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## The Assassination of Rafik Hariri: Foreign Policy Perspectives

ROBERT M. BOSCO

**ABSTRACT.** The assassination of foreign leaders is rarely considered by scholars of international affairs. This article examines the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri and the debates around the international tribunal formed to investigate it. It argues that the assassination of Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri is an instance of how issues of foreign policy intersect with the perennial themes of international organization and law. It pays particular attention to how the international norm against political assassinations remains a contested issue in international politics.

*Keywords:* • Foreign policy • Rafik Hariri • Assassination  
• Lebanon • Syria

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### Introduction

“Ethical concerns usually place assassination off limits as a policy option,” writes Ward Thomas (2000: 105). Indeed it would seem that in the customary practice of international affairs, the murder of foreign leaders is generally regarded as a less than optimal means by which to conduct foreign policy. Yet whatever the strength of the international norm against assassination, state-sponsored political assassinations are frequent occurrences in international politics.

Powerful states in the international system often deliberately use political assassinations to control or liquidate real or perceived challenges to their geopolitical hegemony. In this sense political assassinations have been and remain an important (if secretive) feature of the foreign policies of states. One can see this, for example, in the pattern of assassinations of leaders of liberation movements in Africa and the Middle East by former colonial powers. The assassinations of Mehdi Ben Barka of Morocco (1965) and Felix Moumie of Cameroon (1960) remain unsolved and are presumed to be linked to French intelligence services (Brittain 2006). Amilcar Cabral of Cape Verde (1973) was assassinated by Guineans working for Portuguese intelligence services. Patrice Lumumba of the Congo, killed on

January 17, 1961 had been the target of numerous assassination attempts by the CIA, and his assassination was finally carried out by agents of the Belgian government working in concert with US intelligence (Brittain, 2006: 66). Such “selective and systematic” political assassinations against liberation movements may well have impacted the historical trajectory of a number of countries in Africa and the Middle East by “robbing them of some of their great leaders and weakening their important political organizations” (Brittain, 2006: 61).

One may also note the history of assassinations by South Africa’s apartheid-era defense forces of anti-Apartheid activists, scholars, journalists, and lawyers, which were carried out not only in South Africa but also in Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, and Europe. Finally, there is the long string of Israeli assassinations of Palestinians since the mid-1970s. To this day, targeted political assassinations are employed by both sides in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. In fact, one scholar argues that the 2001 assassination by Israel of Abu Ali Mustafa, Secretary General of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, “was a turning point in the twenty-first century’s open espousal of assassination as a political tool” (Brittain, 2006: 72). Ward Thomas observes that “in recent decades evidence has mounted that the norm against assassinating foreign leaders may be waning” (Thomas, 2000: 22). Indeed, the gradual accumulation of cases like the ones above, as well as more recent events such as the assassination of Rafik Hariri in Lebanon (2005) and Benazir Bhutto in Pakistan (2007), suggest that political assassinations are an enduring feature of international politics despite the existence of generally recognized norms of nonintervention in both customary and codified international law.

Given the frequency with which political assassinations are used by states as a policy tool in their foreign relations and the important questions political assassinations raise about the force of international norms, it is surprising that political assassinations have received so little attention from scholars of international politics. With a few exceptions (Thomas, 2000; Iqbal and Zorn 2006), one must generally look to sociologists for insights into political assassinations in international affairs (Ben-Yehuda, 1997; Brittain, 2006; Wilkinson, 1976). Comparative political research on assassinations, once quite rich in the 1970s, is now dated (Crotty, 1971; Havens et al., 1970; Kirkham et al., 1970). One possible reason for the relative neglect of this topic by scholars of international politics may have to do with how assassinations feature in the popular imagination. Political assassinations tend to appear in the popular imaginary as secretive activities of state intelligence services: dark, dirty, and almost impossible to research adequately. Or they may appear as singular events perpetrated by rogue (perhaps criminally insane) “terrorists” that may occasionally impact international politics quite seriously, but largely remain isolated and peripheral events on the international political scene. Yet the examples mentioned briefly above suggest that political assassinations are far from peripheral in the foreign policies of states in the international system.

Moreover, although both state and nonstate actors may engage in either terrorism or political assassination, the two phenomena are not synonymous. The analytical boundary between terrorism and political assassination is surely difficult to maintain consistently in every instance. This is partly because both political assassinations and terrorist acts may share similar objectives. Generally speaking, however, political assassination refers to the targeting of a specific individual or group of individuals, while terrorism does not (Ben-Yehuda, 1997: 28).

Keeping this distinction in mind, this article uses the events surrounding the 2005 assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri to make the case that political assassinations are an important feature of international politics and deserve more attention from scholars in the field. More specifically, I argue that, unlike many other well-known cases of state-sponsored political assassinations, the killing of Rafik Hariri does not fit comfortably into two of the more important theoretical perspectives on foreign policy. After demonstrating why, I move on to make a greater point: that the assassination of Rafik Hariri and the developments after it are an instance of how multiple actors in the contemporary international system, such as domestic interest groups, states, nonstate actors, and international organizations, tangle with each other over the meaning and construction of an international norm, specifically, over the definition and scope of the norm against political assassinations. In other words, the story of the assassination of Rafik Hariri is the story of how matters of foreign policy intersect with the perennial themes of international organization.

### Empirical Overview

#### *Setting the Stage: Understanding Lebanese–Syrian Tensions*

The following empirical discussion provides the reader with a brief overview of the political developments following Lebanon's civil war (1975–1990) that led up to Hariri's assassination. Although familiar to regional specialists, an overview of this sort is necessary to give the basic background for Hariri's rise to power in Lebanon, to highlight the tensions between Hariri and Syrian-backed Emile Lahoud, and also to understand the emergence and formation of cross-border connections among Syrian and Lebanese security bureaucracies and the antagonism between them and Hariri.

Syrian intervention in Lebanese affairs has a long and complex history. Following Sinai II in the late 1970s, Syria under Hafez Al-Asad attempted to draw Lebanon under its "political-strategic wing" (Hinnebusch, 1984: 311). During this period Syria sought to play the role of "balancer" between rival interest groups within Lebanon and to thus reconstruct the Lebanese state along lines more amenable to Syrian control (Hinnebusch, 1984: 313). Yet it was the 1989 Ta'if accords that ended Lebanon's fifteen year civil war and definitively established Syrian influence in Lebanon's internal affairs (Nizameddin, 2006: 95). The Ta'if accords left the presidency of Lebanon in Maronite (Christian) hands, while the post of prime minister was thereafter to be held by a Sunni. During this period Emile Lahoud was not yet president of Lebanon but commander-in-chief of Lebanon's army. Syria tightened its grip over Lebanon when it offered to send troops to assist the United States to liberate Kuwait from Sadaam Hussein, and the United States returned the favor by tacitly accepting Syria's dominant role in Lebanon (Nizameddin, 2006: 99). Emboldened by this move, Syrian forces operating in Lebanon with the support of the Lebanese army ousted Lebanon's first post-Ta'if prime minister, Michel Aoun. While Lebanese prime ministers came and went following this episode, Syria exerted increasing influence over Lebanese foreign policy. Eventually Lebanese foreign policy was "governed by the notion of privileged relations between Lebanon and Syria," which in effect meant that Lebanese foreign policy "should always concur with that of Syria" (El Khazen, 2003: 613).

Meanwhile, Syria worked to strengthen its massive security infrastructure in Lebanon. Pro-Syrian army commander Emile Lahoud cultivated connections with Syrian military intelligence, while Lebanon's Interior Minister Michel Murr established a powerful security network in Lebanon that periodically harassed and imprisoned opponents of the Syrian regime (Nizameddin, 2006: 100). In this can be seen the seeds of the creation of the Lebanese–Syrian security apparatus, a cross-border force with its own independent interests that became an important “actor” in the assassination of Hariri.

In 1992 Rafik Hariri took over as Lebanon's prime minister with the support of Saudi Arabia and the United States. Hariri, a Sunni Muslim, was a successful businessman who had converted his large fortunes gained in Saudi Arabia into billions of dollars' worth of construction and commercial interests in Lebanon (Harris, 2007: 39). Hariri's projects were not simply aimed at self-enrichment. His construction companies OGER and SOLIDERE were, for example, developed with the intention of reconstructing Lebanon's infrastructure following the civil war and focused especially on the rebuilding of war-damaged Beirut (Cooke, 2002: 408). Noting Hariri's status as an independently wealthy businessman with multiple commercial concerns and high-level connections in Europe and the United States, some have argued that his “money power” aroused jealousy in Lebanon's “overcrowded, superheated political arena” (Harris, 2007: 39). Regarding Syria, Hariri recognized that to reconstruct Lebanon he would have to accept Syrian supremacy in security affairs to some extent, yet his great wealth, enormous popularity, foreign connections, and privatization initiatives would ultimately isolate him from Lebanon and Syria's cross-border security apparatus. The power of Syria's security forces stemmed in large part from the Asad family and extended into Lebanon through the Syrian military intelligence commander there and down to a group of Lebanese security heads. It is plausible that Hariri's popularity and foreign connections meant that the leaders of this cross-border security apparatus felt that they would never be able to fully trust him (Harris, 2007: 40).

In 1998 Emile Lahoud became Lebanon's president, aligned himself with Hizbullah, and picked his own man as prime minister (Michel Huss). This of course heightened already existing tensions between Hariri and Lahoud. Throughout the time Hariri spent out of office in Lebanon's political opposition (1998–2000), Lahoud embarked on an extended campaign to discredit Hariri and his liberal economic ideas. Lahoud used Hariri's personal wealth, for example, as a contrast to his own “man of the people” image (Nizameddin, 2006: 101).

When Hariri returned as Lebanon's head of government in 2000, he resumed his attempts to gain foreign support for his privatization initiatives. French President Jacques Chirac openly stated his support for Hariri's reforms. The wrangling over privatization between Hariri, Lahoud, Syria, and Lebanon's security apparatus is important, because nationalizing key sectors (or keeping them nationalized) would confirm Syrian control over Lebanon, as much of Lebanon's public sector (particularly telecommunications) was managed by the pro-Syrian military-security apparatus under the watchful eye of Lahoud and Bashir Asad (Nizameddin, 2006: 106). Indeed, Hariri's efforts to privatize much of Lebanon's public sector, as well as his outspoken resistance to government corruption, would “clash directly with Syria's determination to maintain a strong grip over Lebanon that was aided by the loyal Presidency of Emile Lahoud” (Nizameddin, 2006: 95). The role of Syrian President Asad also deserves some comment. As his father grew

increasingly ill in the late 1990s, Asad became personally concerned with Hariri's outspokenness, liberal economic vision, and his connections to older Syrian political factions that Asad wished to sweep aside in his own ascent to power, an ascent that was by 2000 a *fait accompli*.

By 2004, the year before Hariri's assassination, two distinct and competing power alliances had emerged between, on the one hand, Syrian President Bashar Asad, Lebanese President Lahoud, and the cross-border security forces and, on the other, Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri and his domestic (Druze and Maronite) and international (United States, France, and Saudi Arabia) supporters. Hariri and Lahoud spent 2000–2004 in a state of constant and open conflict. Part of the problem in this period was Syria's attempt to override the Lebanese constitution, according to which Lahoud's presidential term was set to expire in September 2004. Syria's attempts to extend Lahoud's term had both domestic and international repercussions. Extending Lahoud's term would, of course, allow Syria to keep its man in Beirut, but in 2003 the United States had made it clear that Syria, accused of allowing Islamic radicals to cross into Iraq, was to withdraw from Lebanese affairs. Forcing the extension of Lahoud's term in office would thus send a clear signal to the United States of Syria's opinion on this matter, and also leave no doubt whose side Syria was on in the United States–Iraq conflict. Although Hariri openly opposed the extension of Lahoud's term throughout 2004, he eventually relented shortly before his resignation from the post of prime minister in October of that year. Throughout this period Lebanon's pro-Syrian factions accused Hariri of deliberately attempting to undermine Syria's position by "relying too much on Western participation in the country's reconstruction process" (Nizameddin, 2006: 97). Thus the stage was set for a confrontation between Hariri and the factions supporting him and the Syria–Lahoud alliance and the cross-border security apparatus that undergirded it, a tension that would culminate in the assassination of Hariri in February 2005.

### *The Assassination of Rafik Hariri*

On the morning of August 26, 2004 Rafik Hariri was summoned to Damascus for a ten-minute meeting with Syrian President Bashar Assad, itself not an unusual occurrence. Here is the Syrian version of that meeting according to Rustum Ghazali, the head of Syrian intelligence in Lebanon:

On his return trip from Damascus after meeting with President Assad ... he [Hariri] looked relaxed ... he said that his meeting with Assad was cordial and brief ... Assad told him ... "today I am dealing with you as a friend and as the Prime Minister of Lebanon ... we are of the view that it is in the interest of Lebanon to maintain the continuity of the regime by extending the term of office of President Lahoud. As a friend, I would like you to clarify your position on this matter. We are in no hurry to know the answer, and you may wish to think about it at your convenience." (United Nations Security Council [UNSC] S/2005/662: 16).

And here is the Lebanese version according to Marwan Hamdeh, former Lebanese prime minister:

I saw that his motorcade was back by 1 p.m. which meant that the meeting in Damascus was pretty short. We saw Mr. Hariri and he looked tired. He was sweating. He told the four of us that President Lahoud was to be reelected or

“he will have to pay a high price”. He reported Assad saying to him: I will break Lebanon on your head and Jumblat’s head. (UNSC S/2005/662: 16).

Walid Jumblat, the leader of Lebanon’s Druze party (PSP), had joined forces with Hariri in an anti-Syrian alliance in the years leading up to Hariri’s assassination. Hariri’s son reported:

I discussed the situation with my father. He told me that Assad threatened him, telling him, ‘this is what I want. If you think you and President Chirac are going to run Lebanon, you are mistaken. It’s not going to happen. President Lahoud is me. Whatever I tell him, he follows suit. This extension is to happen or I will break Lebanon over your head and Walid Jumblat’s ... so either do as you are told or we will get you and your family wherever you are. (UNSC S/2005/662: 17).

On September 3, 2004 Rafik Hariri’s bloc, which included Lebanon’s Maronite Christian and Druze parties (the latter led by Jumblat), approved the extension of Lahoud’s term. Four days later, Lebanon’s ministers of economy, culture, refugee affairs, and environment all resigned, followed a month later by Hariri himself. On February 14, 2005, at 12:50 p.m., Hariri and 22 other individuals were killed in an explosion in downtown Beirut. A United Nations fact-finding mission arrived in Beirut to investigate the assassination on February 25, 2005. Exactly a month later, the mission released its report in New York, and more reports followed. One observation common to many of the reports is particularly relevant here. According to UN report 775, dated December 12, 2005:

Given the extent to which the Syrian and Lebanese intelligence services infiltrated daily Lebanese life ... there was little probability that a third party could have undertaken the necessary surveillance of Mr. Hariri and maintained the resources, logistics, and capacity needed to initiate, plan and commit a crime of that magnitude without the knowledge of the Lebanese security forces and their Syrian counterparts. (UNSC S/2005/775: 11)

The same report expressed concern that Syria withheld information, scuppered interviews, or canceled them at the last minute, all the while denouncing the UN investigation as “politically motivated” (CBC News). By December 17, 2005, the chief UN investigator, Detliv Mehlis, had told an Arab newspaper he believed that Syria was directly responsible for Hariri’s assassination (CBC News). By the end of 2005, 19 suspects had been identified, including 5 high-level Syrian security officials and 4 Lebanese generals. Although the investigation into Hariri’s assassination is ongoing, the protracted history of Syrian involvement in Lebanon and the continued formation and development of cross-border interest groups aligned with Syria sketched briefly here suggest that cross-border cooperation between Lebanese and Syrian security elements remains a plausible framework within which to account for Hariri’s assassination.

### **The Assassination of Rafik Hariri: Foreign Policy Perspectives**

Most, if not all, of the examples of state-sponsored political assassinations mentioned at the outset of this article were matters of foreign policy. What is at issue in these past cases is the tension between an international norm (against assassination) and the desire of actors within states to protect or further what they

perceive to be in the national interest or what they might perceive to be in the interest of their own bureaucracies. However, Hariri's assassination cannot be understood solely from a foreign policy perspective. In this section, I briefly show why this is the case. Here I do not take into account all current theoretical frameworks for foreign policy analysis (FPA). I focus only on two frameworks that naturally suggest themselves as relevant: first, the bureaucratic politics model and then the domestic interest group model.

According to Jutta Weldes (1998), the classical bureaucratic politics model popularized by Graham Allison (1969) holds that an actor's preferences, perceptions, and influence "correlate highly with bureaucratic positions", and that "a decision-making process may be understood as a bargaining situation in which players 'pull' and 'haul' to promote their organizational interests, with the net result that governmental decisions do not reflect the intentions of any player in particular" (Weldes, 1998: 218). Although Weldes directs her own constructivist critique at the model's framing of interests, its conception of power, and its understanding of rationality, the bureaucratic model helps us to understand the important role played by rival bureaucratic actors within and across states. The overall point of this approach is that bureaucracies have their own vested interests, and so scholars of foreign policy should not simply assume the existence of a unified "national interest" that can explain foreign policy decision-making. Bureaucracies are shelters for a variety of competing interests, agendas, and commitments (Snyder et al., 2002). Foreign policy decisions are often the outcomes of precisely this complex process of competing bureaucratic interests and agendas within states (Allison, 1971; Allison and Zelikow, 1999).

United Nations report 203 of 2005 (hereafter referenced as UNSC S/2005/203) provides a rare insight into the bureaucratic structure and operation of the Lebanese and Syrian security forces. Syrian Military Intelligence maintains a branch in Lebanon, and this branch "played a key role in Lebanese political life and had active involvement in, if not direct supervision of, the management of security affairs in Lebanon" (UNSC S/2005/203: 7). Yet even the Syrian–Lebanese cross-border security apparatus is far from a monolithic entity. In theory, all of the security forces coordinate with each other as members of the Lebanese Central Security Council chaired by the Minister of the Interior. In practice, things seem to follow a different pattern. First, "coordination among agencies is almost nonexistent", and, second, "reporting lines follow personal and political loyalties rather than constitutional arrangements" (UNSC S/2005/203: 8). Sensitive information, it is suggested, is not necessarily passed to those to whom it should be passed. Rather, sensitive intelligence information is passed by heads of the individual security agencies to "those who appointed them, to whom they have loyalty" (UNSC S/2005/203: 8). The report concludes: "there is very little, if any, accountability other than that based on informal and extra-constitutional loyalties" (UNSC S/2005/203: 8).

As the series of high-profile assassinations of liberation leaders in the Middle East and Africa demonstrates, cross-border cooperation between security agencies is common enough in cases of state-sponsored political assassination. Yet even if a bureaucratic politics perspective is a fruitful approach to take to examples of state-sponsored political assassination, the case of Rafik Hariri is certainly less clear cut than most. The fact that Syria was probably involved in some way in Hariri's

assassination does not itself invalidate a bureaucratic politics explanation, but it is difficult to tell whether the complicated cross-border security alliances should be considered as Syrian, Lebanese, neither, or both. There is also some ambiguity as to whether this particular bureaucracy should be considered a state or a nonstate actor. If it is an open question exactly how the Syrian–Lebanese cross-border security bureaucracy should be defined and to whom it is accountable, then it is unclear whether the model of bureaucratic politics can help us fully understand why Hariri was assassinated, by whom, and how the decision-making process occurred.

A domestic interest group perspective holds generally that domestic interest groups affect whether a state adheres to or defects from international agreements and that an actor's domestic political standing impacts their ability to keep or break promises or agreements on the international stage (Putnam, 1988: 460). For Risse-Kappan (1991) domestic interest groups and coalition-building processes are important variables in explaining constraints on elite foreign policy decision-making.

Multiple interest groups in Lebanon exist that may have played some causal role in Hariri's assassination. After Hariri's resignation following the extension of President Lahoud's term in office, an opposition bloc coalesced under the leadership of Hariri, Walid Jumblat, and Michel Aoun, the exiled Maronite leader. Hariri was also able to bring in Lebanon's large and influential Sunni community. By the end of January 2005, a month before Hariri's assassination, there was "a formidable power bloc emerging in Lebanon bringing together for the first time representatives of almost all political and religious communities, with the noted exception of the Shi'ite groups Amal and Hizbollah" (UNSC S/2005/203: 7). This bloc was independent from, if not hostile to, the Syrian presence in Lebanon and "enjoyed the support of key players in the international community" (UNSC S/2005/203: 7). On February 14, 2005 Hariri was assassinated. The anti-Syrian coalition led by Hariri and Jumblat obviously threatened the interests of Syria and may have played a role in a Syrian decision to assassinate Hariri, but we do not know the extent to which this is true. Neither do we know whether the anti-Syrian bloc constructed under Hariri's leadership also threatened the interests of the combined cross-border Syrian–Lebanese security apparatus, members of which themselves had ties with Lebanese financial and business communities threatened by Hariri's anti-corruption efforts. A domestic interest group model certainly plays an important role in understanding the case, but cannot by itself explain Hariri's assassination. For what a domestic interest group model may not be able to capture is the role played by the Syrian–Lebanese cross-border security bureaucracies and the links between these structures and other domestic interest groups in Lebanon, and the Syrian executive, a complex of forces which may ultimately have led to Hariri's assassination.

The useful but limited applicability of the foreign policy models I have briefly reviewed here stems not just from crucial ambiguities regarding the role of cross-border security apparatuses and the certain but ultimately unclear role that Lebanese domestic interest groups played in the assassination of Hariri. In addition, Syria's long history of intervention in Lebanon's domestic and international affairs no doubt suggests that the relationship between Syria and Lebanon is a special one. Syria's continuing attempts to influence Lebanese foreign policy makes it

debatable whether Lebanon can be considered to have an independent foreign policy regarding Syria or, for that matter, the region. In contrast to many other well-known examples of political assassination, the case of the assassination of Rafik Hariri is clearly unique.

The story of Hariri's assassination and the events surrounding it is not simply the familiar one of a political assassination carried out by a nation-state to further its foreign policy interests. Rather, it is the story of how matters of foreign policy intersect with the perennial themes of international organization. To demonstrate this I now turn to how the events that followed Hariri's assassination – especially the debate surrounding the tribunal charged with investigating his killing – moved the case from a purely foreign policy issue to one in which domestic interest groups, states, nonstate actors, and international organizations tangled with each other over the meaning and construction of an international norm, specifically, over the content and scope of the norm against political assassinations. It is ultimately this that makes the assassination of Rafik Hariri a compelling one for scholars of international politics.

### **Normative Complexity and Contestation over the Hariri Tribunal**

Hariri's assassination set in motion a variety of events. Massive protests in Lebanon against Syrian intervention in Lebanese affairs electrified Beirut. Government officials and citizens alike called for the resignation of pro-Syrian members of Lebanon's parliament, its prime minister, the complete withdrawal of Syrian forces from Lebanon, the removal of Lebanese intelligence officials, and an international tribunal to investigate Hariri's assassination (Knio, 2008: 447). The political scene in Lebanon fractured into two loose coalitions. The "March 14" coalition was an alliance between Sunni, Druze, and Maronite members. The second coalition, the "March 8" coalition, was composed of the two biggest Shi'ite movements in the country, Hezbollah and AMAL, and a Christian-based front, the Free Patriotic Movement. Each coalition had a very different interpretation of the meaning and significance of Hariri's assassination and the international criminal tribunal formed to deal with it.

On May 30, 2007 the United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 1757, establishing the Special Tribunal for Lebanon. According to the United Nations, Hariri's assassination was not only a domestic event, but could also be considered a threat to international peace and security. The tribunal was thus created under Chapter VII of the UN Charter. The way in which this came about caused great controversy in Lebanon. The UN accepted the idea that the Hariri tribunal should be created under Chapter VII of the Charter, but political debate in Lebanon over which branch of government had the proper authority to approve the tribunal led to a UN ultimatum: Lebanon's government must approve the tribunal by June 10, 2007 or the tribunal would become a *fait accompli* (Knio, 2008: 449).

The March 8 coalition argued that because the tribunal was created under such circumstances, it violated the sovereignty of Lebanon. The coalition denounced the tribunal as "an attempt by external actors to impose a new political order" (Wierda et al., 2007: 1066). Part of the reasoning behind this objection concerned the definition of Hariri's assassination. The March 8 coalition argued in effect that foreign powers such as the United States and France had pressured both the

United Nations and political groups inside Lebanon to define the assassination of Hariri as an international crime, and hence a threat to international peace and security (Wetzel and Mitri, 2008: 101). So defined, the tribunal could be formed under Chapter VII of the UN Charter. According to the coalition, such a move gave unbridled license to foreign powers and international organizations to intervene directly in the balance of power within Lebanon and, by extension, in Lebanese–Syrian relations.

In May of 2007 US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice defended the imposition of the Hariri tribunal on the grounds that the international community, “consistent with its pledge to help the Lebanese people achieve their vision of a free and democratic Lebanon, will use every means at its disposal to further justice” (Dow Jones, May 8, 2007). Shortly after, the United States ambassador to the UN claimed that, by unilaterally adopting the resolution to establish the tribunal, the UN Security Council had “demonstrated its commitment to the principle that there should be no impunity for political assassination, in Lebanon or elsewhere” (Solomon, 2007). The UN’s decision to impose the Hariri tribunal, and thus the international norm against political assassination, on Lebanon in the absence of much consensus concerning the matter may be seen as an extension of United States foreign policy, as the Bush administration pushed for the tribunal as part of its wider strategy to pressure Syria to abandon its alleged support for extremist groups across the region. Moreover, both the US and France viewed the Hariri tribunal as an important means by which to rid Lebanon of Syrian influence. This is a perfect example of how the norm against assassination often “reinforces the position of great powers relative to other states and nonstate actors” (Thomas, 2000: 107).

From the perspective of the March 14 coalition, the Security Council had to act under the auspices of Chapter VII to demonstrate that the international community was committed to fighting impunity for political assassinations. There are many interesting aspects of the coalition’s argument. Generally, the March 14 coalition and those in Lebanon who supported the creation of the Hariri tribunal under Chapter VII of the UN Charter appeal to the moral authority of international organizations. For example, in “A Lebanese Perspective on the Special Tribunal for Lebanon” Choucri Sader argues that defining Hariri’s killing as a “terrorist” crime and thus a crime against humanity will constitute a “prologue” to subjecting terrorist crimes to international criminal law (Sader, 2007: 1089). Sader goes on to write that “we deeply hope that the Special Tribunal will serve as a model to resurrect the openness, transparency, integrity and independence of our judicial system and permit compliance with the highest standards of international justice” (Sader, 2007: 1089). Sader is here making a moral argument for the Hariri tribunal, which hinges upon defining Hariri’s killing not only as a political assassination but also as a crime against humanity. The norm against political assassination, bolstered by this redefinition, would “trickle down” through legal channels and help make Lebanon’s domestic legal system more just. Sader makes a powerful moral argument here about the ability of international organizations to rejuvenate domestic systems of justice. In contrast, according to the March 8 coalition, defining Hariri’s killing as an international “terrorist” act essentially justifies the intervention by great powers and international organizations like the UN in Lebanon’s sovereign affairs.

Such debates about the purpose and effectiveness of the Hariri tribunal depend on how Hariri's killing is defined. The argument that the Hariri tribunal has a moral function, i.e. to redress wrongs, to rehabilitate Lebanon's system of justice, and to further strengthen the international norm against political assassination, depends in large part on blurring the distinction between political assassination and terrorism. We can see how this fundamental matter of definition functions in the discourse of the March 14 coalition. From their point of view, if Hariri's killing is defined as an act of terror with international repercussions and hence as deserving of investigation under Chapter VII, this will help to bolster Lebanese sovereignty vis-à-vis Syria. Walid Jumblat made this argument, declaring that the UN Hariri tribunal is the only way to punish and deter the Syrian regime, thereby helping Lebanon to "establish its authority in all its territory" (Jumblat, 2006: 30). In fact, the March 14 coalition developed in large part around precisely this discourse about the reaffirmation of Lebanese sovereignty in relation to Syria. Initially, two of its major groups, the Sunni Future Movement and the Progressive Socialist Party, had been "arch supporters" of the Syrian regime throughout the 1990s (Knio, 2008: 450). Hariri's assassination changed this. It shifted the nature of their political alliances and "enshrined their new vision of an independent state capable of exerting the sole monopoly of violence across its own territories" (Knio, 2008: 450). For the March 14 coalition, the international Hariri tribunal is a way to achieve this. The intention here is to work with international organizations like the UN to establish, expand, and then internalize an international norm to help bolster the country's internal sovereignty and achieve independence in foreign policy making.

It is no surprise that debates over the assassination of Rafik Hariri reflect fundamental differences on the meaning and definition of political assassination. The characterization of an event as a political assassination, an execution, or an act of terror is always a political, social, and cultural construction (Ben-Yuhuda, 1997: 28). The United Nations, the March 14 coalition, and the March 8 coalition all define the assassination of Hariri differently. For the March 14 coalition it is desirable that Hariri's assassination be defined as an international, terrorist crime. The coalition's arguments essentially appeal to the objective existence of an international norm against political assassinations of this kind. In the end, however, the United Nations did not define Hariri's assassination beyond the very general notion that the assassination was an affront to international peace and stability (thus allowing Chapter VII of the UN Charter to come into force). Instead, the Hariri tribunal will rely on Lebanese law to define Hariri's assassination. In fact, the Hariri tribunal is unique because it is "the first international criminal court which will try persons who are accused solely of violating domestic, not international criminal law" (Milanovic, 2007: 1139). Ironically enough for those who viewed the tribunal as a way to enforce the international norm against assassination, deter Syria, and bolster Lebanese sovereignty, "the tribunal is notable for its failure to incorporate international norms" (Milanovic, 2007: 1128).

## Conclusion

In conclusion, there is no doubt that political assassinations will continue to be used by states in the international system as important if secretive techniques of foreign policy. Political assassinations are often used to liquidate or silence

emerging challenges to the hegemony of powerful states in the international system, or to usurp other nations' ability to carry out their own foreign policy. Yet theoretical perspectives on foreign policy, or at least the two briefly reviewed here, may take us only part of the way toward understanding the range of issues raised by political assassinations in today's world. As the case of the assassination of Rafik Hariri shows, the international norm against political assassination and the very definition of political assassination itself remain open questions. In closing, one may note that the case of Rafik Hariri may no longer be unique: Pakistan has approached the United Nations to form a similar tribunal to investigate the 2007 assassination of Benazir Bhutto. Thus there may be another case on the horizon in which scholars of international affairs must pay attention to the ways in which the foreign policies of strong and weak states in the international system intersect with the perennial themes of international organization and law.

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