

## *Chapter Eight*

# **Lebanon's Arab Spring: The Cedar Revolution Nine Years On**

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With the anniversaries of many of the major events seen during the Arab Spring passing in early 2014, much of the optimism of the time has long since faded. Increased economic volatility, political instability, and street violence have been features of the upheaval, while in Syria an ongoing civil war has killed over 120,000 people and is driving sectarian violence in Iraq and Lebanon.<sup>1</sup> Despite this pessimistic outlook, though, it is still too early to predict the failures of the revolutions in the Arab Spring countries. The economic, political and security developments of an earlier uprising in the region instead suggest that, given time, instability can be overcome and a country can begin to recover.

This uprising, the Intifadat al-Istiqlal, or Cedar Revolution, in Lebanon bears many similarities to those that took place across the region in 2010–2011. Demonstrations following the February 14, 2005 assassination of the former Prime Minister, Rafic Hariri, brought hundreds of thousands onto the streets and resulted in the resignation of Prime Minister Omar Karami; the formation of a new government, following free elections; and the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon.

Despite being followed by economic decline, political polarisation, and increased violence—as currently experienced by those countries that saw Arab Spring revolutions—Lebanon's economy was able to recover, while an agreement reached in Doha in May 2008 ended open street fighting between political factions and enabled a deeply divided political system to function again with relative stability. By 2011, the overt influence of Damascus had faded and the country had seen four years of significant GDP growth, suggesting that—with

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<sup>1</sup>“Death Toll in Syria Likely as High as 120,000: Group,” *Reuters*, May 14, 2013, available at: <http://uk.reuters.com/article/2013/05/14/us-syria-crisis-deaths-idU.S.BRE94D0L420130514>.

time—the upheaval of revolutions across North Africa may be replaced with stability, under more accountable government.

This optimism is tempered however by the fact that, today, Lebanon is once again facing economic malaise, political paralysis and paramilitary violence, all driven by the conflict in Syria. This threatens the fragile progress made since 2008, and suggests that the political polarisation exacerbated by the Cedar Revolution has left Lebanon more vulnerable to division. If this is the case then it may be that, even if Lebanon's uprising shows stability can be achieved, the Arab Spring countries will exhibit a similar susceptibility to political unrest in the future.

### The Cedar Revolution and the Arab Spring

On 14 February 2005, a massive car bomb exploded on Beirut's Rue Minet el Hos'n, killing former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafic Hariri and 22 other people. In the week following the bombing, up to 20,000 people marched from the scene of his death to Beirut's Martyrs' Square,<sup>2</sup> chanting slogans blaming the Damascus government for the assassination, and calling for a withdrawal of Syrian troops from the country.<sup>3</sup> Protests continued in the days following this, regularly drawing over 20,000 people, while a tent city called "Camp Freedom" was set up in Martyrs' Square.<sup>4</sup> Demonstrators also called for the resignation of the pro-Syrian government led by Omar Karami, and criticised the pro-Syrian President Emile Lahoud (whose term had been extended by three years just months before, following pressure from Damascus).<sup>5</sup>

Prime Minister Karami resigned on February 28 (though he was reappointed by President Lahoud, to form a unity government, on March 10).<sup>6</sup> By this time, the under-pressure Syrian President, Bashar

<sup>2</sup>"The Cedar Revolution," *NOW*, available at: <https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/archive/The-Cedar-Revolution169>.

<sup>3</sup>"Beirut protesters denounce Syria," *BBC News*, February 21, 2005, available at: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle\\_east/4283543.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/4283543.stm).

<sup>4</sup>"The Cedar Revolution," *op. cit.* (footnote 3).

<sup>5</sup>"Lebanon—2005," *Freedom House*, available at: [http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2005/lebanon#.Us\\_ekfRdVQg](http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2005/lebanon#.Us_ekfRdVQg).

<sup>6</sup>"Pro-Syrian Lebanese PM re-appointed," *The Guardian*, March 10, 2005, available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2005/mar/10/syria.jamessturcke>.

al-Assad, had announced that all Syrian troops would withdraw from Lebanon by the end of April 2005.<sup>7</sup> Despite counter-demonstrations in support of Damascus, when up to 500,000 people gathered to watch Hezbollah's Hassan Nasrallah speak,<sup>8</sup> opposition to Karami continued and, on March 14, over 800,000 people marched on Martyrs' Square.<sup>9</sup> A month later, with protests continuing and politicians failing to agree on the formation of a unity government, Karami resigned for a second time, before the elections on May 31. These elections, declared by the UN Security Council to be "fair and credible," began on 29 May and concluded on 19 June in a clear victory for an anti-Syrian coalition between Hariri's son, Saad's Future Movement and the Progressive Socialist Party (PSP), which formed a government under Prime Minister Fouad Siniora.<sup>10</sup>

While the Arab Spring protests of 2011 may have focused on oppressive domestic regimes, and particularly individuals such as Muammar Gaddafi and Hosni Mubarak, a parallel between these and the Lebanese uprising can immediately be drawn. In the development of tented protest communities, like "Camp Freedom," and the vast numbers of often secular middle-class protesters who occupied the streets, the protests of the Cedar Revolution mirrored and arguably inspired those seen in Tahrir Square. Similarly, the call for the resignation of unpopular leaders Lahoud and Karami were no different to the slogans shouted in Tunis and Cairo. The mass protest of those supportive of the ruling government was also seen—though it did not turn violent in 2005, as some later did during the Arab Spring. In addition to these factors, the fall of the Karami government within two months of the protests beginning and the establishment of an opposition government through democratic means, were similar to the processes which saw the Muslim Brotherhood parties, Ennahda

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<sup>7</sup>"Assad pledges Lebanon withdrawal," *BBC News*, March 2, 2005, available at: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle\\_east/4310699.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/4310699.stm).

<sup>8</sup>"Syria Supporters Rally in Lebanon," *The Washington Post*, March 9, 2005, available at: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A16165-2005Mar8.html>.

<sup>9</sup>"'Record' Protest Held in Beirut," *BBC News*, March 14, 2005, available at: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle\\_east/4346613.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/4346613.stm).

<sup>10</sup>See: Annan, K., "Letter dated 26 October 2005 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council," United Nations Security Council (2005), p. 3, p. 7, available at: [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/2005/673](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2005/673).

and the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP), elected in Tunisia and Egypt, respectively.

## The Aftermath of Revolution

These were not the only similarities though, and in the months following Hariri's assassination, despite the relatively auspicious beginnings of the Cedar Revolution, Lebanon soon began to experience many of those problems now facing countries like Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt. These included the damaging economic impact, political polarisation and security concerns that can be seen today in all of these countries.

As with the Arab Spring nations, the repercussions of the Cedar Revolution saw Lebanon's economy suffer. Unlike Libya and Yemen, however, Lebanon did not see its economy shrink during the years following the revolution, with GDP growth maintained.<sup>11</sup> However, the revolution still had a detrimental effect, with GDP-growth figures of 7.4 percent in 2004 falling to 1 percent in 2005 and just 0.6 percent in 2006.<sup>12</sup> During the same period, consumer-price inflation, shrinking by 0.7 percent in 2005, grew to 5.6 percent in 2006, before hitting 10 percent in 2008,<sup>13</sup> while the country's debt-to-GDP ratio rose fast: from 167 percent at the end of 2004, to 182 percent in 2006.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>This is compared to Yemen, which saw GDP growth of 7.7 percent in January 2011 replaced with a 10.5 percent decrease in January 2012. See: "Yemen GDP Annual Growth Rate," *Trading Economics*, available at: <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/yemen/gdp-growth-annual>, and Libya, where GDP growth had fallen by 60 percent in January 2012. See: "Libya GDP Annual Growth Rate," *Trading Economics*, available at: <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/libya/gdp-growth-annual>.

<sup>12</sup>"Lebanon—World Development Indicators," The World Bank Group, available at: <http://data.worldbank.org/country/lebanon>.

<sup>13</sup>"Inflation, average consumer prices," International Monetary Fund, available at: <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2013/02/weodata/weorept.aspx?sy=2005&ey=2018&scsm=1&ssd=1&sort=country&ds=.&br=1&pr1.x=78&pr1.y=15&c=446&s=PCPIPCHpercent2CPCPIEPCH&grp=0&a=>.

<sup>14</sup>"General Government Gross Debt," International Monetary Fund, available at: [https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2013/02/weodata/weorept.aspx?pr.x=75&pr.y=8&sy=2004&ey=2018&scsm=1&ssd=1&sort=country&ds=.&br=1&c=446&s=GGXWDN\\_NGDPpercent2CGGXWDG\\_NGDP&grp=0&a=](https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2013/02/weodata/weorept.aspx?pr.x=75&pr.y=8&sy=2004&ey=2018&scsm=1&ssd=1&sort=country&ds=.&br=1&c=446&s=GGXWDN_NGDPpercent2CGGXWDG_NGDP&grp=0&a=).

The uprising also had a negative effect on the Lebanese tourism industry, one of the country's most important economic sectors. A favorite holiday destination for visitors from the Gulf, the country had seen visitor numbers increase year-on-year between 1997 and 2004. However, from 1,278,000 visitors in 2004, the number of incoming tourists fell to 1,017,000 in 2007: a drop of 20.5 percent, which coincided with the worst of the instability brought on by the Cedar Revolution.<sup>15</sup> In December 2006, following political unrest caused by multiple ministerial resignations and the assassination of Pierre Gemayel,<sup>16</sup> the head of the Lebanese Hotel Association claimed that hotel occupancy was at just 25 percent during a period of the year when the country was expecting up to 400,000 visitors.<sup>17</sup> At the same time, international-tourism receipts as a percentage of exports fell from 45.1 percent in 2004, to just 28.5 percent in 2008.<sup>18</sup>

The damage that the Cedar Revolution caused the country's tourism industry was also reflected elsewhere in the wider economy, as strikes called by the Hezbollah-led opposition, political deadlock and violence all damaged business confidence. The manufacturing sector's growth, which had shown a steady rise since 2001, fell from 8.3 percent in 2004, to -0.1 percent in 2005 and -6.7 percent in 2006. Aside from 7.2 percent growth in 2007, likely caused by reconstruction work following the war between Israel and Hezbollah in 2006, the industry continued to shrink following this: contracting by 6.3 percent in 2008, and 4.2 percent in 2009.<sup>19</sup> This was accompanied by a fall in energy production: from 240.5 kiloton equivalent (kte) in 2004, to 177.3kte in 2008—though it is likely that a proportion of this was also caused by damage to facilities during the 2006 conflict.<sup>20</sup> One knock-on effect of this can be seen in the unemployment figures (with those out of work

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<sup>15</sup>“International Tourism, Number of Arrivals: Lebanon,” The World Bank Group, available at: <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/ST.INT.ARVL?page=1>.

<sup>16</sup>“Lebanese Christian Leader Killed,” *BBC News*, November 21, 2006, available at: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle\\_east/6169606.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/6169606.stm).

<sup>17</sup>“Protests Blow to Beirut Economy,” *BBC News*, December 8, 2006, available at: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle\\_east/6162941.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/6162941.stm).

<sup>18</sup>“Lebanon—World Development Indicators,” The World Bank Group, available at: <http://data.worldbank.org/country/lebanon>.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*

rising from 7.9 percent of the population in 2004, to 8.9 percent in 2007).<sup>21</sup>

The similarity between the economic troubles experienced by the Arab Spring countries and Lebanon following the Cedar Revolution is also mirrored in the political polarisation that followed the uprising. Echoing the ongoing divide between Islamist and secular groups in Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia, this dispute had its roots in pre-existing political fault lines, yet had been exacerbated by the 2005 uprising. Support or opposition to Syrian influence in Lebanon, the ideological focus point of both the Cedar Revolution and of Lebanese politics after the civil war, still existed; yet, the revolution had made power-sharing politics a more zero-sum game. When the anti-Syrian parties, known as the “March 14 Coalition,” had come to power following the Cedar Revolution, they had allowed the pro-Syrian March 8 Coalition opposition few Ministers in the cabinet. This had left Christians in the Free Patriotic Movement, Phalange, Baath and Syrian Social Nationalist parties on the sidelines,<sup>22</sup> and in a situation in which a significant proportion of the population now felt underrepresented. As such, despite the election victory won by the Future Movement and its supporters in 2005, the opposition continued to call for a unity government in which it would have a veto,<sup>23</sup> undermining political stability and ensuring ongoing unrest.

This political divide was further exacerbated by the creation of the UN Special Tribunal investigating Hariri’s assassination, which was strongly opposed by Hezbollah and the Syrian government.<sup>24</sup> Similar to the political disputes over the religious extent of the new constitution in Tunisia, or the conflict between the Muslim Brotherhood and the judiciary or armed forces in Egypt, opponents of the process were willing to collapse the Lebanese government (with all five Shia minis-

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>“Security Tops New Cabinet’s To-Do List,” *The Daily Star*, July 21, 2005, available at: <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2005/Jul-21/5090-security-tops-new-cabinets-to-do-list.ashx#axzz2qMmjWG1H>.

<sup>23</sup>“Hezbollah’s Leader Calls for Street Protests,” *The New York Times*, November 20, 2006, available at: [http://www.nytimes.com/2006/11/20/world/middleeast/20lebanon.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2006/11/20/world/middleeast/20lebanon.html?_r=0).

<sup>24</sup>“U.S. Issues Lebanon ‘Plot’ Warning,” *BBC News*, November 1, 2006, available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/6107224.stm>.

ters resigning in November 2006 to try and prevent the passage of the tribunal draft bill).<sup>25</sup> Driven by political difference rather than confessional fault lines, as demonstrated by the presence of the pro-Syrian Christian Free Patriotic Movement siding with Hezbollah, the polarisation that these issues caused was deeply destabilising. When President Lahoud's extended term of office ended in November 2007, no consensus candidate could be found to replace him, and Siniora's cabinet was forced to take on Presidential powers.<sup>26</sup> After nearly 18 months of paralysing demonstrations, heavy fighting eventually broke out in May 2008, before agreement in Doha saw the opposing factions begin to compromise.

These street battles were the culmination of an increase in political violence which had accompanied the economic and political decline evident since Hariri's assassination, and which can be compared with those experienced by the Arab Spring countries. From June 2005 to December 2007, the country saw a number of political assassinations of Syria's opponents,<sup>27</sup> comparable to the assassinations of Chokri Belaid and Mohamed Brahmi in Tunisia in 2013.<sup>28</sup> Between June 2005 and September 2007, six prominent Lebanese political figures or journalists opposed to the Syrian regime were killed in bomb or gun attacks and a further two escaped assassination attempts.<sup>29</sup> Just two months after Syrian troops were withdrawn, journalist Samir Qasir

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<sup>25</sup>"Hezbollah Ministers Quit Cabinet," *BBC News*, November 12, 2006, available at: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle\\_east/6139730.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/6139730.stm).

<sup>26</sup>"Siniora Says Cabinet Assumes Presidential Powers," *Gulf News*, November 24, 2007, available at: <http://m.gulfnews.com/siniora-says-cabinet-assumes-presidential-powers-1.213778>.

<sup>27</sup>A bomb attack in July 2005 targeted the pro-Syrian Defence Minister, Elias Murr, leaving him with minor injuries. See: "Murr Escapes Deadly Car Bomb Attack," *The Daily Star*, July 13, 2005, available at: <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2005/Jul-13/9074-murr-escapes-deadly-car-bomb-attack.ashx#axzz2q1B89K35>.

<sup>28</sup>See: "Tunisia Shocked by Assassinations: Opposition Leaders Mohamed Brahmi and Chokri Belaid Killed with the Same Gun," *The Independent*, July 26, 2013, available at: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/africa/tunisia-shocked-by-assassinations-opposition-leaders-mohamed-brahmi-and-chokri-belaid-killed-with-the-same-gun-8733972.html>.

<sup>29</sup>Journalists Ali Ramez Tohme, who escaped a car bomb attack on September 15, 2005, and May Chidiac, who was seriously injured in a similar attack on her car on September 25, 2005. See: "Third Attack Against Press in Four Months," *Committee to Protect Journalists*, September 26, 2005, available at: <https://cpj.org/2005/09/third-attack-against-press-in-four-months.php>).

was killed when a car bomb exploded outside his home;<sup>30</sup> this was followed on June 21 by the killing of Communist Party leader George Hawi with a car bomb.<sup>31</sup> On December 12 Gebran Tueni, described by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan as “a tireless advocate of a sovereign Lebanon and free press,” was killed in a car bombing<sup>32</sup> and in December 2006 gunmen shot dead anti-Syrian MP Pierre Gemayel.<sup>33</sup> The following year, Sunni MP Walid Eido was killed in a car-bomb attack on Beirut’s waterfront on June 13<sup>34</sup> and Christian MP Antoine Ghanem was killed in a car bombing in east Beirut.<sup>35</sup>

In addition, a spate of bombings throughout 2005 targeted Christian areas, with at least eight attacks from March 19 to September 17 striking towns and neighbourhoods including New Jdeideh, Jounieh and Ashrafiyeh, killing five and wounding at least 60.<sup>36</sup> Likely carried

<sup>30</sup>“Hundreds Mourn Beirut Journalist,” *BBC News*, June 4, 2005, available at: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle\\_east/4609329.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/4609329.stm).

<sup>31</sup>“Fierce Critic of Syria Killed in Beirut Blast,” *The Telegraph*, June 22, 2005, available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/lebanon/1492580/Fierce-critic-of-Syria-killed-in-Beirut-blast.html>.

<sup>32</sup>“Security Council Receives Mehlis Report; Annan Condemns New Assassination in Lebanon,” *United Nations News Centre*, December 12, 2005, available at: <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=16905&Cr=middle&Cr1=leban#Us7EVPnRdVQg>.

<sup>33</sup>“Lebanese Christian leader killed,” *op. cit.* (footnote 17).

<sup>34</sup>“Lebanese MP Dies in Beirut Blast,” *BBC News*, June 14, 2007, available at: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle\\_east/6749663.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/6749663.stm).

<sup>35</sup>“MP Antoine Ghanem Assassinated,” *The Daily Star*, September 20, 2007, available at: <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2007/Sep-20/47135-mp-antoine-ghanem-assassinated.ashx#axzz1zUoMKoRi>.

<sup>36</sup>See: “Car Bomb Rocks Beirut,” *The Guardian*, March 19, 2005, available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2005/mar/19/syria.lebanon>. See also: “Fresh Lebanon Bombing Kills Three,” *BBC News*, 23 March 2005, available at: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle\\_east/4374111.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/4374111.stm). See also: “Bomb Hits Beirut’s Christian Area,” *BBC News*, 27 March 2005, available at: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle\\_east/4385265.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/4385265.stm). See also: “Bomb Damages Christian Town Near Beirut,” *The Washington Post*, April 2, 2005, available at: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A19372-2005Apr1.html>. See also: “Bomb Kills One, Wounds 6 in the Port City of Jounieh,” *The Daily Star*, May 6, 2005, available at: <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2005/May-06/5307-bomb-kills-one-wounds-6-in-the-port-city-of-jounieh.ashx#axzz2q1B89K35>. See also: Sadler, B., “Explosion Hits Beirut,” *CNN*, July 22, 2005, available at: <http://edition.cnn.com/2005/WORLD/meast/07/22/lebanon.explosion/index.html>. See also: “Car Bomb Explodes in Beirut: One Dead and 30 Wounded,” *Asia News*, September 17, 2005, available at: <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Car-bomb-explodes-in-Beirut-one->

out by Syrian supporters attempting to undermine security, the attacks were comparable to those striking the Coptic Christian community in Egypt following the Arab Spring.<sup>37</sup> However, the fighting of May 2008, when the discovery of Hezbollah-controlled hidden cameras at Rafic Hariri International Airport led to government accusations that the group was planning an attack, was the most serious.<sup>38</sup> By this point, the relationship between Siniora's government and the Hezbollah-led opposition had deteriorated substantially. The declaration on May 6, according to which Hezbollah's telecommunications network would be dismantled, unleashed six days of fighting across Lebanon, during which Hezbollah was able to take control of large areas of West Beirut and killed at least 61 people.<sup>39</sup>

## Recovery

With these developments in mind, it is likely that observers looking at Lebanon in spring 2008 could well have come to the same conclusions about the fate of the Cedar Revolution as many have about the Arab Spring. However, the shoots of recovery after the uprising had been apparent since late 2007 and the following years would see Lebanon begin to regain the ground lost following the assassination of Hariri.

The Lebanese economy was the first to show these signs, with GDP growth measured at 7.5 percent in the closing months of 2007, and then showing strong growth in 2008, 2009 and 2010.<sup>40</sup> Inflation also fell from the high point reached in 2008 back to a low of 1.2 per-

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dead-and-30-wounded-4136.html. See also: "Powerful Explosion Near Beirut Hotel Injures at Least 3," *The New York Times*, August 23, 2005, available at: [http://www.nytimes.com/2005/08/23/international/middleeast/23lebanon.html?adxnnl=1&adxnnlx=1124802094-t3xMNR3qz+TfiO6F3gWUkQ&\\_r=2&](http://www.nytimes.com/2005/08/23/international/middleeast/23lebanon.html?adxnnl=1&adxnnlx=1124802094-t3xMNR3qz+TfiO6F3gWUkQ&_r=2&).

<sup>37</sup>"Egypt Police Boost Security at Churches Ahead of Coptic Christmas," *Reuters*, January 6, 2014, available at: <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/01/06/us-egypt-copts-idU.S.BREA050HA20140106>.

<sup>38</sup>"Hezbollah in Airport Spying Row," *BBC News*, May 3, 2008, available at: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle\\_east/7382289.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7382289.stm).

<sup>39</sup>"Lebanon Army Gives Gunmen Deadline to Disarm," *Al Arabiya News*, May 12, 2008, available at: <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2008/05/12/49725.html>.

<sup>40</sup>"Lebanon—World Development Indicators," *op. cit.* (footnote 13).

cent in 2009 and 4.5 percent in 2010,<sup>41</sup> while government debt fell to 142 percent of GDP by 2010.<sup>42</sup> Following the signing of the Doha Agreement, the Lebanese tourism industry also began to recover significantly (with 2008 the first year to see visitor numbers rise since 2004, and 2010 seeing more than 2 million visitors).<sup>43</sup> Meanwhile, in January 2010, Lebanon's tourism chief Nada Sardouk claimed that the country's hotels had seen "80 percent to 90 percent hotel occupancy this year [2009],"<sup>44</sup> suggesting that these visitors were staying in the country rather than travelling onwards. International tourism receipts as a percentage of exports also rose, to reach 39.2 percent in 2010, while a return to sustained growth was also present in the manufacturing sector between 2010 and 2012. All this was likely to have contributed to an accompanying fall in unemployment: down from 9 percent in 2008, to 5.8 percent in 2011.<sup>45</sup>

As well as this, the country's divisive and confrontational political environment, while still apparent in the positions taken on the UN Special Tribunal's investigation into the assassination of Rafic Hariri,<sup>46</sup> ceased to have such a damaging effect. This was, in part, due to the fact that the March 8 Coalition had returned to power as part of a unity government following the Doha Agreement<sup>47</sup> and was then able to gain 10 seats out of 30 in a similar cabinet under Saad Hariri following the 2009 elections.<sup>48</sup> Following the fall, in January 2011, of Saad Hariri's government over the tribunal issue, Najib Mikati was able to form a new cabinet—dominated by March 8 ministers—within six months and still maintain Lebanese involvement in the process,

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<sup>41</sup>"Inflation, Average Consumer Prices," *op. cit.* (footnote 14).

<sup>42</sup>"General Government Gross Debt," *op. cit.* (footnote 15).

<sup>43</sup>"International Tourism, Number of Arrivals: Lebanon," *op. cit.* (footnote 16).

<sup>44</sup>Stoddart, V., "Beirut is Reborn as a Glitzy Playground for Tourists," *USA Today*, January 22, 2010, available at: [http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/travel/destinations/2010-01-21-beirut-bounces-back\\_N.htm](http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/travel/destinations/2010-01-21-beirut-bounces-back_N.htm).

<sup>45</sup>"Lebanon—World Development Indicators," *op. cit.* (footnote 19).

<sup>46</sup>"Hezbollah and Allies Topple Lebanese Unity Government," *BBC News*, January 12, 2011, available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-12170608>.

<sup>47</sup>"Lebanon—2009," *Freedom House*, available at: <http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2009/lebanon#.UtUQ2vRdVQg>.

<sup>48</sup>"Lebanon's National-Unity Cabinet Formed," *NOW*, November 9, 2009, available at: [https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/nownews/lebanons\\_national-unity\\_cabinet\\_formed](https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/nownews/lebanons_national-unity_cabinet_formed).

with the transitional period punctuated by only minor civil unrest.<sup>49</sup> This suggests that, unlike the period immediately following the uprising, co-operation was preferred to conflict by Lebanon's opposing political groups—something that may be beginning to be seen in Tunisia.<sup>50</sup>

A significant improvement in political and civil rights was also evident in the years that followed the Cedar Revolution and was exemplified by *Freedom House* changing the country's rating from "Not Free" in 2005 to "Partly Free" in 2006, something that Lebanon has maintained to 2013. The "Freedom Rating" awarded by the NGO also changed significantly in the years following the Cedar Revolution: improving from 5.5 in 2005 to 4.0 in 2011.<sup>51</sup> This was accompanied by movements to end arbitrary detention and torture, with *Freedom House* declaring in 2011 that the "security forces' practice of arbitrary detention has declined since 2005, though isolated incidents still occur," and that "the government has made some progress toward ending torture since 2007."<sup>52</sup>

Meanwhile, as with the improvements in economic and political instability, political violence and assassinations became less frequent. The assassination of the pro-Syrian Druze politician Saleh Aridi, in September 2008<sup>53</sup> was the only high-profile political killing until the death of the Internal Security Forces (ISF) intelligence chief Wissam al-Hassan in October 2012.<sup>54</sup> Additionally, September 2008 saw a reconciliation agreement signed between warring Sunni and Alawite

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<sup>49</sup>"Lebanon's Mikati Forms New Cabinet With Hezbollah Support," *Bloomberg*, June 13, 2011, available at: <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2011-06-13/lebanon-s-mikati-forms-new-cabinet-with-hezbollah-support.html>.

<sup>50</sup>"Tunisia's NCA Agrees New Constitution," *BBC News*, January 24, 2014, available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-25878534>.

<sup>51</sup>See: "Lebanon—2005," *op. cit.* (footnote 6) and "Lebanon—2011," *Freedom House*, available at: [http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2011/lebanon#.UtAOh\\_RdVQg](http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2011/lebanon#.UtAOh_RdVQg). (N.B.: *Freedom House* ranks countries between "1" and "7," with "7" being awarded to the most repressive regimes.)

<sup>52</sup>"Lebanon—2011," *op. cit.* (footnote 52).

<sup>53</sup>"Lebanese Politician Sheik Saleh Aridi Killed In Car Bombing," *The Guardian*, September 11, 2008, available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/sep/11/lebanon.syria>.

<sup>54</sup>"Wissam Al-Hasan Assassinated in Ashrafiyeh Bomb Blast," *Nabarnet*, October 19, 2012, available at: <http://www.nabarnet.com/stories/en/57713>.

militias in the northern city of Tripoli after sectarian fighting linked to political disagreements in Beirut had killed at least 22 people.<sup>55</sup> While 2008 did see two significant bomb attacks in Tripoli, one of which killed at least 15 people, these were not believed to have been linked to the political violence generated by the Cedar Revolution and were, instead, likely to have been carried out by al-Qaeda-inspired Islamist terrorists.<sup>56</sup> The same was true of significant violence in the Nahr al-Bared refugee camp during the summer of 2007 (sparked when the Islamist terrorist group Fatah al-Islam attacked Lebanese Army positions, in retaliation for the arrest of its members).<sup>57</sup>

## The Road from Damascus

Despite this recovery, the progress made has since stalled in the face of unrest generated by the ongoing civil war across the border in Syria. The malign effect Bashar al-Assad's regime had on Lebanon prior to 2005 has returned since late 2011 and has left the country struggling to deal with increasing economic, political and security problems once again.

As with the years following the Cedar Revolution, the knock-on effect of the conflict in Syria has been mostly felt by the Lebanese economy and GDP growth in particular has slowed dramatically. While the economy is yet to experience negative growth, the figures have fallen from 7 percent growth in 2010, to 3 percent in 2011 and just 1.3 percent in 2012.<sup>58</sup> Inflation also appears to be rising again, reaching 6.3 percent in 2013.<sup>59</sup> The tourism industry has also suffered, as members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) have warned their citizens against travel to Lebanon and, in some cases, have

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<sup>55</sup>“Sunni, Alawite Leaders Sign Truce Deal in Tripoli,” *The Daily Star*, September 9, 2008, available at: <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2008/Sep-09/50899-sunni-alawite-leaders-sign-truce-deal-in-tripoli.ashx#axzz2qH7D5TJT>.

<sup>56</sup>See: “Lebanon Bomb Kills 15 In Attack on Army,” *Reuters*, August 13, 2008, available at: <http://www.reuters.com/article/2008/08/13/us-lebanon-blast-idUSLD6575120080813>.

<sup>57</sup>“Three-Month Battle Ends as Army Takes over Refugee Camp,” *The Guardian*, September 3, 2007, available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2007/sep/03/syria.lebanon>.

<sup>58</sup>“Lebanon—World Development Indicators,” *op. cit.*

<sup>59</sup>“Inflation, Average Consumer Prices,” *op. cit.*

advised those present there to leave.<sup>60</sup> Figures for the number of visitors entering the country, as well as for international-tourism receipts as a percentage of exports, are not available for 2012–2013; yet, by the end of 2011, both had also fallen significantly from the previous year. In June 2013, Lebanon's Tourism Minister stated the president of Lebanon's Syndicate of Hotel Owners claimed that hotel occupancy was down 30 percent from the previous year.<sup>61</sup>

The outbreak of the civil war has also had an enormously damaging influence on Lebanon's political structures, with its legislative and executive bodies left hopelessly paralysed as opposing coalitions support different sides in Syria. The resignation of Prime Minister Najib Mikati in March 2013<sup>62</sup> left Lebanon with a caretaker government for nearly a year, with Prime Minister-designate Tammam Salam simply unable to form a replacement government.<sup>63</sup> The country's Parliament meetings have also been boycotted by a number of major parties, failing to reach quorum eight times in the past year and meeting for the first time since May 2013 on March 19, 2014.<sup>64</sup> In addition to this, parliamentary elections due for May 2013 have been postponed to November 2014, while—despite the increase in political rights logged by *Freedom House*, following the Cedar Revolution—Lebanon's "Freedom Rating" has declined to 4.5 in 2013.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>60</sup>See: "GCC States Issue Lebanon Travel Warning," *Al Arabiya News*, June 6, 2013, available at: <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2013/06/06/GCC-states-issue-Lebanon-travel-warning-.html>. See also: "Saudi Arabia Urges Citizens to Leave Lebanon," *The Daily Star*, November 21, 2013, available at: <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2013/Nov-21/238559-saudi-arabia-calls-on-citizens-to-leave-lebanon.ashx#axzz2qMmjWG1H>.

<sup>61</sup>"Syrian Bombs Empty Lebanese Tables as Conflict Hits Tourism," *Bloomberg*, June 6, 2013, available at: <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2013-06-05/syrian-bombs-empty-lebanese-tables-as-war-hits-tourism-mainstay.html>.

<sup>62</sup>"Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Mikati Resigns," *Reuters*, March 22, 2013, available at: <http://uk.reuters.com/article/2013/03/22/us-lebanon-mikati-idU.S.BRE92L0TG20130322>.

<sup>63</sup>"Cabinet Formation Still at Impasse, Salam Says," *The Daily Star*, October 1, 2013, available at: <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2013/Oct-01/233151-cabinet-formation-still-at-impasse-salam-says.ashx#axzz2qMmjWG1H>.

<sup>64</sup>"Parliament Fails to Convene Once More," *The Daily Star*, December 18, 2013, available at: <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2013/Dec-18/241522-parliament-fails-to-convene-once-more.ashx#axzz2qH7D5TJT>.

<sup>65</sup>"Lebanon—2013," *Freedom House*, available at: <http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2013/lebanon#.UtAPEvRdVQg>.

Significant political violence has also returned to the country and has been seen in Beirut, Tripoli and Sidon, as well as across the Bekaa Valley. The assassination of ISF Intelligence Chief Wissam al-Hassan was the first major car-bomb attack in Beirut since 2008,<sup>66</sup> yet since then, there have been a number of large bomb attacks in the capital, with recent explosions killing the former Finance Minister, Mohamad Chatah (a persistent critic of the Syrian regime) and striking the Shia district of Haret Hreik.<sup>67</sup> In November 2013 the Iranian Embassy was struck by a double suicide bombing<sup>68</sup> and two large car bombs targeted Hezbollah strongholds in South Beirut in July and August 2013.<sup>69</sup> Street fighting and sniping at sectarian interfaces in Tripoli has continued since August 2012, with the most recent round continuing sporadically since November 2013 and killing dozens.<sup>70</sup> In addition, in May 2013, Islamist gunmen clashed with the Lebanese Armed Forces in Sidon, leaving over 40 people dead.<sup>71</sup> Rocket fire from Syrian rebel forces regularly strikes border towns such as Hermel and Arsal in the Bekaa Valley<sup>72</sup> and Shia towns seen as Hezbollah strongholds in East Lebanon have been targeted by jihadists with a number of suicide car-

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<sup>66</sup>“Wissam Al-Hasan Assassinated in Ashrafiyeh Bomb Blast,” *op. cit.*

<sup>67</sup>“Beirut Blast Kills Sunni Ex-Minister Mohamad Chatah,” *BBC News*, December 27, 2013, available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-25524729>. See also: “Car Bomb in Beirut Kills Four, Wounds 77,” *The Daily Star*, January 2, 2014, available at: <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2014/Jan-02/242913-huge-explosion-rocks-beirut-southern-suburbs.ashx#axzz2qH7D5TJT>.

<sup>68</sup>“Lebanon Blasts Hit Iran’s Embassy in Beirut,” *BBC News*, November 19, 2013, available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-24997876>.

<sup>69</sup>“Car Bomb Kills 21 in Beirut Southern Suburb,” *The Daily Star*, August 15, 2013, available at: <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2013/Aug-15/227505-explosion-in-southern-suburb-of-beirut-witnesses.ashx#axzz2qH7D5TJT>. See also: “Over 50 Hurt As Car Bomb Hits Hezbollah Beirut Stronghold,” *Reuters*, July 9, 2013, available at: <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/07/09/us-lebanon-explosion-idU.S.BRE96807Z20130709>.

<sup>70</sup>“Sniper Fire Kills One As Clashes Flare in Lebanon’s Tripoli,” *Reuters*, January 5, 2014, available at: <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/01/05/us-syria-crisis-lebanon-idU.S.BRE A040AA20140105>.

<sup>71</sup>“Lebanese Army Storms Assir Complex, Preacher Flees,” *The Daily Star*, June 24, 2013, available at: <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Local-News/2013/Jun-24/221395-fierce-clashes-rock-south-lebanon-city-for-second-day.ashx#ixzz2X9bBrhZD>.

<sup>72</sup>“Rocket Attack Kills 8 In Arsal, Stokes Tensions,” *The Daily Star*, January 18, 2014, available at: <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2014/Jan-18/244451-rocket-attack-kills-8-in-arsal-stokes-tensions.ashx#axzz2rDvgPnS6>.

bomb attacks.<sup>73</sup> As the war in Syria has continued, the violence in Lebanon has worsened and is currently at a much more serious state than at any time during the Cedar Revolution (other than May 2008).

## Conclusion

In the three years following the Cedar Revolution, Lebanon experienced similar societal problems to those currently being felt by the Arab Spring countries across the Middle East and North Africa. Despite these difficulties, the three indicators of economy, politics and security show that, after several years of immediate instability following the uprising in 2005, Lebanon was able to overcome these issues and begin to develop successfully once more. However, the significant instability manifesting in the country, as a result of the violence in Syria, has since reversed much of progress made since the second half of 2008, with the political polarization and accompanying violence which followed the Cedar Revolution becoming particularly apparent once more.

Taking this into account, it is possible to suggest that, given time, those states currently facing political instability post-Arab Spring will be able to follow Lebanon's example and challenge their economic, political and military problems post-revolution. The key variables as to whether this will happen depend on the extent to which the economies, political environment and security situation of these countries have been damaged by their revolutions and how severe the political fragility, which is likely to affect these states for some time, is. Despite this, the fact that the measure of economic and political cohesion regained by Lebanon before the outbreak of violence in Syria has since been reversed suggests that even if the level of damage caused by revolution is lower than expected, states may still be vulnerable. In that case, it is worth noting that even those states which are able to recover from upheaval may continue to be ill-equipped to deal with further political turmoil for many years to come.

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<sup>73</sup>"Suicide Car Bomb Kills At Least Four in Lebanon's Hermel," *The Daily Star*, February 1, 2014, available at <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2014/Feb-01/246080-sound-of-explosion-in-lebanons-hermel-al-manar.ashx#axzz2wbSJQz7E> and "Suicide Bomber Kills Three in E. Lebanon," *The Daily Star*, February 22, 2014, available at <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2014/Feb-22/248183-suicide-bomber-kills-two-soldiers-in-e-Lebanon.ashx#axzz2u4YS3Zq7>.