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Constructing Security Council Resolution 1701 for Lebanon in the Shadow of the ‘War on Terror’

KARIM MAKDISI

This article argues that the ‘war on terror’ gave global meaning to the 2006 Israel–Lebanon war and to the construction of UN Security Council resolution 1701 that authorized the deployment of robust UN peacekeepers in southern Lebanon (UNIFIL). It uses a critical, discursive approach to argue that UN resolutions have embedded in them a particular, powerful discourse, in this case the ‘war on terror’. This discourse grounded a global struggle for and against US domination of the region in a local power dispute in Lebanon between 2004 and 2008. It concludes that Israel’s failure to defeat Hizbullah militarily resulted in resolution 1701 comprising two contradictory narratives that represented the battle for and against US domination, and that the subsequent battle for hegemonic articulation of this resolution weakened, rather than strengthened the Lebanese state during 2006–08, plunging Lebanon into internal strife until the signing of a national peace accord in Doha in May 2008.

The July 2006 war between Israel and Lebanon, and the truce contained in UN Security Council resolution 1701 (henceforth: ‘1701’) that also authorized the deployment of a robust contingent of UN peacekeepers, received extensive attention in Western media, policy circles and scholarly work. The bulk of this attention has focused on drawing lessons from the military dimensions of non-conventional warfare,¹ explaining the nature of the Hizbullah threat and its relationship to Syria/Iran,² analysing the role of the UN in terms of lessons learned in peacekeeping and peacebuilding in Lebanon,³ or situating the 2006 war within general trends of international law.⁴ With some notable exceptions, however, most of this work provides a static reading of both the conflict’s international–domestic nexus – unsurprisingly, given the influence of the dominant neorealist tradition that separates them into distinct spheres⁵ – as well as of the complex social dynamic that underpins construction of a weak Lebanese state.⁶ Much of this literature is framed within problem-solving analyses that assume a given received problem (for example, Hizbullah as ‘spoiler’, Lebanon as ‘weak state’) and prescribe solutions (such as strengthening Lebanon’s sovereignty) to preserve the existing order.⁷ It also largely writes away Lebanese agency and assumes the Lebanese state to be a passive victim of either Hizbullah/Syrian cooption or Israeli violence. As such, the literature generally underestimates the dynamic effect produced by the 2006 war’s wider context, namely the US-led ‘war on terror’, in which the 2006 war itself was only one, albeit dramatic, element.

This essay seeks to complicate the received view by contextualizing the battle over Lebanon between 2004 and 2008 within the larger ‘war on terror’, which, in

effect, grounded a global struggle for and against US domination of the region in a bitter but essentially local Lebanese power dispute. The global battle over Lebanon, in this sense, briefly condensed from a political/ideational struggle into a military one during the 2006 war, and Israel's failure to defeat Hizbullah returned it once more to the political/ideational realm now centred on the post-war interpretation of 1701 and the role of the Lebanese state and UN peacekeepers in its implementation. This article further analyses how the UN itself, through a series of resolutions on Lebanon, beginning with resolution 1559 in 2004 and culminating in 1701, was conscripted into this localization of a global struggle. It shows how the UN mediated between the imperatives of the 'war on terror', with its violent, post-Westphalian implications for the Lebanese state, and its own mission to preserve the Westphalian order in which it operates.

The article takes a critical discursive approach to understand how and where meaning is produced. Like all texts, UN resolutions have embedded in them a particular discourse, defined by Charlotte Epstein as a 'cohesive ensemble of ideas, concepts and categorizations about a specific object that frame that object in a particular way and, therefore, delimit the possibilities for action in relation to it'.⁸ Of course, resolutions like 1701 are not, in and of themselves, meaningful without other, related texts 'upon which they draw in constructing identities and policies, in which they appropriate as well as revise the past, and in which they establish authority by reading and citing others'.⁹ In this case, the series of resolutions, statements and diplomatic activities during the 2004–06 period collectively sought to frame Hizbullah and Lebanon/Syria in a way that would make an attack on them legitimate or normal.

As Fierke's analysis of discourse helps explain, official foreign policy texts and by extension UN resolutions 'don't stand alone from wider societal discourses but are located within a larger textual web'.¹⁰ The construction of such forms of discourse, in turn, are bound up with notions of power and thus are invariably contested.¹¹ Accordingly, competing texts vie for legitimation, such that UN resolutions for instance are ultimately given meaning through what Epstein refers to as a 'powerful discourse', that is, one that 'makes a difference' in interpreting the text itself.¹² Indeed, given the historically contingent nature of discourse, such constructs are notable for not only what they include but, perhaps more importantly, what they exclude in terms of other sets of articulations or meanings.¹³ This article explores the overlapping material and ideational contests to define this 'powerful discourse' and thereby define what constitutes a legitimate Lebanese state, the role of the UN within it, and the nature of resistance to American hegemony and Israeli dominance over the region. The outcome of these contests in the Lebanese case that this article tracks between 2004 and 2008 can help us understand Epstein's notion of a 'hegemonic articulation' that signals the victory of a particular configuration of meanings and social relations. The ultimate product of powerful discourse is 'common sense' – a 'naturalized discourse ... whose statements are experienced as "obvious", "true", and even "necessary"'.¹⁴

Moreover, as Fierke asserts, while conventional approaches to security start with an 'objective threat' independent of discourses and knowledge, critical discursive approaches emphasize the identification of a threat as a 'product of a

politics of representation'.¹⁵ In this sense, the elimination of Hizbullah, and thus of the very idea of resistance, can be seen not just as a material objective but also as an ideational one on which Israeli domination and US hegemonic stability in the region depends. Moreover, while most conventional treatments of Hizbullah in Western literature begin with the apparently objective observation that it is a 'terrorist' organization, this elides the lack of definition of the term 'terrorism' and the fact that there is a bitterly contested struggle in Lebanon and the region focused on the idea of a legitimate resistance. That is to say, this literature, by framing its approach with certain givens expressive of its own discourses, produces an analysis that neatly confirms its own initial set of assumptions.

Indeed, it must be remembered that during the immediate post-civil war period in Lebanon (1990–2004) Hizbullah was officially regarded as a legitimate and protected 'resistance' group and therefore, unlike other armed groups, entitled to carry arms as long as the state of war with Israel persisted. Syria's hegemonic position in Lebanon, accepted by the US and the international community in this period, had prevented any global debate over this special status. Between 2004 and 2008, however, following the eviction of Syria from Lebanon and an escalation in the US-led 'war on terror', Hizbullah's standing in relation to the state was sharply disputed within Lebanon and, globally, at the level of the UN Security Council in both ideational and material terms. The 'war on terror' discourse, as we shall see, essentially tried to 'de-naturalize'¹⁶ this resistance, deny it any agency of its own, and represent Hizbullah as merely a proxy of the 'terror' axis run by Syria/Iran, and re-interpret it as a 'militia' that undermined, rather than protected, the Lebanese state. Hizbullah's counter-narrative, which of course depended on the organization's material survival, projected itself as a 'Lebanese' subject working to protect Lebanon's sovereignty.

The first section of this article provides an interpretative framework showing how the 'powerful discourse' that emerged after 11 September 2001 connected Hizbullah and its assumed patron, Syria, with global terrorism. Next, the article analyses the construction of a UN-legitimated international regime, centred around resolution 1559, that translated this 'war on terror' discourse into domestic Lebanese terms, and describes the build-up towards war in 2006. The article then examines the construction of 1701, arguing that this resolution comprised two conflicting narratives about the meaning of the 2006 war and the role of the UN which made further violence in Lebanon inevitable. In the final section, the article shows how the discursive contest over interpretations of the resolution transformed the conflict in Lebanon from an international to a domestic one and how the production of a hegemonic national discourse emerged following the signing of the 2008 Doha agreement that precipitated the formation of a national unity government.

The Global Discourse of the 'War on Terror': Framing the 2006 Israel–Lebanon War

The historical roots of the 2006 Israel–Lebanon war lie within the larger Arab–Israeli conflict, but it is the US-led 'war on terror' that framed the breakdown of

order in Lebanon from 2004 to 2008 and gave the 2006 war its seminal status, and, ultimately, its most significant meaning.¹⁷ As has been well documented, Western security interests were re-imagined in the post-Cold-War era.¹⁸ The new enemy was now embodied in non-state networks that could take advantage of weak or collapsing states to undermine the existing order and, potentially, acquire weapons of mass destruction (WMDs). Liberal interventionists and neorealists in the US and Europe advocated proactive Western and UN intervention in the third world within a global liberal paradigm and in post-Westphalian terms that increasingly intertwined military and humanitarian/development agendas.¹⁹

Protected by great-power interest in regional stability, Arab states initially remained largely immune to these changes. By the late 1990s, however, they were clearly in an internal 'state of crisis': liberal reforms were exposed as failures and oppositional Islamist groups gained in popularity, utilizing the discourse and institutions of democracy to their advantage.²⁰ Arab states were no longer reliable security partners and democracy was producing the wrong results. The 11 September attacks thus allowed what Michael Mann refers to as the 'new imperialists' in the Bush administration to launch 'global adventures' and operationalize plans for a 'new Middle East'.²¹ As David Hirst notes, the US now desired to 'tackle the whole Arab/Muslim milieu from which the diabolical deed had sprung: to invade, subdue, shape and utterly transform it'.²²

Between 2001 and 2003, the Bush administration issued a series of seminal texts in order to consolidate and take advantage of US 'traumatized identity'.²³ Targeting a 'radical network of terrorists and every government that supports them', Bush made it clear that the defeat of 'terrorists' required that the US 'pursue nations that provide aid or safe haven to terrorism. Every nation in every region now has a decision to make: either you are with us or you are with the terrorists'.²⁴ The notion that there could be, for instance, liberation struggles or resistance groups independent of global terrorism was now removed conceptually from this discourse, as organizations as disparate as Hizbullah and al-Qaeda were lumped together.²⁵ In 2002, Bush invoked an 'axis of evil' to rebuke states such as Iraq and Iran that were supported by a 'terrorist underworld', including Hizbullah and Hamas.²⁶ One of Bush's goals was 'to prevent regimes that sponsor terror from threatening America or our friends and allies with weapons of mass destruction'. Syria was soon added to a list of 'rogue states' that 'sponsor terror' and sought WMDs.²⁷

The 2002 *National Security Strategy* (NSS), which operationalized the US 'war on terror', legitimated the logic of militarism, proactive regime change and the doctrine of pre-emptive attacks in the name of 'self-defence' against those deemed part of the 'terror' network.²⁸ The NSS stated unequivocally that the 'war against terrorists of global reach is a global enterprise of uncertain duration'. Accordingly, 'America will help nations that need our assistance in combating terror. And America will hold to account nations that are compromised by terror – because the allies of terror are the enemies of civilization'.²⁹ As such, these allies in the region would now include not just Israel and pro-Western Arab states (which until then had been publicly criticized in the

US for being undemocratic), but, crucially, Arab domestic political parties and alliances within ‘weak’ states such as Lebanon that could be represented as ‘democratic’. As shown below, Lebanon’s pro-US ‘March 14’ alliance formed during this period, appealed to the US in these very terms, projecting itself as the democratic alternative to Hizbullah (and thus Syria and Iran) in Lebanon.

The ‘powerful discourse’ produced by these speeches and texts was an essential prerequisite for the series of ideational battles and wars the Bush administration embarked on in the Arab region. After the 2003 Iraq War, the US gaze turned to Syria and Lebanon.³⁰ The testimonies of key figures in the US administration to Congress in autumn 2003 typically sought to establish Syria as a global ‘security concern’, since it, like Iraq, was said to be developing WMDs and also engaged in state-sponsored terrorism.³¹ These testimonies uniformly represented Lebanon simply as under Syrian ‘occupation’, with Hizbullah as a Syrian (and Iranian) proxy, a ‘terrorist organization’ with ‘global reach’.³² By December 2003, President Bush signed the ‘Syria Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act’.³³ This Act called on Syria to stop ‘undermining international peace and security’, sponsoring ‘international terrorism’ and developing WMDs. It also called for Syria to end its ‘occupation’ of Lebanon so that Lebanon could achieve ‘full restoration of its sovereignty’, ‘deploy its army in the South’ and evict all ‘terrorist and foreign forces, including Hizbullah and the Iranian Revolutionary Guards’.³⁴ In effect, this Act concretely linked the long-standing efforts of the neoconservatives within the US administration to isolate Syria and destroy Hizbullah to the ‘war on terror’ discourse.³⁵

Localizing the ‘War on Terror’ Discourse in Lebanon: The Resolution 1559 Regime

The next stage in the Bush administration’s Syria–Lebanon policy was to localize its ‘war on terror’ discourse in Lebanese domestic terms, which it did via a series of UN Security Council resolutions targeting Syria and its allies in Lebanon. These interventionist UN resolutions became a pivot around which pro- and anti-Western Lebanese politics mobilized. The most important text within this discourse was the adoption of resolution 1559 on 2 September 2004. This resolution – and the regime it set up comprising biannual implementation reports, Security Council presidential statements, related resolutions and diplomatic pressure – unequivocally set forth the basic US ‘war on terror’ narrative that the UN, for the first time, appeared to legitimize in Lebanon. In essence, resolution 1559 called for the withdrawal of Syrian army units (‘foreign forces’) from Lebanon, on the one hand, and the disarming of Hizbullah, as well as Palestinian groups (‘militias’) operating within Palestinian camps, on the other.³⁶

The resolution had been hastily arranged to pressure Syria and the Lebanese parliament to halt the latter’s imminent, scheduled vote to amend the Constitution in order to extend the term of pro-Syrian President Emile Lahoud by three additional years (until 2008).³⁷ For the Lebanese representative at the UN, this resolution’s unprecedented interference with Lebanon’s internal affairs called into question the UN’s neutrality and was summarily rejected.³⁸ That

there was a split between Lebanon's pro-Syrian alliance, which still had control of the Foreign Ministry, and Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri, who had close ties to Saudi Arabia and the West, was clear. The disagreement illustrated the deep division in Lebanon's policy-making process, which traditionally depends on consensus among the sectarian elites on matters of high politics and security, during the unfolding political and constitutional crisis. That the Security Council proceeded with the vote despite these political tensions underlined its unprecedented activist agenda in this case, and its intent to take sides with one particular domestic group over another.³⁹

The most controversial and divisive element within resolution 1559 was its stipulation that Hizbullah must disarm, thus internationalizing Hizbullah's status in Lebanon. The US Ambassador to the UN considered 'the continued presence of armed Hizbullah militia elements, as well as presence of Syrian and Iranian forces in Lebanon', the main obstacle in Lebanon, and his French counterpart decried Lebanon's 'occupation and persistent presence of armed militias'.⁴⁰ The crucial implication of such statements, incorporated into resolution 1559, was that Hizbullah was merely a proxy 'militia' and not a legitimate resistance group. The Lebanese representative at the Council made this distinction a central plank of Lebanon's official dissent, stating,

There are no militias in Lebanon. The Lebanese national resistance appeared following the Israeli occupation of Lebanese territory and will remain as long as the Israelis occupy parts of Lebanon ... The resistance forces exist alongside the Lebanese national forces; our military authorities determine their presence and their size according to our needs. The authority of the Lebanese State extends over all of Lebanese territory except the Israeli occupied areas.⁴¹

The resolution thus interposed a Security Council interpretation into a long-standing, but inconclusive national Lebanese debate about the nature of the state and its role in the Arab–Israeli conflict. Indeed, the Council's overtly interventionist agenda meant that the US–French drafted resolution mustered only a slim majority of nine in the Council, as China, Russia, Brazil and Algeria (representing Arab states) all denounced the resolution's interference in the internal affairs of a sovereign state.⁴²

Once passed, resolution 1559 embodied and deepened the civil conflict in Lebanon. Lebanon's parliament convened in defiance of the Security Council to approve President Lahoud's extension, prompting Hariri to resign but vowing to return to power. Hariri's assassination in a car bomb on 14 February 2005 paved the way for rival mass demonstrations and the formalization of two deeply divided Lebanese coalitions, the 'March 14' and 'Opposition' blocs, who were nonetheless still partners in a coalition government.⁴³ 'March 14' representatives echoed US, EU and Israeli accusations that Syria and its Lebanese allies within the Lebanese–Syrian security apparatus were behind Hariri's murder and called for the implementation of resolution 1559.⁴⁴ For its part, the Opposition blamed those powers behind resolution 1559 as the main beneficiaries of the assassination. Indeed, for Hizbullah leader Hassan Nasrallah the 'option of the

resistance' and '1559' projects were mutually exclusive.⁴⁵ The Security Council once again controversially intervened in domestic Lebanese matters, internationalizing Hariri's murder and its investigation in a manner that was then unprecedented in UN history.⁴⁶ Mobilized by the US and France, the Council immediately dispatched a fact-finding mission to Beirut, which within one month had issued a controversial report, based largely on circumstantial evidence, blaming Syrian and Lebanese security agents for Hariri's murder.⁴⁷ This, in turn, led to the adoption in April 2005 of resolution 1595 setting up a UN investigating commission with a mandate to help the Lebanese government find the 'perpetrators, sponsors, organizers and accomplices' behind this 'act of terrorism'.⁴⁸ The UN appointed the controversial German prosecutor Detlev Mehlis, whose name was to become synonymous in opposition circles with US neoconservative and Israeli agendas, as its first investigator.⁴⁹ In October a ministerial meeting of the Security Council passed resolution 1636 under Chapter VII of the UN charter, defining Hariri's murder as a 'terrorist' act, calling for Syria's 'unconditional cooperation' with the investigation and insisting 'that Syria not interfere in Lebanese domestic affairs'.⁵⁰ In effect, this internationalization of the Hariri assassination investigation, which now also included periodic reports and high-profile diplomatic activity against Syria and Lebanon's pro-Syrian allies, led to its overt politicization and incorporation into resolution 1559's regime.

Semi-annual Secretary-General reports, associated Security Council presidential statements, and actions by Western diplomats in 2005–06 further reinforced the 1559 regime. Indeed, the UN Special Envoy appointed to follow up on resolution 1559 was the controversial Norwegian diplomat Terje Rød Larsen, who, like Mehlis, was viewed by the Lebanese opposition as a core member of the US neoconservative team. In effect, Larsen's reports enabled the Security Council to actively interpret Lebanon's constitutional provisions and pronounce on convoluted domestic Lebanese matters at a time of deep and potentially violent constitutional and political crisis in the country. In his very first implementation report, Larsen appeared to override Lebanon's national decisions, as well as its ongoing political process, by considering Hizbullah a 'militia' rather than a legitimate 'resistance' group, and suggesting that the resolution to Lebanon's problems with Israel lay with disbanding Hizbullah rather than ending Israeli aggression.⁵¹ Further reports and related diplomatic action by Western states effectively de-legitimized the extension of President Lahoud's term as president, insisted that Lebanon hold parliamentary elections on schedule and without delay in 2005 despite warnings by many civil society groups that 'free and fair' elections could not be held without electoral reforms, and called for the 'disbanding and disarming of Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias and the extension of government control over all Lebanese territory'. The Security Council also pressured Lebanon to establish full diplomatic relations with Syria, demarcate the Lebanese–Syrian border and deploy its armed forces throughout southern Lebanon.⁵² Unsurprisingly, these provisions comprised the core of the 'March 14' political agenda in Lebanon.

On the eve of the 2006 war, Security Council pressure on Lebanon and Syria to fully implement resolution 1559 was unrelenting.⁵³ In March, the Council

passed resolution 1664, establishing a tribunal of ‘international character’ to try the Hariri assassins, still presumed to be Syrian and Lebanese security officials.⁵⁴ In May, resolution 1680 called on Syria to take measures ‘against movement of arms’ into Lebanon, to delineate its common borders and to establish ‘full diplomatic relations and representation’ with Lebanon.⁵⁵ All in all, from the adoption of resolution 1559 to the start of the 2006 war, the Security Council adopted ten resolutions and seven presidential statements – and published ten highly visible UN Secretary-General’s implementation reports dealing with Lebanon (and Syria).⁵⁶ This discourse, framed within the larger discursive context of the ‘war on terror’, substantively shifted the global context within which Hizbullah’s actions would now be interpreted, something Hizbullah apparently failed to grasp in the summer of 2006.

The 2006 Israel–Lebanon War: ‘Powerful Discourse’ Elevates South Lebanon from Local to Global

During the 1990s, Israel maintained its two-decade occupation of southern Lebanon, launched two minor invasions and engaged in a war of attrition against the Lebanese resistance. Although these events were extremely important on the domestic level in Lebanon and Israel, their impact remained contained, as the great powers did not confer meaning to them. The Clinton presidency (1992–2000) was focused on Iraq and the ‘peace process’, and the international community thus took little interest in Lebanon’s sovereignty.⁵⁷ Even Israel’s May 2000 withdrawal from Lebanon after 22 years of occupation, so significant in local terms, did not elicit a global reaction beyond UN technical certification of the withdrawal to the ‘Blue Line’ and rhetoric about the need for Lebanon to deploy its army along the border.⁵⁸ With the regional order unchanged, Lebanon firmly rejected the UN certification claim, pointing to Israel’s frequent incursions into Lebanon’s territory, airspace and territorial waters. Lebanon’s deployment of a ‘Joint Security Force’ to southern Lebanon in August 2000 remained deliberately outside the border area: ‘[t]he Government of Lebanon has taken the position that, so long as there is no comprehensive peace with Israel, the army would not act as a border guard for Israel and would not be deployed to the border’.⁵⁹ Successive Lebanese governments, supported by Syria, continued to unequivocally uphold Lebanon’s right to resist Israel’s occupation and retrieve prisoners held in Israeli gaols.

Southern Lebanon remained generally calm during the period immediately following Israel’s withdrawal, the UN peacekeepers (UNIFIL) recording no serious breaches of the ceasefire in populated areas between May 2000 and November 2005.⁶⁰ The root causes of the Lebanon–Israeli conflict, however, had not been resolved. Israel maintained its objective of pacifying Lebanon and creating a demilitarized zone in the south, and Hizbullah openly declared its intention to secure the release of Lebanese prisoners held in Israeli gaols. After several botched operations in 2004–05 to capture Israeli soldiers to exchange for Lebanese prisoners, Hizbullah declared 2006 the ‘year of the prisoners’.⁶¹ On 12 July 2006, a Hizbullah unit crossed the Blue Line and attacked an

Israeli army patrol near the border, capturing two Israeli soldiers and killing three others.⁶² Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert accused Lebanon of an ‘act of war’, while the Lebanese government officially requested that the UN broker a cease-fire.⁶³ Hizbullah, however, only agreed to return the captured Israeli prisoners through ‘indirect negotiations’, conducted via a third party mediator such as the UN or Germany, that would lead to their ‘trade’ with Lebanese prisoners detained in Israeli prisons.⁶⁴ For its part, the UN Secretary-General condemned Hizbullah’s raid but called on all sides to ‘exercise maximum restraint’ to ‘avoid any further escalation’.⁶⁵ The following day, the Secretary-General dispatched a team of three senior UN diplomats to the region to reinforce his ‘call to exercise restraint and to do whatever possible to help contain the conflict’.⁶⁶

Given the new ‘war on terror’ imperatives and discourse, however, Hizbullah’s raid took on new meaning in global terms. The UN’s calls for restraint were ignored by Israel and dismissed by the US. The apparent failure of the resolution 1559 regime to produce results (namely, disarm Hizbullah and weaken the Syrian regime) was blamed by US neoconservatives on the more pragmatic, diplomatic side of a US administration hoping for a ‘slow-motion’ toppling of the Syrian/Lebanese regime, or ‘regime change on the cheap’.⁶⁷ They supported, instead, Israel’s use of force to ensure the implementation of resolution 1559.⁶⁸ In this sense, Hizbullah’s 12 July raid represented an appropriate opportunity for the US administration, increasingly frustrated in Iraq, to reinvigorate its plans for a ‘new Middle East’ with a quick victory in Lebanon. The 2006 war thus became a defining battle, even a proxy war, in the ‘war on terror’. By 14 July, Israel’s declared aims included the elimination of Hizbullah and implementation of resolution 1559.⁶⁹ Israel now explicitly framed its war in Lebanon within the ‘war on terror’ discourse. Accordingly, senior Israeli foreign ministry spokespersons, such as Gideon Meir, repeated that Israel ‘views Hamas, Hezbollah, Syria and Iran as primary elements in the axis of terror and hate, threatening not only Israel but the entire world’. For Israel, Meir explained, Hizbullah’s actions proved it was part of ‘an international effort to wage holy war against the infidel’.⁷⁰

During the first week of the war, the US insisted that no UN action should be taken before Israel could accomplish its objectives.⁷¹ Following the ‘war on terror’ logic, it was imperative that Hizbullah be destroyed but, equally, that the pro-US Lebanese government remain protected: Prime Minister Siniora was ‘on a list of “good guys” working against the axis of evil’.⁷² Accordingly, the US vetoed Israel’s initial plan to destroy Lebanon’s civilian power stations, government buildings and affluent areas in the downtown district, which would have immediately damaged Siniora’s standing in Lebanon.⁷³ The G-8 Summit communiqué of 16 July further supported Israel’s actions and blamed the ‘extremist’ Hizbullah for the war, called for the implementation of resolution 1559 but warned Israel not to undermine Lebanon’s government by attacking civilian infrastructure.⁷⁴

In his first briefing before the Security Council on 20 July, Kofi Annan legitimized Israel’s war against Hizbullah, but drew the line at what the UN, along with European and Arab states, saw as Israel’s unnecessarily ‘disproportionate’

violence that had caused a humanitarian disaster and, more importantly, weakened the standing of the Lebanese government: 'I have already condemned Hezbollah's attacks on Israel, and acknowledged Israel's right to defend itself under Article 51 of the UN Charter ... I also condemn Hezbollah's reckless disregard for the wishes of the elected Government of Lebanon, and for the interests of the Lebanese people and the wider region'.⁷⁵ Given that, at best, the debate within the international legal community was divided over Israel's claim of self-defence and Lebanon's right to resist, Annan's unilateral and unreserved support of the US–Israeli position can be seen as an important symbolic reinforcement of the 'powerful discourse' of the 'war on terror'. The debate was now about the extent to which Israel's violence and resulting civilian casualties undermined the ability of Lebanon's government to play its role as a 'good' actor within the Westphalian order of sovereign states in the post-war phase. In other words, for Annan the UN role was now limited to ensuring that the US administration's post-Westphalian intervention in Lebanon did not repeat the catastrophic breakdown of order and security vacuum in post-war Iraq. This, in turn, would support rather than expose what David Chandler refers to as the post-Cold War practice of an 'empire in denial' and its 'invasive' core project of state-building. This project, reflecting a 'new hierarchy of Western power', creates what Chandler calls the 'phantom state whose governing institutions may have extensive resourcing but lack social and political legitimacy'.⁷⁶

On 26 July, Annan finally called for an 'immediate cessation of hostilities because we face a grave humanitarian crisis', blaming Hizbullah's 'reckless' actions for the war and accusing it of 'deliberate targeting of Israeli population centres', but also requesting that Israel 'end its bombardments, blockades and ground operations'. Annan also called for the deployment of an 'international force' that could play a 'vital role' and 'assist' the Lebanese government in implementing resolutions 1559 and 1680, 'in particular by helping the Government to extend its authority – including a monopoly of the use of force – throughout the country, strengthen the Lebanese Army and disarm all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias'.⁷⁷ At the end of his speech, Annan revealed the key role he felt the UN could play in the region to keep US support: 'we need a new push for a comprehensive Middle East peace ... We need a peace track here [in Lebanon], too – not least to help remove a pretext used by extremists throughout the region, including in Lebanon'. In other words, the UN role would be to build 'peace' in Lebanon and the region to 'remove' pretexts used by 'extremists' and thus preserve an order that fitted Western security interests. This formula, behind which the UN, EU and some Arab governments rallied, was premised on a growing realization that Hizbullah could not be defeated, and thus sought above all else to preserve Lebanon's government within the Westphalian order.

By the end of July, the tide of the war had shifted decisively against Israel, and the US was losing faith in Israel's capability to destroy Hizbullah. The US tried to salvage its position by co-sponsoring a draft resolution on 5 August authorizing the deployment of a NATO-style peace enforcement operation explicitly under Chapter VII terms with a main objective to disarm Hizbullah.⁷⁸ The Lebanese government, which was under huge domestic pressure given the civilian

casualties, could now no longer accept such terms without the explicit approval of Hizbullah. On 11 August, after several days of negotiation and amidst increasing Israeli military frustration, the Security Council unanimously passed 1701, which came into effect three days later.

A Tale of Two Narratives: (De)Constructing Resolution 1701

The negotiation of 1701 reveals two deeply contested and apparently contradictory narratives that are embodied in the resolution's final text. This contradiction, in turn, resulted in a heated post-war battle over 1701's interpretation and UNIFIL's new role. The first narrative draws from the resolution 1559 regime discourse and represents Lebanon as a weak state and Hizbullah as the principal threat to both Israel's security and Lebanon's sovereignty. The resolution holds Hizbullah fully responsible for the war and effectively recognizes Israel's right to self-defence in pursuing the war option.⁷⁹ Thus, according to Annan, Hizbullah's 'unprovoked attack on Israel' resulted in Israelis being 'newly awakened to a threat' they thought they had 'escaped' with Israel's unilateral withdrawal from Lebanon in 2000. In this UN account, Hizbullah, unlike Israel, 'launched its fire indiscriminately, to sow the widest possible terror, making no effort to distinguish between military and civilian targets and also endangering civilians on its own side by firing from the midst of heavily populated areas'.⁸⁰ UN and US narratives on the causes of the war had fully converged, US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice adding that Hizbullah 'and its sponsors' have 'brought devastation upon the people of Lebanon, dragging them into a war that they did not choose and exploiting them as human shields'.⁸¹ The crucial part of this narrative was to reaffirm the constructed split between Hizbullah and Lebanese 'citizens' who, in Annan's words, were trying to 'consolidate their country as a sovereign, independent, and democratic State'. Lebanon, as a result of this split, 'has been a victim for too long'. To make the distinction even more explicit between Hizbullah as 'spoiler' and Lebanon as 'victim' in need of 'empowering', the resolution's text and sponsors deliberately contrasted Hizbullah's role with the positive one played by the Siniora government in negotiating the terms and extending its authority 'such that there will be no weapons' without its consent and 'no authority' other than that of the government.⁸²

Operationally, 1701's core objective according to this narrative, premised on Lebanon's assumed status as a 'weak state', is to strengthen Lebanon's 'sovereignty', sealing (and delineating) its border with Syria, disarming Hizbullah and replacing it with up to 15,000 members of Lebanon's armed forces: in other words, to implement resolutions 1680 and 1559. As Annan explained, 'only when there is one authority, and one gun will there be a chance of lasting stability'. To accomplish its task, 1701 called for the deployment of an 'enhanced' contingent of up to 15,000 UNIFIL troops, largely composed of and led by EU and NATO members Italy, Spain, France and Germany.⁸³ UNIFIL's new 'robust' mandate authorized it to 'take all necessary action ... to ensure that its area of operations is not utilized for hostile activities of any kind'.⁸⁴ As Rice made clear, 1701 allows the 'democratic Government of Lebanon to expand its

sovereign authority, as called for in resolution 1559. It will do so by creating a new international force' that 'will not be the same force' as the 'current' UNIFIL. This 'new stabilization force' was to deploy with Lebanon's armed forces to 'protect the Lebanese people and to ensure that no armed groups like Hizbullah can threaten stability'. Indeed, although UNSCR 1701 was a Chapter VI resolution, its text includes Chapter VII language that clearly recalls the earlier, defeated 5 August draft.⁸⁵

The second narrative that emerged during the negotiation of 1701 contested the one-sided language and interventionist impulse of the resolution's final text. Resolution 1701, according to the Qatari Foreign Minister at the Security Council, 'lacks balance and overlooks the accumulated, complicated, historical, social and geopolitical factors' that contextualize the war, fails to condemn 'Israeli aggression against innocent civilians in Lebanon and Lebanese infrastructure' and 'does not clearly spell out Israel's legal and humanitarian responsibility for that destruction or address in a balanced manner the question of Lebanese prisoners, detainees, and abducted persons in Israeli jails'.⁸⁶ In this narrative, it is not Lebanon's 'weakness' and Hizbullah's 'terrorism' that are the main source of the problem, but rather, in the words of Lebanon's acting Foreign Minister, Israel's 'perennial threat to Lebanon's security'⁸⁷ and the failure to achieve what 1701 refers to in its penultimate paragraph as a 'comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East' based on long-standing UN resolutions.⁸⁸

Operationally, this dissenting narrative rejects the post-Westphalian elements borrowed from resolution 1559 and thus all international interference in Lebanon's domestic sphere. As a result all direct references to Chapter VII of the UN charter were removed from the final text, and instead of an 'international force' with an enforcement mandate to disarm Hizbullah and secure the Lebanese–Syrian border, as the 5 August draft had demanded, the existing UNIFIL was expanded in terms of scope and mandate but remained a traditional operation. As French Foreign Minister Philippe Douste-Blazy made clear, 'the mandate that the Security Council is giving UNIFIL is not one that imposes peace. UNIFIL will help the Lebanese Government in several of its missions'.⁸⁹ Crucially, as the Qatari Foreign Minister stressed, the resolution 'assigns sole responsibility to the Lebanese Government for dealing with the armed phenomena in the South', an area 'subject to the exclusive control of the Lebanese Government'. Thus UNIFIL could only be authorized to 'monitor the cessation of hostilities', 'accompany and support the Lebanese army as they deploy throughout the South', and otherwise assist in humanitarian issues.⁹⁰ In this narrative, then, UNIFIL could not 'secure the border' with Syria, or actively seek to disarm Hizbullah without *explicit* instructions from the Lebanese government, in which Hizbullah and its allies were still represented. Finally, in this narrative, it is the Westphalian substantive elements incorporated vaguely into 1701 to which UNIFIL was expected to devote itself, namely, Israeli withdrawal from remaining Lebanese territory including Sheba'a farms, the return of Lebanese prisoners and the halting of all air, land and marine violations of Lebanese territory.

Conclusion: The Battle for Hegemonic Articulation of 1701 in Lebanon

Israel's failure to defeat Hizbullah militarily and thus allow the US to impose the 1559 regime on Lebanon, and Hizbullah's inability to challenge the 'war on terror' discourse on the global level, produced a resolution with no apparent hegemonic narrative at its adoption. Resolution 1701 had effectively evolved over the course of its negotiation from one whose interpretive fate would have been determined by an activist Security Council operating under the shadow of the 'war on terror' to one in which the main interpretive responsibility lay on the Lebanese government, which Hizbullah continued to participate in and have some leverage over. Israel, Hizbullah and the Lebanese government all understood that, shorn of explicit Chapter VII and peace enforcement references that earlier drafts had flirted with, the text of 1701 contained mere words on paper. The devil would be in the resolution's official interpretation by the Lebanese state, which could now be transformed into a violently contested site for representation. Indeed, the often violent political and ideational battle for 'hegemonic articulation' of the two conflicting narratives embedded in 1701 dominated Lebanon for nearly two years until the conclusion of the Doha Accords in 2008.

In Lebanese discourse, 1701, and with it the role of UNIFIL peacekeepers, was contested from the start. The pro-US 'March 14' coalition warmly welcomed 1701 as a key political instrument with which to restore Lebanon's sovereignty, leverage international support against Hizbullah domestically and extricate Lebanon, once and for all, from both the Arab-Israeli conflict and Iranian/Syrian sphere of influence.⁹¹ The Hizbullah-led Opposition coalition, for its part, considered the US-Israeli project to crush the resistance and create a pliant Lebanese state as the main threat to Lebanon's sovereignty, and only reluctantly accepted 1701. The months after the passage of 1701 were very tense in Lebanon, focusing, on the one hand, on UNIFIL's new mandate and, on the other, on the nature and role of the resistance in Lebanon. Unlike the original UNIFIL, the post-2006 UNIFIL with its new, much publicized 'robust' rules of engagement was viewed with deep suspicion by residents of southern Lebanon and by Hizbullah.⁹² Spanish and French contingents, in particular, faced local protests as they attempted to impose their own proactive interpretation on the UNIFIL mandate by searching homes aggressively for illegal weapons. However, following a roadside car bomb in June 2007 which killed four Spanish peacekeepers, UNIFIL troops as a whole retreated to their bases and they have largely adopted a much less aggressive posture in southern Lebanon since then. Indeed, the UN's rapidly expanding political office increasingly turned to state-building exercises as it effectively accepted the Westphalian limits to the 1701 mandate.

Hizbullah's victory on the battlefield during 2006, however, did not immediately translate into domestic political gains, as the 'March 14' coalition, neo-conservatives within the US administration and UN envoy Larsen continued to promote the 1559 regime and its campaign to force Hizbullah's disarmament and isolate Syria. Effectively, the conflict that had taken on an international military dimension during 2006 had now shifted to Lebanon's constitutional

institutions and their authority to legitimate, or deny the claims of, an armed resistance and its relationship with the national armed forces. This bitter internal conflict resulted in sectarian clashes, the collapse of the national unity government in November 2007 and the creation of an unprecedented constitutional vacuum in which the Siniora government continued to be recognized by the West and yet denied legitimacy by the domestic opposition.⁹³

In May 2008, after the Siniora government unilaterally passed a controversial decree to dismantle Hizbullah's communication network, a move Hizbullah claimed threatened its very survival, opposition militias took to the streets of Beirut and within hours had routed the 'March 14' militias, while the Lebanese army remained neutral. The US protested but did not interfere and, with the Bush administration's second term coming to an end, Lebanese politicians signed an agreement in Doha under Qatari and Arab League patronage and endorsed by the UN Security Council.⁹⁴ This agreement set out the terms of a new national unity government, the election of a compromise president and the dates for new parliamentary elections. The result of the Doha agreement was thus the re-incorporation of Hizbullah into the Lebanese government and the reaffirmation of the resistance as a national project that could coexist with the Lebanese armed forces. As the Hizbullah MP Ali Fayyad made clear, the deployment of the Lebanese army to southern Lebanon did not represent the strategic shift in army or government doctrine which 'March 14' leaders, and the US, had wanted.⁹⁵ Moreover, a new government of national unity was formed in November 2009 with a clear mandate to implement the non-controversial elements of 1701, that is, shorn of the remnants of resolution 1559, and asserting Lebanon's right to resist Israel's occupation and threats.

The Doha agreement, and Barack Obama's election as US president and the rapprochement of Syria with Saudi Arabia and Europe, represented the end, for now, of Lebanon's meaning in global terms and its return, in discursive terms, to its local framing. Hizbullah had decisively won the battle for 'hegemonic articulation' of 1701 in Doha, but the threat of renewed war continued to loom as tension over Iran's WMD programme grew, and with it the possibility of Lebanon once more becoming 'meaningful' in global terms.

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NOTES

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36. UN Security Council resolution 1559, S/RES/1559, 2 Sept. 2004.
37. Lebanon’s constitution allows for a one-term presidency lasting six years.
38. UN Security Council, S/PV.5028, 2 Sept. 2004.
39. Resolutions passed in the 1986–2004 period dealt exclusively with routine matters related to the extension of UNIFIL’s mandate.
40. UN Security Council (see n.38 above).
41. Ibid.
42. Ibid. It should be noted that France under President Jacques Chirac went along with the US for two main reasons: to aid in rebuilding the Franco–American relationship following the tense stand-off during the US war on Iraq, which France opposed; and Chirac’s close personal and business relationship with Rafiq Hariri, who, by 2004, needed Syria out of Lebanon to consolidate his power. In Lebanon resolution 1559 is referred to as comprising two parts: a ‘French’ part (calling on Syria to withdraw) and a ‘US’ part (calling on the disarming of Hizbullah).
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