by proportional representation were no longer keen to abolish the quota system. Instead of overcoming ethnic-sectarian division, they have promoted a sectarian structure that distributes state institutions and resources among religious communities, forcing primordial affiliations upon people instead of offering them modern citizenship with equal rights. Consociational guarantees steadied the influence of such sectarian entrepreneurs, who based their authority on the pretense of representing their communities. These entrepreneurs fostered group cohesion and expanded the sway of sectarian identities into fields like education, charities, employment, NGOs, media, parties and even sports in order to stabilize and expand their power.[30]

A MODEL FOR SYRIA?

This comparison of the Lebanese and Syrian experience indicated strong similarities between them, reaffirming the value of discussing the possibility of a Syrian power-sharing agreement. Syria faces a dilemma: On the one hand, time is running out to stop the vicious circle of violence, ethnic-sectarian tensions, the collapse of state institutions and the threat of a spillover into neighboring countries. On the other hand, time is needed to find new political representatives, to build up trust and to successfully rebalance claims, interests and expectations. Therefore, a multiphased model (akin to the design of the Taif accord) may be useful. It would enable the immediate creation of institutions and allow for a longer-lasting process of negotiating and establishing effective transethnic and transsectarian political and social structures. The Lebanese accord consists of a mixed model that comprises elements of consociationalism, centripetalism and the vision of a unitary nation-state as part of a three-step solution. With its wide range of suggested institutions, it offers plenty of opportunities to facilitate the transformation of a new institutional design. But the Taif accord has two central shortcomings: ambiguous institutions and the lack of a concrete timetable to abolish the static power-sharing arrangement.

An adequate formula for Syria will require modifications, such as a clearly defined exit strategy as well as state institutions and government rulings that aim to promote cooperation between the communities. Such a transitory model should contain the following:

- Immediate guarantees of proportional, parity or negotiated political representation
- Centripetal institutions with incentives for interethnic cooperation
- A unitary state of institutions guaranteeing civil rights, irrespective of ethnic or other identities and affiliations.

After 50 years of one-party rule, and 40 by one family, the formation of political parties that are more representative will be a new experience for Syrian society. It is likely that in such a situation of radical change, traditional and primordial identities will gain prominence as "communities of fate," especially when they resemble historical memories. Anathematizing ethnic/sectarian identities will not help to overcome the underlying lack of trust in the "other." Opponents will suspect a hidden agenda, and this may even create more

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resentment. Acknowledging the existence of the fear that communities will be discriminated against or even threatened with extermination is a first step in facing the negative dynamics of mistrust. A transitory political system will have to take such cleavages into consideration and create a political and legal framework that helps to rebuild cooperation. In the immediate aftermath of violent conflict, stakeholders will demand fixed shares of power for their communities due to deep mistrust, as the consociational model suggests.

However, Lebanon's postwar experience proves that such a model tends to assume a life of its own and expand outside the political realm into different segments of society. Therefore, in a second step, a prescribed consociational distribution of power should be replaced by a more competitive scheme: democracy with centripetal instruments that help the protagonists in "moving out of zero-sum politics into self-interested cooperation."[31] Such an arrangement needs an institutionalized exit strategy, to be implemented in a fixed time frame, as well as incentives to overcome divisions and to depoliticize ethnic identity. Donald Horowitz suggests a centripetal approach that focuses on intermediary institutions and stimulates interethnic cooperation (e.g., by composing mixed electorates that force the candidates to moderate their language in order to reap votes from other communities).[32] An integrative power-sharing agreement has to bridge, not deepen, the main social cleavage. One possibility is to strengthen alternative identities like regionalism, language and gender. A fair representation of the regions or a quota system (for women or for professions such as farmers) could help break up the primary division of ethnicity and sectarianism and build up alternative solidarity units. The emergence of a nonsectarian civil society that does not preserve ethnic division, but rather helps to gradually erode its relevance, could divide power by emphasizing nonethnic and nonsectarian criteria such as programmatic parties, socioeconomic interest groups and voluntary associations. Such organizations would help transcend ethnic and sectarian solidarity networks by promoting common interests and political opinion. Over the course of time, this should result in the gradual shift of attention from primordial affiliations toward political considerations.

An integrative power-sharing approach attempts to safeguard all segments of society, transforming authority into a civil state and society into a unity of shared values and chances. If common state institutions offer reliable services, people would no longer depend on their parochial communities. This would also stimulate cooperation on common issues and help to overcome fragmentation. Therefore, the state needs reliable security and administrative institutions. Socioeconomic development programs that balance the regional distribution of chances between communities and secure social justice are vital. No less important is the "soft power" of a national education system and unbiased media outlets. Cultural rights have to be guaranteed, accompanied by a national program — for example, competitive state schools that are serious alternatives to religious or private academies and that do not target only the economically disadvantaged. Furthermore, secular family law has to complement a voluntary confessional code. Implemented together, these steps could lead to a unitary nation-state in which ethnic and sectarian identities shed their political relevance, and communal guarantees are gradually superseded by individual rights.

PERSPECTIVES

Syria (still) has the great advantage that its state structures may be revived; they have not completely disintegrated or become the booty of community militias. An arrangement for the solution of ethnic and sectarian divides should take place in several steps. An ideal-typical transitional strategy of power sharing could benefit from the successes and mistakes of the Taif accord. The most probable alternatives to such an agreement are a long-lasting civil war for territory and power, a new dictatorship of a minority or majority group, or the separation into ethnic ministates, which would only perpetuate the conflict on a different level. The Syrian quagmire and its regional repercussions are too complex to be solved by a military victory. What is needed is a smooth transition rather than the unpredictable outcome of a system collapse. Taking into account the serious fragmentation, the traumatic violence and the deep mistrust among political actors and communities, it is also improbable that a secular democratic state can emerge in the near future.

As conflicts in the region are structurally interwoven, there can be no sustainable peace in Syria without a comprehensive regional solution. Syria's neighbors must be included in any peace negotiations in order to implement and safeguard a power-sharing agreement. Double-layered negotiations between internal and external actors should bring all relevant parties together: the regime and the opposition, the United States and Russia, Saudi Arabia and Iran. Internal and external powers must be willing to accept the self-negating prophecy that further escalation will bring more harm than any negotiated compromise. In a best-case scenario, all actors will share the common understanding that narrowing one's own expectations through compromise will achieve better results than sticking to a winner-take-all mentality. There are some sparse hints that regional and global actors are inching closer to such a realization.

[1] "Syria Could Turn into a New Somalia — UN's Brahimi," BBC News Middle East, November 6, 2012, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-20220183.

[2] Religious subgroups in the Middle East are often considered more than just religious creed, but also form determinist social identity groups similar to ethnic communities. They are generally endogamous, and members are born into them and are identified by outsiders with their community, with or against their will. Conversion to another religion is frowned upon and may be regarded as treason by coreligionists. Confession and denomination are the more academic terms to describe religious subgroups, whereas sects and sectarianism reflect the negative image of a backward mentality and discrimination. All these termini will be applied here, depending on context. In Syria, political fragmentation may follow ethnic (e.g., Kurds versus Arabs) as well as sectarian identities, whereas in Lebanon sectarian identities are at the core of sociopolitical polarization.

[3] Stephen Starr, *Revolt in Syria: Eye-Witness to the Uprising* (Columbia University Press, 2012).

[4] Timothy D. Sisk, *Power Sharing and International Mediation in Ethnic Conflicts* (United States Institute of Peace Press, 1996), 23.

[5] Arend Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Societies. A Comparative Exploration* (Yale University Press, 1977), 100.

[6] Ibid, 147–150. Consociationalism sees ethnic groups represented in parliament, government and leading public offices proportionate to their demographic distribution; participate in rule by grand coalitions; enjoy

veto power in essential matters; and embrace far-reaching cultural autonomy with their own institutions for education, family law and conflict mediation.

[7] Hassan Abbas, *Governance of Diversity in Syria*, ed. Arab Reform Initiative (2012), http://www.arab-reform.net/sites/default/files/GovDiv_Syria_H.Abbas_June12_Final_En.pdf.

[8] Ayse Tekdal Fildis, "The Troubles in Syria: Spawned by French Divide and Rule," *Middle East Policy* 18, no. 4 (2011): 129–139.

[9] For Beirut, see Fuad I. Khuri, *From Village to Suburb. Order and Change in Greater Beirut* (University of Chicago Press, 1975), and Salim Nasr, "La transition des chiites vers Beyrouth: mutations sociales et mobilisation communautaire à la veille de 1975," in *Mouvements communautaires et espaces urbains au Machreq*, ed. CERMOC (Beirut, 1985), 87–116; for the Syrian cities, Nikolaos van Dam, *The Struggle for Power in Syria: Politics and Society under Asad and the Ba'th Party*, 4th edition (I.B. Tauris, 2011), and Hanna Batatu, *Syria's Peasantry, the Descendants of Its Lesser Rural Notables, and Their Politics* (Princeton University Press, 1999).

[10] For Lebanon, see UNDP, *The National Human Development Report. Lebanon 2008-2009. Toward a Citizen's State* (2009), 26, http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/nationalreports/arabstates/lebanon/NHDR_Lebanon_20082009_En.pdf; for Syria, Raymond Hinnebusch, "Syria: From 'Authoritarian Upgrading' to Revolution?, " *International Affairs* 88, no. 1 (2012): 95–113; and Thomas Pierret and Kjetil Selvik, "Limits of 'Authoritarian Upgrading' in Syria: Private Welfare, Islamic Charities, and the Rise of the Zayd Movement," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 41, no. 4 (2009): 594–614.

[11] Aziz Nakkash, *The Alawite Dilemma in Homs. Survival, Solidarity and the Making of a Community* (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2013), http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/iez/09825.pdf; and Muhammad Saleh and Laila Awwad, "Homs: Sectarianism Lebanese War Style," *Al Akhbar English*, July 24, 2012, http://english.al-akhbar.com/node/10236.

[12] Starr, *Revolt in Syria*.

[13] Even inside the Jihadist Jabhat al-Nusra, recent developments show a power struggle between the head of the Iraqi branch of al-Qaeda (The Islamic State of Iraq, Dawlat al-Iraq al-Islamiyya), Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, and Abu Muhammad al-Julani, the leader of Jabhat al-Nusra. The first had declared the unification of both branches into The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (al-Daula al-Islamiyya fi-l-Iraq wa-l-Sham), whereas the latters' supporters complained about unwanted intermingling. Baghdadi's adherents therefore have accused the other side of heresy (*kufr*); see *al-Hayat Arabic*, May 19, 2013.

[14] See the interview with Walid Jumblatt at al-Arabiyya, November 11, 2011, online: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PFPyxOfkBg0.

[15] Georges Malbruno, "Bogdanov: "Éviter la somalisation de la Syrie," *Le Figaro*, September 10, 2012, http://www.lefigaro.fr/international/2012/09/10/01003-20120910ARTFIG00660-bogdanov-eviter-la-somalisation-de-la-syrie.php; and Oraib Al Rantawi, "Once Again, about a Syrian Taif," ed. Al-Quds Center for Political Studies — Analysis, September 24, 2012.

[16] George Semaan, "Lakhdar Brahimi Leading Syria towards Taif?," *Al Hayat English*, August 20, 2012, http://alhayat.com/ Details/427920. Lakhdar Brahimi had also participated in drawing up the Afghan (2001) and Iraqi (2004) power-sharing arrangements.

[17] Amal Mudallali, "Why Lebanon's Taif Accord Is No Road Map for Syria," *Al-Monitor,* September 28, 2012, http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2012/al-monitor/syrian-taef.html.

[18] At the end of July 2013, the number of people killed has surpassed 100,000. On July 25, 2013, 1,846,534 Syrian refugees have been registered or were awaiting registration outside the country. For a regular update of UNHCR figures, see http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php.

[19] Ryan Lucas, "Syria Says Ready for Talks with Armed Opposition," *Daily Star*, February 25, 2013, http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2013/Feb-25/207820-syria-regime-ready-to-talk-with-all-who-want-dialogue-muallem.ashx.

[20] Al Rantawi, "Once Again, about a Syrian Taif."

[21] In 1989, the Cold War was abating and new power constellations emerged. One year later, in October 1990, the West schemed an alliance with local powers to mobilize against the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait. In this context, Syria was given plenty of rope to finish up with the last renitent actor against the implementation of Taif, the Christian General Michel Aoun.

[22] The Arabic text of "The Lebanese Document of National Accord" (Wathiqat al-Wifaq al-Watani al-Lub-

nani) is reprinted in Hanna Ziadeh, *Sectarianism and Intercommunal Nation-Building in Lebanon* (Hurst, 2006), 302–309. For an English translation of the Taif agreement, see *Le Monde diplomatique* (no year), http://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/cahier/proche-orient/region-liban-taef-en. Passages are cited in accordance with the numeration of this English translation.
[23] Van Dam, *The Struggle for Power in Syria*.
[24] In Berlin, a group of Syrian opposition representatives and Western scientists worked out a draft plan for Syria after the toppling of Bashar al-Assad; *The Day After Project: Supporting a Democratic Transition in Syria* (August 2012), http://www.usip.org/the-day-after-project.
[25] For a detailed online map, see *Syria: Ethnic Composition*, http://gulf2000.columbia.edu/images/maps/Syria_Ethnic_Detailed_lg.jpg.
[26] International Crisis Group, *Iraq and the Kurds: The High-Stakes Hydrocarbons Gambit*, Middle East Report 120, (April 19, 2012), http://www.crisisgroup.org/~/media/Files/Middle East North Africa/Iraq Syria Lebanon/Iraq/120-iraq-and-the-kurds-the-high-stakes-hydrocarbons-gambit.pdf.
[27] Benjamin Reilly, "Centripetalism. Cooperation, Accomodation and Integration," in *Conflict Management in Divided Societies: Theories and Practice*, ed. Stefan Wolff and Chirstella Yakinthou (Routledge Chapman & Hall, 2012): 57–65.
[28] The Arabic text of the constitution with its amendments of 1990 is reprinted in Ziadeh, *Sectarianism and Intercommunal Nation-Building in Lebanon*, 241–275. For an English translation, see "The Lebanese Constitution," *Arab Law Quarterly* 12, no. 2 (1997): 224–261. Articles of the constitution are cited as "Art. 95, 1990," in which 1990 indicates the year of revision.
[29] The abolition of sectarian quotas was also assigned in the constitution (Art. 95, 1990).
[30] For these patronage networks, see Ernest Gellner, *Patrons and Clients in Mediterranean Societies* (Gerald Duckworth, 1977), and Michael Johnson, *Class and Client in Beirut: The Sunni Muslim Community and the Lebanese State 1840-1985* (Ithaca Press, 1987). Danyel Reiche, "War Minus the Shooting? The Politics of Sport in Lebanon as a Unique Case in Comparative Politics," *Third World Quarterly* 32, no. 2 (2011): 261–277, and Paul Kingston, "Patrons, Clients and Civil Society: A Case Study of Environmental Politics in Postwar Lebanon," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 23, no. 1 (2001) provide special studies on sport and NGOs, respectively.
[31] Stefan Wolff and Christalla Yakinthou, eds., *Conflict Management in Divided Societies: Theories and Practice* (Routledge Chapman & Hall, 2012), 7.
[32] Donald L. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (University of California Press, 1985); and Donald L. Horowitz, "Conciliatory Institutions and Constitutional Processes in Post-Conflict States," *William and Mary Law Review* 49 (2008): 1213–1248.