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LEBANON STRATEGIC POSITION IN THE MIDDLE EAST & ITS EFFECT ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

A Thesis Proposal

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by
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Abstract

INTRODUCTION: Although Lebanon is geographically small, its strategic location, long history, and culturally diverse population have simultaneously made it a place of opportunity and confrontation, a crossroads of cultures, and a region of conflict. Today, Lebanon is facing extreme economic and political instability, but it continues to retain a meaningful role in the Middle East and beyond as a center for cultural exchange and coexistence.

OBJECTIVES: This research examines Lebanon's position in the Middle East and how Lebanon's strategic position in the Middle East impacts Lebanon's choices for foreign affairs and diplomacy. It attempts to understand Lebanon's regional position and, therefore, the political, strategic, and economic factors that influence Lebanon's interactions with other regional and global players. Ultimately, the research provides strategic recommendations for enhancing the effectiveness of Lebanon's diplomatic efforts and enhancing Lebanon's ability to be resilient and credible in the eyes of the international community.

METHODS: This study uses a qualitative, exploratory research design to explore Lebanon's strategic positioning in the Middle East and how the institutional, political, and discursively constructed mechanisms through which this positioning influences foreign policy behavior and diplomatic practices.

RESULTS: The analysis shows that Lebanon's foreign policy is heavily dependent on the competing external interests led by its confessional regime as well as regional and global powers, including Syria, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Israel, the US, China, Russia, and France. These dynamics have restricted the state in recent years from developing a coherent and autonomous foreign policy. However, Lebanon still matters in diplomacy because it has long been the commercial, cultural, and political bridge of the region.

CONCLUSION: This study concludes the importance of developing a comprehensive reform architecture aimed at strengthening Lebanon's foreign policy capacity through institutional reform rather than strategic realignment. Therefore, it clearly demonstrates that Lebanon's external vulnerability is not a direct result of its geopolitical location, but rather the outcome of fragmented decision-making mechanisms, lack of policy continuity, and dysfunctional institutional coordination.

Introduction

Research Background and Geography of Lebanon

The geographical setting of Lebanon is relatively small (approximately 10,452 square kilometers) but has a considerable impact on the lives of the Lebanese people. Lebanon stretches about 225 to 238 km along the Mediterranean Sea coastline and shares a border of approximately 375 km with Syria to the north and east and approximately 79 km with Israel to the south.

Lebanon is situated at the intersection of three continents: Asia, Africa, and Europe, and therefore it has been a crossroads of continents and, hence, of civilizations, cultures, and empires throughout thousands of years. I have visited the mountainous regions of Lebanon, ranging from the Beqaa' Valley to the narrow coastal plain, and I realized the role that the Beqaa' Valley and the coastal plain played in attracting people, merchants, and empires to Lebanon for centuries. From ancient years, Lebanon was a crossroads for multiple civilizations and cultures. The Phoenicians were a seafaring and merchant civilization that built cities such as Byblos, Sidon, and Tyre. Through their merchant activities, the Phoenicians made Lebanon a cultural and commercial center. Following the Phoenicians (c. 1200 – 539 BC), other powers occupied Lebanon, and for thousands of years, Lebanon was under the influence of the Assyrians (c. 9th – 7th Century BC), Romans (64 BC – 395 AD), Byzantines (395 – 642 AD), Arabs (642 – 1099 AD), Crusaders (1099 – 1291 AD), and Mamluks/Ottomans (1291 – 1918).

All of these powers were drawn to Lebanon for reasons related to its strategic location, its active and well-communicated ports, and its natural wealth. The presence of these civilizations can still be seen today, and the layers of influence from these civilizations can be viewed in the architecture, the streets, and the cultural landscape of Lebanese towns. Whenever an empire rose or fell, Lebanese cities remained centers of commerce, learning, and communication; therefore, Lebanese cities became a meeting point for various peoples and ideas. This diversity in the Lebanese cities gave them the strength of diversity, and at the same time fostered tensions.

As we look at the 20th century, we see that the fall of the Ottoman Empire led to a new mandate for Lebanon: the French mandate. The French mandate resulted in the establishment of the borders of Lebanon that exist today. After gaining its independence in 1943, Lebanon embarked upon the process of nation-building. The nation-building process in Lebanon is driven by local politics and regional forces, and the political system of Lebanon was developed by the Lebanese people. The political system of Lebanon is based upon a sectarian system, whereby state power is distributed among eighteen officially recognized religious communities, including Sunni and Shia Muslims, several Christian denominations, and Druze. Over time, each of these religious communities developed external alliances and political interests that intensified competition and rivalry within the state. Lebanon has had a system of sectarian representation since the early 20th century. The sectarian representation was established in the aim to promote peace and stability within the nation; however, it created patronage networks and led to political paralysis. Moreover, the implementation of sectarian quotas has also promoted favoritism, personal relationships, and political allegiance, often at the cost of the nation's efficiency and accountability. In reality, these quotas continue to affect the distribution of public-sector jobs and government assistance and therefore reinforce dependency and contribute to continued corruption.

To understand the path of Lebanon, it is necessary to locate it within the greater Middle Eastern context. The Middle East has long been characterized by trade, migration, and ongoing conflict due to its strategic position on the main shipping lanes of the world, such as the Suez Canal and the Strait of Hormuz. The Middle East is also rich in oil and gas, which are projected to account for a large portion of future global energy consumption. The control of these resources has granted the Middle East a great deal of influence on global energy markets, economic stability, and political power. At the same time, the competitive nature of regional actors, including Saudi Arabia, Iran, Syria, and Israel, continues to create instability, a problem exacerbated by the involvement of global powers, including the United States, Russia, China, and France. The economic and political fortunes of Lebanon are frequently affected by the larger regional and international dynamics.

- **Research Problems & Questions:**

There are many key issues that are inadequately examined within the existing body of literature and policy documents relating to the implications of Lebanon's strategic location and their impact upon the way in which foreign affairs and diplomacy are practiced in the country. Upon reviewing the literature, several gaps were identified, as well as areas requiring additional analysis and explanation.

a. Civil Society Participation in Foreign Policy and Security Decision-Making: Recent policy studies suggest that civil society actors (local leaders and elected officials), along with state actors, often do not participate in the formulation and development of security assistance and foreign policy initiatives. The coordination between donors and state actors is typically informal, and there is very limited formal parliamentary oversight or public participation. Civil society actors' exclusion from the policymaking process raises significant questions regarding the legitimacy, fairness, and long-term sustainability of policy reforms. In this regard, a primary research question is, *"How can Lebanon involve civil society, local communities, and parliamentarians in the formulation and implementation of its foreign and security policies?"*

b. Impact of Humanitarian Research and Innovative Practices on Policy Development: Despite the fact that much of the extant literature highlights the strength of Lebanon's universities and research institutions, there has been almost no discussion of the manner in which humanitarian research and innovative practices can contribute to foreign policy or strategic decision-making. Furthermore, the methods whereby research results may inform policy responses in emergency situations have remained largely unexamined. As a result, an essential research question arises: *What practical methods exist to link Lebanon's research capacity to the evidence-based development of foreign policy, especially when rapid action is necessary?*

c. Long-Term Vision for National Identity and Foreign Alignment: The majority of the existing literature focuses on immediate problem-solving and issues related to short-term challenges such as political stability, economic reform, and security assistance. By contrast, less emphasis has been placed on examining Lebanon's long-term national identity and how it will affect the country's foreign alignments and its strategic role in the region. Consequently, fundamental questions remain unanswered: *Should Lebanon adopt a policy of neutrality, alignment, or a unique posturing strategy? Additionally, how can a long-term vision of the country's national identity promote internal cohesion and mitigate conflicting demands from external influences?*

d. Accountability: Reports of different human rights organizations have clearly highlighted the lack of accountability for major national crises, specifically the Beirut Port Explosion on August 4, 2020. Although the

accountability gap had a negative effect on Lebanon's international credibility and reduced the country's ability to negotiate sustained external support, the foreign policy implications of this accountability gap have received relatively little scrutiny. Therefore, the question remains: ***Can Lebanon utilize some form of improved domestic accountability and transitional justice, and if so, what risk does continued impunity pose to Lebanon's international reputation?***

e. The Role of the Diaspora in Foreign Policy: Lebanon's diaspora community offers considerable support to the country through remittances and numerous other types of assistance. Nevertheless, the existing literature has barely explored the possible influence the Lebanese diaspora community could exercise on Lebanon's foreign policy and relationships with other countries. Although the Lebanese diaspora exists throughout the world and is actively involved in business, politics, economics, and culture, it currently represents a dysfunctional resource for influencing the country's external relationships. Hence, the ultimate question remains unanswered: ***How can Lebanon more effectively collaborate with the Lebanese diaspora to develop and advocate for Lebanon's foreign policy and interests internationally?***

Literature Review

Geopolitical Value and Strategic Relevance

The literature review in this chapter has been divided into three main parts and a case study. The first part is addressing Lebanon's historical positioning from independence to post-civil war, with a focus on the literature gap. The second part highlights the geographical and strategic importance in the Middle East, focusing on the literature gap to be addressed. As for the third part, it is focusing on the external powers' perceptions of Lebanon, addressing the literature gap as well. Finally, case studies of Lebanon's geopolitical relevance are discussed with a focus on Lebanon and the Arab–Israeli Wars, the Cold War and proxy politics, Syrian tutelage (1990–2005), post-2005 realignment, the 2006 War, and finally, the Maritime Boundary Agreement (2022), with a view on the literature gap as well in these case studies.

a. Historical Positioning: From Independence to Post–Civil War

Lebanon occupies an unusual position within the Middle East: geographically and demographically it is small, and yet politically it is unusually influential in the region. From the time Lebanon gained its independence in 1943, Lebanon's history has been characterized by a National Pact that outlined Lebanon's political system as a precarious balance of power sharing between Christians and Muslims. While the National Pact initially offered a short-term solution to maintain stability in Lebanon, it eventually generated and entrenched sectarianism in Lebanon and linked the domestic balance of power to the ebbs and flows of regional politics (Makdisi, 2000; Salibi, 1988). Because of its pluralistic society, its free-market economy, and its strategic location at the crossroads of the eastern Mediterranean, Lebanon has been a magnet for actors from around the region and globally. Beirut has been a hub of Arab financial and publication activities and a diplomatic center. Nonetheless, because Lebanon has been so open to the world, it has also made the country vulnerable to regional conflicts. The influx of Palestinian refugees to Lebanon in 1948 and the eventual militarization of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in the late 1960s dramatically altered the domestic balance of power in Lebanon and its relations to other states. By the early 1970s, Lebanon was both a haven and battleground for Palestinian guerrillas who drew the country into the larger regional conflict and provoked repeated Israeli incursions (Sayigh, 1997; Picard, 2002). The eruption of the Lebanese Civil War (1975–1990) transformed Lebanon into a proxy theater for rival external actors such as the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), Syria, Israel, and the West. The external actors exploited Lebanon's sectarian divisions and prevented Lebanon's leadership from making authoritative decisions, thereby further eroding Lebanon's sovereignty and foreign policy capabilities (Jalbert, 1984). Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon and subsequent occupation of the south of Lebanon until 2000 exemplified how far Lebanon had sunk in terms of being a front line in the Arab-Israeli conflict (Traboulsi, 2012). Likewise, the Syrian military intervention in Lebanon in 1976, which started out as a peacekeeping mission, evolved into long-term tutelage that would have a lasting impact on Lebanese politics for decades (Cobban, 1985; Salibi, 1988).

Literature Gap

A large amount of academic literature has studied Lebanon's history, including the sectarian nature of the country (Salibi, 1988); the destabilizing impacts of the Palestinian presence in Lebanon (Sayigh, 1997); Syria's influence over Lebanon (Salem, 2006); and Hezbollah's rise in post-2005 Lebanon (Norton, 2007; Salloukh et al., 2015). However, much of the previous literature continues to view Lebanon as either a proxy battleground or a fragile state. There is relatively less research exploring how the multiple rounds of outside interference and internal division have limited Lebanon's capacity to define a long-term strategic identity. There are numerous unanswered questions about whether Lebanon should adopt a neutral foreign policy, or whether Lebanon should side with

one or another of the regional rivals, or if Lebanon should pursue a hybrid strategy. In addition, the extent to which historical vulnerabilities will guide Lebanon's decision-making processes must be assessed. Addressing these concerns is central to moving past descriptive studies of instability to a better understanding of Lebanon's geopolitical agency, regardless of how limited that agency may be in the Middle East.

Geographic and Strategic Importance

Lebanon is geopolitically strategic due to its location in the center of the Middle East and its unique geography, making Lebanon a key player in the regional politics. Geographically, Lebanon's location at the junction of the Levant and the Mediterranean Sea positions it as a gateway to connect the sea to the interior of Syria, thus providing a direct route to Iraq and Jordan by land and sea. Historically, the port cities of Beirut and Tripoli allowed Lebanon to act as a conduit for trade with the Mediterranean. Furthermore, Lebanon's location at the intersection of conflicts provides further emphasis on its significance. Lebanon's southern border with Israel is among the most volatile fault lines in the Middle East. Confrontation even between small factions such as Hezbollah and Israel has the potential to escalate into a regional conflict, as exemplified in the 2006 war and numerous border clashes since then (Norton, 2007). Lebanon's eastern border with Syria creates another element of instability, as Syria is Lebanon's primary partner for trade, electric power, and fuel. Therefore, the direction of Syria's government is directly related to Lebanon's stability. The latest Syrian civil war has severely disrupted Lebanon's economic activities but has also placed over one million Syrian refugees in Lebanon, increasing Lebanon's political and economic fragility (International Crisis Group, 2020).

Literature Gap

There exists substantial academic research that deals with Lebanon's geography and strategic importance. There is an abundance of research that examines Lebanon's history as a commercial player in the Mediterranean (Fawaz, 1994), as well as its susceptibility to the Arab-Israeli conflict (Norton, 2007) and its vulnerability to spillover effects from Syria (International Crisis Group, 2020). Research that has recently taken place has added additional insight relative to the ongoing maritime border disputes and the recent discovery of hydrocarbon deposits from Lebanon's coastline (Kershner, 2022; Stergiou, 2023). Nonetheless, there is little to no literature that views Lebanon as anything more than a passive arena of conflict or a weak transit economy and has failed to consider whether Lebanon can utilize its geography to develop a more autonomous foreign policy identity. Whether or not Lebanon's geographic resources, its ports, diasporic connections, and hydrocarbon reserves can be strategically used to counterbalance Lebanon's vulnerabilities and enhance its international diplomatic influence has not been thoroughly examined. Addressing this literature gap is necessary to determine if Lebanon can transform its geography from a source of dependency into a foundation for strength and strategic leverage.

i. External Powers' Views of Lebanon

Lebanon's geopolitical value, like its physical geography, has been shaped by the views of external powers toward Lebanon and how they have used Lebanon as a resource in regional politics throughout its modern history. Therefore, for the majority of Lebanon's modern history, the country has not been seen primarily as a sovereign nation, but rather as an essential component in the larger struggles of regional and global rivals.

- The United States of America (USA)

To the United States, Lebanon is most useful as a means of managing risk and preventing regional instability. From the beginning of Lebanon's civil war, the USA has alternately followed a policy of non-involvement and selective involvement in Lebanon and has largely pursued this policy due to its concern for the safety of Israel and its desire to contain Hezbollah. One of the central components of US policy toward Lebanon is to provide military assistance to the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) to help build up the capacity of the state and to counter the increasing military strength of Hezbollah (Addis, 2011). At no time has Lebanon ever been recognized as a full-fledged partner of the USA, but rather as a place where unstable situations may arise that could escalate into a larger conflict within the context of the broader Arab-Israeli conflicts or provide opportunities for Iran and Syria to extend their presence into the region.

- France

France possesses a unique historical and cultural legacy of influence over Lebanon. As a result of its previous status as the mandate authority over Lebanon and its continued close relationship with Lebanon's Christian populations, France has historically functioned as a patron for Lebanon internationally. France was a leading participant in organizing the international donor conferences (such as the CEDRE conference, organized in Paris in 2018) and continues to offer support for the UNIFIL peacekeeping operation deployed along the Lebanese-Israeli border (Corm, 2021). In addition, France's recent attempts to present itself as a mediator after the 2020

Beirut port explosion, when French President Emmanuel Macron visited Beirut and called for reform, demonstrate France's ongoing effort to revive its historical status as a mediator in the Middle East, even though its capabilities to do so have significantly decreased as a consequence of Lebanon's internal division and the influence of other competing external powers.

- Russia

Russia's role in the Levant and its involvement in the region's power politics have undergone a significant shift over the past decade, mainly because of opportunities created by geopolitical and regional developments, including, most critically, the pivoting of U.S. foreign policy away from the Middle East and forever wars (Ali, M. & Yahya, M., 2024). The military intervention in Syria has allowed the Kremlin to project its power and influence across the area, establishing a working relationship with several Lebanese entities to ensure that it will have the ability to utilize Lebanon as a logistical base for its operations in the Eastern Mediterranean (Ali, M. & Yahya, M., 2024). Due to the fact that Russia's engagement in Lebanon is secondary to the engagement of Iran, the USA and France, Lebanon is not a main focus of Russian foreign policy but rather represents one aspect of a larger equilibrium process Russia employs in order to augment its bargaining power in the region while maintaining contact with all relevant parties without committing too heavily to Lebanon's internal affairs.

- China

From the perspective of China, Lebanon is perceived as a geo-economic opportunity more than a source of security concerns. According to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Lebanon is a possible logistics hub linking Europe, Africa, and Asia and thus offers considerable economic opportunities (Guangda & Suliman, 2025). Despite apparent Chinese interest in investment in Lebanon, particularly in reconstruction and infrastructure projects, the instability of Lebanon's government and economy has limited large-scale Chinese investments. Therefore, while Lebanon appears to represent an unexploited economic node in China's long-term planning, it is currently of low priority to date.

- Arab States

Among the Arab states, Lebanon has long been a field of proxy competition and sectarian leverage. Historically, the Gulf states and Saudi Arabia, specifically, funded Sunni political parties and reconstruction projects in Lebanon, particularly under the leadership of Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri in the 1990s. However, as the Hezbollah party has increased in influence throughout the years, the Gulf states and Saudi Arabia, specifically, have become tremendously cautious. Saudi Arabia's disenchantment with Lebanon was due to this increased power of Hezbollah and its Iranian patron. Today, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia no longer sees Lebanon as a priority. (Ghaddar, 2023). Equally, Syria and Iran have historically and still utilize Lebanon as a method of endeavoring influence and securing their respective western sides: a) Syria utilized Lebanon to endeavor influence while under its tutelage, and b) Iran utilizes Hezbollah as a component of its regional warning posture against Israel and the USA (Byman, 2008). The recent rapprochement between Saudi Arabia and Iran, which began in 2023, may create possibilities for Lebanon to capitalize on reduced regional tensions; however, it remains to be seen whether Lebanon's domestic actors can capitalize upon this reduced tension.

Literature Gap

Although it exists a large body of literature that describes how external powers see Lebanon as an important factor in their respective regional security agendas (Byman, 2008; Addis, 2011); as a cultural and historical area of influence (Corm, 2021); or as a logistical/economic hub in the context of a broader geostrategic initiative (Guangda & Suliman, 2025), a great deal of this literature focuses on Lebanon's role in the strategies of external powers and not on how Lebanon might reinterpret these external views to allow it to establish its own diplomatic agency. Additionally, there is a lack of analysis on how Lebanon might transform its international image and move from a fragile proxy state to a credible mediator or economic partner in order to reduce its dependency on external actors and enhance its resilience. This literature gap is significant because it identifies a need for research that moves beyond simply documenting the external agendas of nations to explore how Lebanon can proactively shape its foreign relations in response to the ways that external powers perceive Lebanon.

Case Studies of Lebanon's Geopolitical Relevance

This study will use case studies to assess Lebanon's place in the world as a result of its geographical position, relations with other countries, and internal civil strife. Through the perspective of Lebanon's historical responses to regional and global events, I will examine the extent to which Lebanon is susceptible to external influences and the extent to which Lebanon can determine its own destiny. Additionally, these case studies will provide a method of analysis as to how Lebanon has become embroiled in larger conflicts due to its geographical position

and internal political divisions. I will utilize these case studies to explore the contradictions inherent in Lebanon's sovereignty as a nation and as a battleground for the competition of other nations.

Literature Gap:

While the existing literature examines Lebanon through the lenses of discrete episodes of conflict, intervention, and realignment (Picard, 2002; Norton, 2007; Salloukh et al., 2015), the literature is very detailed in regard to those episodes. Most of the literature examines each episode separately and treats Lebanon primarily as a passive actor responding to the initiatives of external actors, rather than as an independent actor with the ability to leverage the crises to create a strategic identity for itself over the long run. Emerging literature on the 2022 maritime agreement provides some insights into how Lebanon may begin to employ proactive diplomatic strategies (Kershner, 2022); however, there is still a need for a broad literature review of the extent to which Lebanon may transform its episodic experience of mediation in conflict resolution into a foundation for developing a sustained diplomatic identity. Thus, there exists a substantial research gap: whether Lebanon may establish a durable diplomatic identity as a result of its episodic experience of being involved in regional conflicts.

1. Research Methods

This study uses a qualitative, exploratory research design to explore Lebanon's strategic positioning in the Middle East and how the institutional, political, and discursively constructed mechanisms through which this positioning influences foreign policy behavior and diplomatic practices. The design of this research is directly based on the research problems outlined in Chapter One of this dissertation, and as such, emphasizes governance gaps, exclusionary policymaking, contested national identity, accountability deficits, and the underuse of diaspora capacities in Lebanese foreign policy. Given the fragmented nature of the Lebanese political system, the confessional power-sharing arrangements in place since the end of French colonial rule in 1946, and the long-term external interventions that have occurred in Lebanon since independence in 1946, foreign policy outcomes cannot be effectively examined using positivist or variable-based methods alone. In contrast to these approaches, this research conceptualizes foreign policy and relations as a socially constructed and historically embedded process, shaped by informal bargaining, institutional ambiguity, and competing narratives of sovereignty, neutrality, and alignment (Acharya, 2014). Lebanon serves as a single embedded case study in this research, allowing for an in-depth examination of the country along multiple analytical dimensions (legal, institutional, historical, and geopolitical) while at the same time situating it within larger regional and international contexts (Yin, 2018). Analytical comparisons are made with other small or divided states to illustrate structural constraints and governance options, but not to generate generalizable predictions. This research design is oriented towards being exploratory and interpretive. As such, the goal of this research is not hypothesis testing or forecasting but rather clarification through analysis, refinement of theory, and identification of structural patterns related to foreign policy governance in weak and divided states.

2. Research Methodology

In this chapter, I outlined the research methodology that will be adopted to assess the geopolitical significance of Lebanon and to identify gaps in academic and policy-oriented studies of its foreign and security policies. My objective is to describe the methodological rationale behind the choices I have made to ensure the transparency, rigor, and replicability of the research. My central objective is to examine critically how Lebanon's geopolitical role has been conceptualized in previous studies and to highlight areas that require greater examination or clarification. As set out in the research questions of Chapter One and developed at greater length in subsequent chapters, my focus here will be on five interdependent problematics:

- i. **Institutionalization of civil society, local communities, and parliamentary participation in foreign and security policy;**
- ii. **Disconnect between research production and the development of foreign policy, using empirical evidence in crisis situations;**
- iii. **Long-term strategic identity of Lebanon (neutrality, alignment, or hybrid models);**
- iv. **Foreign policy as a means of advancing domestic accountability and transitional justice;**
- v. **Systematic engagement of Lebanon's diaspora in foreign policy development and international advocacy.**

Due to the normative, institutional, and interpretive nature of the research questions, a **qualitative research methodology** will enable me to explore them effectively. The research methodology serves as a link between the research questions, the practical material analyzed, and the analytical claims, thus ensuring both analytic depth and academic credibility.

Research Philosophy / Paradigm

The study uses an interpretivist research paradigm, which draws upon aspects of constructivist international relations theory and critical political sociology. Interpretivism views political reality, particularly in fragmented and post-conflict environments like Lebanon, as socially constructed by institutions, discourses, historical trajectory, and power relationships, rather than as either objectively existent or value-free.

The interpretivist perspective is appropriate to this study. Lebanon's foreign and security policy is primarily shaped by informal practices rather than formally articulated doctrine, sectarian bargaining, patronage by external powers, and a contested narrative of sovereignty and identity. The interpretivist worldview influences the research design by:

- Stressing the structure of meaning over measurement;
- Treating policy frameworks, legal texts, and institutional structures as social constructs;
- Recognizing the diversity of actors involved in the formation of foreign policy, including non-state and transnational actors;
- Enabling critical engagement with silences, exclusions, and absences within dominant geopolitical narratives.

Unlike predictive generalizations, the study seeks to develop context-sensitive, analytically transferable insights into the governance of geopolitics in weak and divided states.

Research Approach

I utilized an **inductive analytical approach** to the research. Rather than testing predetermined hypotheses, I sought to build analytical insights from systematic engagement with secondary data, allowing patterns, institutional barriers, and governance gaps to arise from the data. This inductive approach is congruent with the research objectives several respects:

- It enables the building of theory relating to the governance of foreign policy in sectarian and hybrid political systems;
- It enables comparative lessons to arise from the case data rather than being imposed as priority;
- It enables the exploration of the research questions related to participation, accountability, and identity.

Thus, in contrast to many other studies, theory in this study is **refined and extended** as opposed to being strictly tested, thus contributing to wider debates in foreign policy analysis, governance studies, and Middle East geopolitics.

Finally, this chapter outlines the methodological framework underlying the study: **the research philosophy, the approach, the design, the data collection, and the analysis methods**. The methodology employed in this study is suitable for assessing the geopolitical significance of Lebanon and identifying gaps in the existing research. By adopting a transparent and systematic methodology, the research aims to contribute to the achievement of the research objectives and to developing meaningful, reliable, and credible findings that can enhance future academic and policy-oriented research.

3. Data Analysis and Discussion of Findings

This chapter provides the analysis and discussion of the findings of the study, according to the objectives and research questions outlined in the earlier chapters. This section is intended to critically analyze the information gathered through qualitative desk-based research in relation to Lebanon's strategic position in the Middle East and its consequences for foreign relations and diplomatic approaches. This section is in accordance with the overall research design and relies only on a qualitative content analysis of secondary sources, such as academic literature, policy reports, publications from internationally operating organizations, and case studies (Creswell 2014; Bowen 2009). The focus of the analysis is based on understanding how Lebanon's strategic geography, sectarian political system, humanitarian role, and Lebanese diaspora engagement influence its foreign policy behavior and diplomatic positioning. I have specifically focused on perspectives reflected in official discourse, debates about policies, and academic interpretations of national interests versus humanitarian imperatives, especially in the context of regional instability and forced migrant movements (Barnett & Finnemore, 2004; Salamey, 2014). Although no questionnaires or interviews were conducted, the analysis still collates viewpoints expressed across a wide range of documented sources, allowing for a comprehensive examination of dominant narratives, tensions, and policy inconsistencies considering the following:

- **Contextual and structural profile of Lebanon:** functioning as an equivalent of demographic analysis in quantitative studies by outlining a tabulated summary of Lebanon's key structural characteristics, including sectarian composition, refugee presence, and Lebanese diaspora distribution (Yin, 2018).
- **Inclusivity and institutionalized foreign policy governance:** addressing the qualitative assessment of the first research hypothesis, where data was collected through thematic analysis and comparative case-by-case evidence rather than statistical testing.
- **Research, humanitarian innovation, and evidencebased foreign policy:** addresses the qualitative assessment of the second research hypothesis, where data was collected through thematic analysis of documented episodes of crisis response, humanitarian governance frameworks, and policy reports.
- **Long-Term vision for national identity and foreign alignment:** addresses the qualitative assessment of the third research hypothesis, where data was evaluated based on qualitative comparative institutional analysis and thematic content analysis.
- **Accountability, impunity, and foreign policy credibility:** addresses the qualitative assessment of the fourth research hypothesis, where data was evaluated based on thematic and comparative qualitative analysis, rather than legal adjudication or statistical quantification.
- **Diaspora engagement and foreign policy leverage:** addresses the qualitative assessment of the fifth research hypothesis, where data was evaluated based on comparative institutional analysis and thematic review of policy literature on diaspora diplomacy.

4. Outcome of the Analysis

This chapter summarizes the results from Chapter Five. The analysis in this study is translated to specific results in a way that does not repeat the analysis: the concepts are extracted from the analysis, and the causal relationships are demonstrated. Additionally, the chapter provides an explanation for how these results relate to the foreign policy system of Lebanon, its governance architecture, and its position on the international stage. Therefore, the chapter provides a link between the analysis presented in the previous chapters and the policy recommendations presented in Chapter Seven:

- **Outcome of the Contextual and Structural Analysis of Lebanon**
- **Outcome of Civil Society and Stakeholder Exclusion**
- **Outcome of Humanitarian and Research Innovation Analysis**
- **Outcome of National Identity and Foreign Alignment Analysis**
- **Outcome of Accountability and Transitional Justice Analysis**
- **Outcome of Diaspora Engagement Analysis**
- **Outcome of Hypothesis Testing**

Integrative Conclusion of the Analysis

a. Core Synthesis

This analysis shows a supporting cycle:

governance fragmentation → elite control → donor dependency → weak legitimacy → low credibility → limited autonomy → reactive diplomatic efforts.

This cycle keeps Lebanon in a fragile state and makes it harder for the country to make big changes.

b. Theoretical Support

It is apparent from examining the cycle that North's (1990) path dependency dynamics have created institutions that continue to support the existence of this vulnerability over time. Nye's (2004) power asymmetry theory illustrates how weakness in governance creates dependence and thus reinforces the cycle of dependence regardless of whether there is a lack of resources.

c. Strategic Meaning

Without institutional reform, the change in Lebanon's foreign policy will remain superficial and will never become genuine. Institutional reform will be required to create the opportunity for real change. This chapter consolidates the results into an outcome framework. This chapter represents the analytical conclusion of the empirical study and the conceptual transition to the prescriptive dimension of the thesis. It turns interpretive analysis into clear conclusions. The next chapter will talk about policy recommendations and strategic frameworks. The structured conclusions serve as the basis for reform proposals.

5. Policy Recommendations and Strategic Framework

This chapter translates the analytical findings and conclusions from Chapter Six into an actionable reform agenda for altering Lebanon's foreign policy order. The analysis concluded that the external vulnerabilities stemming from the country emanate more from institutional fragmentation, lack of coordination, insufficient accountability, and absence of strategic continuity than from geopolitical considerations. Thus, the recommendations go beyond temporary strength to long-term structural changes that enable consistent foreign-policy implementation.

This is why I believe, it's important that this chapter proceed in a systemic and practical way on purpose. The foreign policy is deemed effective when it is not only based on diplomatic skill but also on institutional quality, governance culture, and decision-making practices. Divided institutions in which diplomacy is politicized create a foreign policy that is reactive and responsive to external factors. In contrast, low-capacity states can be strategic and effective when incentives to coordinate, use evidence, and accountability are built into the governance structures (Hudson, 1968; Handel, 1990).

Hence, based on these five mutually reinforcing pillars: strategic doctrine, inclusive **governance, evidence-based policymaking, accountability and credibility of states, and diaspora engagement**, this chapter proposes a reform framework. Collectively these pillars represent an institutional ecosystem that can turn Lebanon from a reactive actor to a trusted, predictable, and strategically autonomous one in international relations. The recommendations are politically practical under the current socio-political conditions of Lebanon, which is vital. Rather than expecting an immediate and radical divergence from the constitution, that framework emphasizes incremental shifts through institutionalization, legal incorporation, and administrative procedures that can eventually alter policy action. The institutional path dependency perspective on this step-by-step approach holds that institutional path dependency calls for gradual adaptation and not sudden structural breaks to culture:

- **Inclusive Foreign Policy Governance Architecture**
- **Parliamentary Empowerment Framework**
- **Evidence-Based Foreign Policy System**
- **Strategic Vision: Institutionalized Active Neutrality as National Doctrine**
- **Accountability and Credibility Framework**
- **Diaspora Diplomacy and Global Advocacy Strategy**
- **Foreign Policy Institutional Capacity Model**
- **Implementation Roadmap**
- **Risk Management and Safeguards**
- **Monitoring and Evaluation Framework**
- **Conceptual Model of an Institutional Resilience Framework for Foreign Policy**
- **Strategic Impact Projection**
- **Long-Term Transformation Scenario**

6. Conclusion

The study has developed a comprehensive reform architecture aimed at strengthening Lebanon's foreign policy capacity through institutional reform rather than strategic realignment. This thesis has demonstrated that Lebanon's external vulnerability is not a direct result of its geopolitical location, but rather the outcome of fragmented decision-making mechanisms, lack of policy continuity, and dysfunctional institutional coordination. The recommendations presented here directly address these structural constraints by proposing governance mechanisms capable of producing coherence, credibility, and long-term strategic orientation. At its core, the proposed framework is a realization to shift from personality-based diplomacy towards institutionally grounded statecraft. By codifying strategic doctrine, expanding participatory governance, integrating evidence into decision-making, strengthening accountability mechanisms, and mobilizing diaspora networks, Lebanon can gradually build a foreign policy system that is both resilient and adaptable. This institutionalization enhances predictability and reliability, being both integral to diplomatic credibility and international trust (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998; Nye, 2004).

Focusing on active neutrality as a strategic doctrine is also consistent with the realities of small, deliberately politically fragmented states. Avoiding regional and international bloc competition positions Lebanon as a forum for mediation, dialogue, and humanitarian engagement. Strategic clarity combined with consistent institutional frameworks and the integration of accountability and transparency into foreign policy remains essential (Handel, 1990). Equally important is the integration of accountability and transparency principles into foreign policy practice. In contemporary international relations, credibility is increasingly seen and linked to governance standards and respect for international norms. Diplomatic and development partnership support is more likely to

be forthcoming for countries that show both the willingness to investigate violations and engage with international mechanisms and exhibit openness in transparent decision-making processes (Sikkink, 2011). The proposed reforms also recognize the vital strategic value of Lebanon's diaspora as a transnational resource to Lebanon. When effectively coordinated, diaspora communities can enhance a state's soft power, support economic diplomacy, and shape international narratives. Institutional engagement mechanisms facilitate the diaspora influence from informal lobbying into a structured component of national foreign policy (Levitt & de la Dehesa, 2003; Nye, 2004).

Finally, there will be political resistance, administrative inertia, and resource constraints for such implementation. For this reason, this chapter has emphasized solid phased implementation and legal safeguards and merit-based appointments, backed by appropriate monitoring mechanisms. The gradual institutionalization increases reform sustainability and minimizes the risk of political backlash.

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