



THE POLITICS AND LIBERATION OF LEBANON

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For 30 years, political events in Lebanon were dominated by Syrian occupation until 2005, when the Syrian army withdrew under international pressure. Yet the national future of Lebanon remains clouded in doubt and tension, as acts of terror against anti-Syrian elements continue, the March "Cedar Revolution" is stymied, and the country totters between freedom and political paralysis and breakdown.

Events in Lebanon in the first half of 2005 altered the political state of affairs concerning Syria's long occupation of that country. Yet the outcome of these events is still unclear and fluid. This article analyzes the history of the Lebanon issue and prospects for creating a new, more equitable and stable order given the dramatic changes which have taken place.

STAGES AND METHODS IN SYRIAN OCCUPATION OF LEBANON

The hegemonic notion of Greater Syria provides the ideological and historic underpinnings for Damascus's drive to eliminate Lebanese independence.¹ Among its tools in realizing this goal was the Saiqah Palestinian faction established in 1968. In April 1969, in the midst of tension between the Lebanese government and Palestinian forces, Syria moved several hundred Saiqah fighters to the border with Lebanon.² This was a mere prelude to the December 1975 Syrian decision to move both Saiqah forces and the Qadisiyya and Hittin brigades of the Palestine Liberation Army (PLA) to the Baka Valley and north Lebanon in order to contain and regulate the chaos emerging from

Lebanese/Maronite-Palestinian fighting in Beirut and Mount Lebanon.³

By June 1976, Syria also sent its own army into Lebanon to dominate the country and subdue it to the will of Damascus. Manipulating the complex fighting scenario in Lebanon, Syrian-Palestinian cooperation against the Christian community became the major motif. For example, in February 1980, the Syrians turned over the western area from Damur to the Zahrani to the PLA, along with heavy military equipment.⁴ On July 20, 1976, following the launching of Syria's direct military intervention in Lebanon, Hafiz al-Asad gave an historic speech in which he declared that "[throughout] history, Syria and Lebanon have been one country and one people"--a political melody that would continue to accompany this foreign conquest.⁵

The Lebanese National Movement (LNM), consolidated under the leadership of the Jumblatt Druze clan in 1976, became another vehicle for the Syrian penetration of Lebanon. A combination of leftist personalities and groups--including Ba'thists and Communists--sought to exploit the Palestinian insurgency in and against Lebanon for their own domestic political ambitions.⁶ However, Kamal

Jumblatt, an aristocratic landlord in socialist garb, wanted Lebanon to remain independent: "We do not want to be a satellite state," he wrote to Asad.⁷ In response, Syrian operatives were sent to assassinate Jumblatt in 1977, and the LNM lost its independence, submitting to Asad and becoming a lever of Damascus against the Christian population. Its traditional platform included a demand to redistribute power away from the Christian communities in favor of the Muslim and Druze communities, to equalize regional government expenditures and investments, and to move toward a secular non-sectarian political system. Kamal's son, Walid, led the LNM and its core party element, the Progressive Socialist Party.

The mechanism of the Arab Deterrent Force (ADF), as proposed by the Arab League at the October 1976 Riyadh and Cairo conferences, became another mode for Syria's emerging domination of Lebanon. Ending hostilities and collecting weapons, in addition to supervising Lebanese-Palestinian relations, were the ADF's primary purposes. Syrian forces were the overwhelming military component, and so the ADF legitimized Syria's presence on Lebanese soil in pan-Arab dress. Thereafter, the Syrians subdued the leftists, Muslims, Druze, Palestinians, and Christian camp, each according to Syrian interests and timing.⁸ Syria's creeping expansion became the fundamental political reality in Lebanon.

Already in 1976, Asad had established his sway over Lebanon, which enabled him to impose Elias Sarkis, then-governor of the Central Bank, as the president. The Chamber of Deputies met on April 10, 1976. Those present unanimously agreed to amend the constitution in order to move up the election and then voted to make Sarkis president.⁹ Asad became both the source of political power and the terminator of those

he opposed. This included the assassination of President-elect Bashir Gemayel in September 1982 and that of President René Moawad in November 1989.

Syrian control over Lebanon was comprehensive in three respects. First, by the 1990s, the Syrians had achieved an exceptional level of domestic pacification, with hardly any expressions of political opposition and little popular street protest. This was due to the flight of political figures abroad and also due to Syria's policy of physical elimination of anyone who dared challenge the absolute rule of the Asads. The assassinations of Gemayel, Shaykh Hassan Khalid, Dany Chamoun, as well as those of Lebanese Forces activists Ramzy Irani and Pierre Boulos demonstrated that point.

Second, the Syrians were very adept in masking Lebanon with a veneer of normal social, political, and cultural life. Beirut bustled, the radio blasted, and hotels were full. However, underneath the surface, the Lebanese lived in fear of voicing their opinions. A large enough number of high-profile Maronites willingly served as an elite front to hide the national infirmity. Among senior Lebanese Forces personalities, Samir Geagea gave approval to the Ta'if Accord, Elie Hobeika crossed the lines from his Israel connection to become a Syrian collaborator, and Fouad Malek ultimately succumbed to line up with the Syrians. Other well-known Maronites--Boutros Harb, Carlos Edde, Nayla Moawad, and Robert Ghanem--followed suit when they made the pilgrimage to Damascus in 2004 in order to seek Bashar Asad's support for their presidential ambitions. Adept Syrian cooptation of Lebanese politicians broadcast a message of normalcy and accommodation across the national and international airwaves.

Third, Syria did allow the minimal opposition to act as an escape valve for

Lebanese grievances. Therefore, when Member of Parliament Fares Soueid insisted in an April 2004 newspaper interview that Syria should withdraw all its troops from Lebanon, not a political ripple was noticeable.¹⁰

Finally, the Syrians were very adept at preventing any international pressure against their policy. No global protest to Syrian occupation of Lebanon was heard for over 25 years.

Military & Security

The Lebanese national army was under absolute Syrian control. In an interview in the summer of 2004, Syria's Prime Minister, Muhammad Naji Otri, defined this situation as "total coordination between the Lebanese and Syrian armies."¹¹ Syria's military presence was felt even in the outlying regions of Lebanon, and its intelligence surveillance agencies penetrated throughout society--both urban and rural. Telephone-tapping and widespread use of informers spread a net of fear throughout the country.

Hundreds of Lebanese citizens were abducted. Among them, many were tortured, imprisoned, and transferred to the notorious Syrian Mezze prison, while others were sent to the Palmyra prison in the desert, never to be heard from again. The 1992 abduction of well-known Lebanese Forces fighter Boutros Khawand was one well-known instance of Syria's methods.¹² With five Syrian detention facilities from Tripoli in the north to Anjar in the west, the image of Lebanon as one big prison was hardly an imaginary notion.

Political & Judicial

The entire Lebanese political system was subjugated as well. Elections and the choice of officials were largely in Syrian hands, though a few independent voices

were audible, such as that of the late Albert Mukheiber in the Chamber of Deputies. A striking example of election interference concerned the independent-minded Gabriel Murr, brother of Michel Murr, minister of the interior and a Syrian ally. He defeated his Syrian-supported opponent (Michel's daughter and Gabriel's niece, Myrna) in a by-election for a legislative seat in the Metn region of Mount Lebanon in June 2002.¹³ Yet within days the election results were overturned and Myrna Murr was declared the victor. Later, the Lebanese authorities closed down Gabriel Murr's television station, sending scores of people into unemployment.

Syria's grip over Lebanon--its political personnel and government decisions--began in 1976 and continued through 2005. In the parliamentary election period of September 2000, Walid Jumblatt had charged Syria with maintaining this system by sowing discord among Lebanese communities, though forecasting that Syrian intervention could not last. He said, "It is not normal that [the Syrians] intervene everywhere, in the labor unions, in public life, at the level of the press, and in the name of security."¹⁴

The eminent rector of the Universite de St. Joseph in Beirut, Selim Abou, explained how Syrian rhetoric was the reverse of reality. In this system of doubletalk, Syria "defends" rather than occupies Lebanon, whereas were the Lebanese army to replace Hizballah along Israel's border, this would be said to serve Israel's interests rather than manifest Lebanon's sovereign rule. The Syrian presence was constantly justified by the formula that it is "legal, necessary and temporary."¹⁵ In 2002, Selim Abou noted, "There was a time when our [army] officers used to specialize in France and in the United States. For a decade, they have been completing their training in Syria with, in

addition, a course in Ba'athist indoctrination."¹⁶

Damascus was the locus of power in Lebanon. In October 2003, for example, a steady stream of political traffic to Damascus included Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri and Deputy Prime Minister Issam Fares, who traveled to Bashar Asad. Hariri again went to the Syrian capital in January 2004 to announce the goal of "full integration on the economic level between the two countries."¹⁷ Commander of the Lebanese Army, General Michel Suleiman, arrived in April 2004. MP Robert Ghanem also beseeched Bashar Asad in June 2004.¹⁸

Syria never recognized Lebanon's independence from 1946, refusing to establish diplomatic relations or to exchange ambassadors. In 1950, when Lebanon was a free country, it rejected economic integration with Syria. However, from the 1990s, it became enmeshed in the economic embrace of Syria. Thus imperialism and colonialism functioned under the guise of a shared nationalism. At the UN, Walid Maalouf, a member of the U.S. delegation to the United Nations who is of Lebanese extraction, saw that Lebanese diplomats only acted when ordered to do so by Syrian counterparts.¹⁹

Lebanese collaborators mouthed Syrian policy as if it were an authentic expression of Lebanese views and interests. Speeches and newspaper articles regularly called for an end to U.S. occupation of Iraq and Israeli occupation of Palestine without ever mentioning a word regarding the Syrian occupation of Lebanon.²⁰ In May 2004, Lebanese Foreign Minister Jean Obeid even protested American sanctions imposed on Syria for its occupation of Lebanon, which he said interfered with the "continuous and deep coordination between the two sisterly countries, Syria and Lebanon."²¹ Hariri expressed similar sentiments at the time.²²

The military courts served as an

instrument of Syria's grip on Lebanon and charged political opponents of Syria's control and occupation--including the present author--with crimes against the state. Calls for an independent judiciary expectedly went unheeded. Col. Ghazi Kana'an, the strongman who managed the occupation regime for many years, was known to send orders regularly to the judges.

Society & Economics

Syria restricted free expression of political opinion in the media, the universities, and "the street." Intimidated, the press was careful not to antagonize the ruling regime and cross the "red lines" of what was forbidden to say or discuss. Closing seven newspapers and one magazine in West Beirut in 1991, and arresting journalists--notably Pierre Atallah before his subsequent escape to Europe--was Syria's way to censor and subdue the media. The 1980 assassination of Riyad Taha, president of the Lebanese Press Association who had declared that 90 percent of the Lebanese people support the Lebanese Army rather than the ADF and Syrian Army, signified the strangulation of the written word. Books from abroad were banned.²³

To silence opposition voices, only pro-Syrian figures received licenses to operate a broadcasting station; other stations prudently exercised self-censorship. Expectedly, Hizballah's al-Manar television network broadcast with full Syrian approval. By contrast, the shutting down of MTV television in September 2002 was an act of arbitrary censorship in the country.

The Syrians exploited the Lebanese economy in order to launder illegal monies, by flooding the labor pool with migrant Syrian workers, and by dumping cheap Syrian products in the markets. Under Syrian occupation, Lebanon accumulated a

national debt of more than \$20 billion. Another development in recent years was mass foreign Arab purchase of properties in Lebanon. Investors from Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, and other Arab countries acquired 841,506 sq. meters of land in Lebanon in 2003--a new record. In the traditional Christian Maronite area of Bikfaya, Kuwaitis secured a large stretch of real estate.²⁴

The Arabization of Lebanon in its foreign policy, the Syrianization of Lebanon in its domestic ambiance, and the Islamization of Lebanon in its cultural environment, threaten to eradicate the historic identity of the ancient Lebanese people. Its Christian character may be dissolved and its liberal enterprising spirit numbed. When the Lebanese government agreed to issue a naturalization decree that awarded Lebanese nationality to 350,000 foreigners, mainly Syrian Muslims, it was clear that Syria sought not only to control or exploit Lebanon, but also to eliminate its collective identity and existence. Lebanon, always the least "Arab" of the Arab states, was an irritable challenge to the integrity of the very notion of an Arab World.

THE LAHOUD PRESIDENTIAL CONTROVERSY

The summer 2004 presidential elections in Lebanon provide a good example of how the Syrian-dominated system worked near its end. Emile Lahoud was to finish his term in November. However, the Syrian regime procrastinated between choosing a successor or extending Lahoud's presidency as it had done in 1995 when it extended the tenure of President Elias Hrawi, his predecessor. Meanwhile, Lebanese Maronite politicians visited Damascus to discuss with Bashar Asad their chances of winning the highest office. In late August, the Syrians decided to extend Lahoud's

mandate by three years through a constitutional amendment. The United States, Lebanese diaspora organizations,²⁵ and the Maronite Church, openly opposed this step which flaunted Syria's absolute control. The Church's bishops convened under Patriarch Sfeir and issued a forthright statement on September 1, 2004, complaining that Syria, "gives orders, appoints leaders, organizes parliamentary and other elections, elevates and drops whoever it wants... interferes in [Lebanon's] administration, judiciary, economy, and particularly politics."²⁶

Nonetheless, on September 3, 2004, 96 of 128 parliamentary deputies approved the necessary amendment to Article 49 of the Lebanese Constitution that limits the presidential office-holder to a single six-year term. Gebran Tueni, editor of *Al-Nahar* in Beirut, described the maneuver as the "crucifixion of democracy." Other dissenting domestic Lebanese voices were also audible. Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri resigned in protest. The Lebanese Forces Party opposed Lahoud's regime because it had turned the country into a "police state."²⁷ Walid Jumblatt and his Democratic Gathering faction as well as the Christian Qornet Shehwan group expressed their opposition to the Lahoud extension.²⁸ As an act of protest, two hundred journalists from various Beirut newspapers signed a petition at the Journalists' Syndicate in Beirut against the amendment.

In contrast, the pro-Syrian *al-Safir* had explained Syria's goal as maintaining stability and political continuity in Lebanon.²⁹ Former Prime Minister Salim al-Hoss commented that the United States opposed the constitutional amendment "not in defense of Lebanon's national interests, but in order to exert diplomatic pressure on Syria."³⁰ Allies of Lahoud and the Syrians voiced support for the amendment, among

them Karim Pakradouni, head of the pro-Syrian Phalange Party; Transportation Minister Najib Mikati; and Labor Minister and leader the Syrian Social National Party Assaad Hardan. Hizballah, the militant Shi'a party, stated approvingly that Lahoud's name had always been associated with the national resistance against Israel.³¹

Of special interest was the joint communique issued by the most senior Muslim religious personalities calling for free political elections. The Sunni spiritual leader and mufti of Lebanon, Muhammad Rashid Qubbani, and the official Shi'a spiritual leader Shaykh Abd al-Amir Qabalan, vice-president of the Higher Shi'a Council, stressed the importance of respecting the constitution and allowing the election results to reflect "the will of all Lebanese."³² But that communique was watered down under Syrian pressure, and the two clerical figures later commented that elections do not concern the religious leadership.³³

THE CHANGING AMERICAN POSITION TOWARD LEBANON

During the George W. Bush presidency, the United States began to alter American policy toward Lebanon that for many years had followed the line of "constructive engagement" with Syria.³⁴ In the 1970's, when oil, money, and arms cemented the "special relationship" between Washington and Riyadh, the Saudis provided diplomatic and financial support for Syria's creeping intervention in Lebanon.³⁵ The Saudi regime also aided the PLO with annual financial allotments of approximately \$100 million during the 1970s.³⁶ Thus, Riyadh supported the PLO's armed insurrection against Lebanon, in particular against the Christian population and militia forces, while Washington favored Syria's role in 1975-76, especially in order to pacify the southern areas of Lebanon.³⁷ While the

Palestinians destabilized the delicate political and social balance in Lebanon, in 1976 the Saudis mediation legitimized Syria's military control of Lebanese land by establishing the Arab Deterrent Force as a cover for Syrian control. Washington praised Syria's role in Lebanon as constructive, while coordinating with Saudi Arabia the regional Arab balance between Egypt and Syria.³⁸

The United States thereby accepted the deterioration of Lebanon's independence, even proposing Christian resettlement abroad.³⁹ On the other hand, Israel's invasion of Lebanon in June 1982--designed to destroy the PLO as a military force--produced an opportunity to change the situation in Lebanon. With Israel, having radically altered the status quo, the international community could then demand the removal of all foreign forces (Syrian, Palestinian, Iranian, and Israeli). This became the basis of the Habib Plan of August 20, 1982, named after the special U.S. diplomatic emissary to war-torn Lebanon, which proposed "the withdrawal of all non-Lebanese forces from Lebanon."⁴⁰ In the words of Lebanon's UN Ambassador Ghassan Tuani, "Lebanon should be left to the Lebanese and the Lebanese alone."⁴¹

In this spirit, the Beirut government decided not to renew the mandate of the Arab Deterrent Force which had been a front for Syria's occupation army since 1976. In September 1982, President Amin Gemayel made an official request to the Arab League demanding that Syrian (and Palestinian) troops be withdrawn. Moreover, the Arab leaders who met in Fez, Morocco on September 8 had in fact recognized the Lebanese government's demand to end the ADF's mandate.⁴² However, Syria refused to withdraw in 1982 and again in 1984, despite Israel's extensive pullback. Syria persevered in

controlling most of Lebanon.

The political trajectory of American policy toward Lebanon was bound to the Riyadh-Damascus connection. The Ta'if Accord of October 22, 1989, which the United States orchestrated with the Saudis, formalized Syrian domination of Lebanon. Any withdrawal of Syrian forces from Lebanon was conditioned by mutual agreement and partially muted by the term "redeployment." The accord called for national reconciliation among the various communities. State Department official David Satterfield was at Ta'if and many observers believe the United States was in effect a partner in the agreement.

It was reported in September 1989 that the United States had no interest in (Syrian) withdrawals. Indeed at Ta'if a month later, the Saudis and Americans quickly got to work on the Christian deputies, largely bypassing the issue of Syria's hegemonic role in Lebanon. All 31 Christian deputies present voted in favor of the accord.⁴³ From a strategic point of view, Washington wanted to demonstrate that it could please Syria in ways that the Soviet Union, a close ally of Damascus, could not. With Ta'if defining Lebanon as having "Arab affinities and an Arab identity," and establishing "preferred relations with Syria,"⁴⁴ the possibility of recovering Lebanese sovereignty would be dependent upon the whims of Damascus.

Among Lebanese Christians, opinion on the Ta'if Accord was divided. General Aoun and the Guardians of the Cedars opposed it, while the Maronite patriarch and Samir Geagea, heading the Phalange Party, were in favor. The Sunni and Shi'a religious establishments in Lebanon were pleased that Ta'if equalized confessional representation by abolishing Christian predominance in the Chamber of Deputies.⁴⁵ Hizballah opposed the

agreement which maintained, said Husayn al-Musawi, "Maronite privilege." Similarly, Nabih Berri, the head of the Shi'a Amal group (Hizballah's main competitor in that community), condemned "political Maronism" because of the retention of the presidency as a Maronite fiefdom.⁴⁶ Yet the traditional Maronite-Sunni linkage appeared to withstand Ta'if.

A vivid illustration of Washington's cold orientation toward Lebanon resonated at the House of Representatives hearings in June 1997 when Congressman Benjamin Gilman finally asked Acting Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs David Welch whether he considered Lebanon to be an independent government. Welch answered, "Yes," but another witness, former Lebanese president Amin Gemayel, declared that Lebanon was a "Syrian client state."⁴⁷ He explained that a foreign leader made the fundamental decisions of political importance for Lebanon. Yet this was a foreign leader whom the United States wanted to appease, or at least to persuade to cooperate with Washington by concessions, and so Syria's control of Lebanon was considered part of the price to win over Damascus.⁴⁸

While the United Nations had recognized the need for "the withdrawal of all non-Lebanese forces from Lebanon" in Security Council resolution 520 (September 1982), the events of September 11, 2001 in particular helped Washington to clarify the moral and strategic equation in the Middle East. Congress had previously condemned Syrian occupation, as in 1995,⁴⁹ but adopted a more compelling stance in December 2003 with the passage of the Syrian Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act.⁵⁰ A specific focus of the act, and the primary motive for its very conception, was defining Syria's presence in Lebanon as illegitimate and

unacceptable. Section 3 stated, "It is the sense of Congress that (3) 'the government of Syria should immediately declare its commitment to completely withdraw its armed forces, including military, paramilitary, and security forces, from Lebanon.'" This was followed up in section 4 (5), which declared it is "The policy of the United States that Syria is in violation of United Nations Security Council resolution (UNSCR) 520 (September 17, 1982) through its continued occupation of Lebanese territory and its encroachment upon Lebanon's political independence."

President Bush issued an Executive Order on May 11, 2004 to impose sanctions on Syria due to its sponsoring terrorism, possessing and developing WMD, occupying Lebanon, and interfering in American efforts to stabilize the situation in Iraq. Following the lead of Congress, the president's sanctions included prohibiting the export of any items on the Munitions List and the Commerce Control List to Syria, prohibiting the sale of U.S. products other than food and medicine, and prohibiting any Syrian aircraft from taking off or landing in the United States.⁵¹ Later in October, Congress considered freezing the accounts and assets of Lebanese and Syrian officials in the United States because Syria's response was not forthcoming to the initial American pressures.

A flurry of statements from Administration officials dramatized that Lebanon would not be forgotten. In mid-March 2004, National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice called for free elections in Lebanon, without Syrian interference, though Lebanese voices serving Syrian dictates criticized American interference.⁵² While in Paris on June 5, 2004, President Bush expressed his (and French President Jacques Chirac's) view that "the people of Lebanon should be free to determine their own future, without foreign interference or

domination."⁵³ On July 16, President Bush sent a message to the Annual Convention of the National Apostolate of Maronites meeting in Orlando, Florida declaring that "The United States looks forward to elections in Lebanon that respect Lebanon's constitution and a future for Lebanon that is independent, fully sovereign, and free of foreign interference or domination."⁵⁴

Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage stated on August 6 that "it's time for Lebanese forces to take charge of their entire country and Syrian forces to remove themselves back to Syria." He also pointed out that, referring to the upcoming Lebanese elections, this is a matter "for the people of Lebanon to decide."⁵⁵ That Syrian troops must withdraw from Lebanon was reiterated in August by Vincent Battle, Washington's outgoing ambassador to Beirut, and also by his newly appointed replacement, Ambassador Jeffrey Feltman.

In mid-August 2004, following a visit to Lebanon, a U.S. congressional delegation met with President Bashar Asad in Damascus and called for Syrian military withdrawal from Lebanon. Yet President of Lebanon Emile Lahoud, held in contempt by virtually all Lebanese, had shamelessly told the American delegation during their visit that Syria's military presence was a "stabilizing" factor and should be preserved.⁵⁶

With the presidential election issue reaching a political crescendo, the White House issued a statement on August 27, 2004 that repeated the need for "non-intervention" so that the Lebanese people could "decide the fate of their nation and its leadership."⁵⁷ American resolve left little room for doubt, and interestingly, in May 2003, French Foreign Minister Dominique de Villepin made statements calling for Syrian withdrawal in accordance with UNSCR 520, though to no avail.⁵⁸

Then in the fall of 2004, the French took

a further political step on behalf of Lebanon in the international arena. The United States and France co-sponsored Security Council resolution 1559, which called for "all remaining foreign forces to withdraw from Lebanon." Syria's name was dropped in the final draft of the resolution, though mentioned in the subsequent report issued by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan.

The clear intent of the resolution was for the approximately 15,000 troops and the security-intelligence apparatus of Syria's occupying presence to leave Lebanon; also, Hizballah was to be disarmed as a separate militia unit. It was instructive that two months before the American presidential elections, George Bush refused to allow the situation in Iraq and concerns over Iran to sidetrack him from working to end nearly three decades of Syrian hegemony in the "land of the cedars."

The confrontation between Syria and the U.S. revealed that Washington's resolve was unrelenting. On September 13, 2004, eleven days after UNSCR 1559, the U.S. Congress passed yet a new resolution that called for ending the "illegal occupation by Syria of the Lebanese Republic." A few days later, Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz threatened to add Syria to the Bush Administration's "axis of evil" list, which includes Iran and North Korea.⁵⁹ Increasing American allegations against Syria were a prominent and permanent feature in Washington's political litany. U.S. officials mentioned the possibility of Syrian chemical weapons being used by Sudan as part of the Arab assaults on the African tribes in the Darfur region during the summer of 2004.⁶⁰

The Bush Administration continued to suspect that Iraq's WMD materials were transferred to Syria during 2002-03 and that Syria had served as a channel for illicit arms transfers to Iraq despite a stringent

UN embargo.⁶¹ In the course of September 2004, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld remarked that Syria was behind the insurgency in Iraq,⁶² and Secretary of State Colin Powell repeated the Administration's position that Syria leave Lebanon.⁶³ In late October, Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage crisply stated that the new Lebanese government under Omar al-Karami was "made in Damascus." Yet Syria stood its political ground, and Bashar Asad offered but a cosmetic military redeployment of troops within Lebanon, but not out of Lebanon.

The re-election of George Bush in 2004 to a second presidential term augured well for the liberation of Lebanon from Syrian occupation. The president declared principally in his inaugural address, that "all who live in tyranny and hopelessness can know: the United States will not ignore your oppression." Two weeks later Bush explicitly mentioned Syria in his State of the Union Address to Congress: "You have passed, and we are applying, the Syria Accountability Act. And we expect the Syrian government to end all support for terror and open the door to freedom." Yet the longevity and pervasiveness of Syrian control demonstrated the will of Damascus, despite increasing international pressure, to maintain its domination over its small neighbor.

With the political lines drawn ever more sharply between Washington and Damascus, the patriotic elements representing "existential Lebanon" stood at odds with the collaborationist elements speaking on behalf of official or "legal Lebanon."⁶⁴ On the one side, the Maronite Council of Bishops under the leadership of Patriarch Nasrallah Sfeir had called on MPs to disregard "threats" and "to place before their conscience the future of their children" by rejecting the Syrianization of the

country.⁶⁵ On the other side, stood Syria's Lebanese proxies, such as Foreign Minister Jean Obeid, who followed the Syrian political line and acted dutifully in the name of Syrian-Lebanese brotherhood. Obeid had been busy meeting with Arab and foreign officials in order to gain their support in rejecting the U.S.-French draft resolution passed at the United Nations in early September.⁶⁶

Muhammad Issa, secretary-general of the Lebanese Ministry for Foreign Affairs, tried to convince the UNSC not to consider the resolution at all. He defended "[t]he distinguished relations linking Lebanon and Syria which achieved their joint interests, particularly the interests of Lebanon. Friendly Syria had helped Lebanon to maintain stability and security within its borders," he claimed.⁶⁷ Issa argued that elections in Lebanon were an internal matter and rejected UN interference. Hassan Nasrallah, leader of Hizballah, railed against the UN resolution's call for disbanding and disarming Lebanese militias. He claimed his militia needed "weapons for resistance" (*slah al-muqa'wama*) against Israel, which had in fact withdrawn its army from Lebanese territory over four years earlier in May 2000.⁶⁸

When the United Nations reported in early October 2004 that Syria had not implemented resolution 1559 for a military withdrawal from Lebanon, the Lebanese Foreign Ministry affirmed that "the question of the exit of the Syrian army is governed by bilateral agreements and relations between Lebanon and Syria."⁶⁹ Syrian occupation was cast as a Beirut policy stance.

LEBANON AND THE EVOLVING MIDDLE EAST

The global struggle against Islamist terrorism and the goal of a Greater Middle

East, based on democracy, human rights, and commerce, now set the parameters for American policy toward Lebanon. Lebanon, a land of liberty, tolerance, and co-existence, was truly the paramount example of what President Bush aspires to see in the Middle East. Washington is united behind the demand for a free Lebanon, and Europe is finally supporting this cause.

America's ties to Lebanon go back to the early nineteenth-century and reflected religious and educational considerations. In the mid-twentieth-century, Lebanon acquired a political importance as a Western beachhead against radical Arab nationalism and Soviet expansion, before succumbing to Palestinian insurgency, Syrian occupation, Iranian radicalism, and Saudi penetration. A free Lebanon would be free of control by these foreign elements, and the ideas and policies it would follow in its own interests would parallel those of the United States.

If this were to happen, Lebanon would make an important strategic contribution to American and Western interests in the Middle East region. Iran would lose its Levant bridgehead, unable to use Hizballah to stoke the fires of warfare across Israel's northern border and in the Palestinian terrorist theater. Damascus's dream of Greater Syria, a euphemism for Lebanon's enslavement, would finally dissolve. A free Lebanon would mean a restricted and contained Syria, perhaps more amenable for peace with Israel. Also, the Palestinians, still imprisoned in the rhetoric of jihad, may begin to adapt authentically to the realities of politics.

The United States has its own national accounting with Lebanon but not with the Lebanese people. In Beirut, Palestinians assassinated U.S. Ambassador Francis Meloy, embassy officer Robert Waring, and their driver Zohair Moghrabi in 1976, while the Syrians and their Shi'a allies carried out

the wanton massacre of 241 U.S. Marines in October 1983. These tragic events demand a moral and strategic reckoning, the likes of which Washington has earmarked for Lebanon and the entire region.

In 1958, President Eisenhower thought it important enough to send 11,000 Marines to Beirut to fend off a pan-Arab threat to the independence of Lebanon, and in 1982, President Ronald Reagan also sent a military force to achieve that goal. No one expects President Bush, who did send far larger forces to Iraq, to engage in a military intervention, *per se*. Yet what will the United States do on the diplomatic and economic plane to assure the recovery of Lebanon's full independence?

THE POLITICAL ORDER EXAMINED

A free, post-occupation Lebanon would need an altered political system given the many developments which have befallen it. Certainly, Lebanon has a good claim for the uniqueness of its constitutional structure, reflecting both democratic values and communal pluralism.

The establishment of Lebanon as a republic in 1926 arose under the patronage of the French mandatory regime. That the very idea of Lebanese independence was a victory for the Christian Maronites was embodied in the custom that one of its sons would always fill the office of president. Based on a formula for confessional power-sharing among the various religious communities, the National Pact of 1943 confirmed Maronite predominance along with the recognition of Sunni Muslim control of the office of prime minister, with a Shi'a serving as speaker of the Chamber of Deputies. Upon achieving independence in 1946, Lebanon's basic political structure consisted of a Christian presidency, but a bi-cephalous Christian-Muslim executive.

This executive was designed to dominate a unicameral legislature with a 6:5 membership ratio of Christians to Muslim and Druze representatives.

The establishment of multi-member electoral districts accommodated the aspirations of the various communities, while also sustaining cooperative mechanisms in the rough-and-tumble of Lebanese politics. A fixed number of deputies belonging to different religious groups would be elected in each district. In the Shouf region, for example, a predetermined number of three Maronites, two Sunnis, two Druzes, and one Roman Catholic would be elected, while voters from all of the different communities would choose from among competing candidate lists. The Ba'albek-Hermel constituency was allotted ten members, six of whose deputies would be Shi'a, two Sunni, one Maronite and one Roman Catholic.⁷⁰ This multi-member multi-confessional constituency structure promoted national integration via sectarian differentiation. This unique Lebanese model diverged from a pure undifferentiated democratic system but offered stability in a fractured society.

The Lebanese political system was republican only in part, because the election of the president itself was not by universal popular suffrage but rather by a vote in the Chamber of Deputies. Parliamentary groupings were precarious and no structured "opposition versus government" developed. Presidential powers, such as the appointing of the prime minister and the very status of the highest office, reflected the republican tradition. The question of executive-legislative rivalry, as existed in the French Fourth Republic with the frequent fall of ministries, did not emerge in Lebanon because of the constitutional predominance of the presidential office.

Reshuffling of ministries was, however, very common.

With a trace of classical republicanism and a dose of Middle East elitism, the dual Maronite-Sunni regime identified the Christians as a "political majority" even when their relative numbers decreased. At the same time, the Sunnis remained the Christians' primary partner in power even when the Shi'a began to increase substantially in number. The impoverished Shi'a felt depoliticized, the Druze were blocked, the Greek Orthodox could advance only to the deputy speakership, and the Greek Catholics to the office of deputy-Prime Minister. In these ways, the political system estranged many and benefited the select few. Lebanon was a democracy of its own particular making. National consensus was at best dormant, and local communal identities remained intense. Patronage reflecting narrow interests dominated the political arena.⁷¹

Then, the Syrian-dictated Ta'if Accord of 1989 reformed the political system by equalizing Christian/Muslim parliamentary representation, reducing presidential prerogatives, increasing the authority of the prime minister, and according the speaker of parliament an enhanced status. This troika regime instituted a new balance among the senior Maronite, Sunni, and Shi'a officials--a prescription for equality that was a formula for paralysis. The Lebanese formula recalled the French notion of *cohabitation*, in which different, competing parties divide and share control of the senior government offices of president and prime minister.

In Lebanon accordingly, the result was to be the perseverance and strengthening of Syria's role as the arbiter and ruler of Lebanese politics.⁷² President Lahoud and Prime Minister Hariri were known for their personal animosity and rivalry, a problem which confounded any hope for a

harmonious conduct of government. Thus, Syria was the political watchdog, and all submitted to the word of Damascus.

VISION OF THE NEW LEBANON

The special national ethos and cultural spirit of Lebanon differentiate it from the Arab world. Until the Palestinian insurgency of the late 1960s, the Syrian intervention from the mid-1970s, and the Iranian penetration from the early 1980s, Lebanon was rooted in its native and ancient moorings. Israel's military intervention, from 1976 until 2000, was peripheral to this national question. With a free press, music festivals, an open economy, a vibrant intellectual environment, and a marketplace of free political ideas and debate, Lebanon's star can rise again. A strong civil society is inherent in the heritage of this vibrant country,⁷³ and the resilience of the Lebanese is apparent even after thirty years of subjugation and occupation.

The new Lebanon must launch the Third Republic, putting an end to the sectarian first republic and the 1989 Arabizing Ta'if republic that imposed Syrian hegemony upon Lebanon. The idea that demographics and politics now demand a small Christian state enclave in Mount Lebanon as a solution to ethnic rivalry is unrealistic.⁷⁴ It is essential more than ever before to endorse a broad and inclusive democratic agenda for all Lebanese in the framework of the geographic unity of the country. Lebanon must separate church from state and be released from the shackles of narrow-minded confessional politics. Only once this has been achieved can the Lebanese evoke communal reconciliation and national harmony after liberation. Healing Lebanon's collective soul and mending its political body are the tasks ahead.

The Syrian occupation of Lebanon could

prove to be the historic crucible for the shaping of a new unity among all Lebanese religious/ethnic communities. The Lebanese hold the Syrians in deep contempt, and the ongoing humiliation has strengthened the bonds of a shared national consciousness against alien rule. Indeed, a survey revealed that 74 percent of Lebanese citizens had wanted a new president in 2004 and 84 percent were of the opinion that "foreign and outside parties"--namely Syria--"dictated the results of presidential elections."⁷⁵

In Kamal Salibi's historical narrative, Lebanon is cast neither as an artificial state nor as an integral appendage of Greater Syria, but rather as an evolving and encompassing national entity.⁷⁶ The Sunnis of Tripoli, who demurred Lebanon's founding in 1920, and the Shi'a of Nabatiyya, who were marginalized thereafter, have become in their consciousness and culture the sons and daughters of their Lebanese homeland. No one wants to exchange Lebanon for the prison of Syria. True and complete liberation will signal the beginning of the end to alien ideologies corrupting the political climate, including Ba'thism, Syrian Social Nationalism, Iranian Shi'a extremism, and Sunni Wahhabi-imported fundamentalism. Loyalty to the Lebanese nation and ethos must supersede any competing focus of identity.

Lebanon requires a revitalized democratic participatory spirit bound to a reassertion of political authority. It is worth considering a type of Gaullist model whereby the president of the Fifth French Republic is constitutionally identified as "the protector of the independence of the nation, of the integrity of its territory...."⁷⁷ A sagacious Lebanese president will hopefully embody the

national will and foster the essential bonds of national unity.

ELECTIONS AND LIBERATION

Yet just when Lebanon was preoccupied with approaching parliamentary elections scheduled for May 2005, on February 14, 2005 a fierce explosion in Beirut shattered the political scene. Former prime minister and politician, billionaire Rafiq Hariri, was assassinated along with six personal bodyguards and over a dozen others. Because of Hariri's growing opposition to Syria's presence in Lebanon, it was immediately suspected that Syrian operatives had carried out the operation. Suddenly, politicking for elections was replaced by a unified resistance to both the Syrian occupation and the accommodating Lebanese government. Hariri's funeral turned into a mass protest, as the tolling of church bells merged with the prayers of the muezzins in the mosques. Syrian workers were attacked, and the Ba'th Party offices in Beirut were burnt down. Lebanese opposition figures, Christians and Druze now joined by Sunni Muslims, renewed with vigor their demand for Syria's total withdrawal from the country. Two weeks after the Hariri assassination, Prime Minister Omar al-Karami's government resigned in response to the large street demonstrations in which the opposition called for the removal of the Syrian-appointed government in Beirut. Karami's attempt to establish a new government in late March 2005 failed.

Throughout this period, the U.S. government, with British and French cooperation, hammered away at Syria to withdraw completely its army and security agencies from Lebanon. UN Secretary-General Kofi Anan added his voice in calling for Syrian withdrawal, in addition to appointing an investigator to inquire into

the murder of Hariri. In early March 2005, Bashar al-Asad announced a partial military withdrawal to the Baka Valley in Lebanon, while the Lebanese opposition and the international community continued to demand a complete withdrawal. However, by the end of March 2005, Syria had in fact removed its military and intelligence personnel from Beirut, the Mountain, and the north. Some 4,000 returned to Syria, while approximately 8,000 Syrian soldiers still remained in the Baka Valley. By early April 2005, they too withdrew.

Meanwhile, mass popular political protest and national self-expression peaked in Beirut on March 14, 2005. One million people were said to have participated in a Lebanese Independence demonstration there. If the attendance figure is accurate, an extraordinary and unprecedented 25 percent of the entire population was present.

The Bush Administration provided resolute political support and encouragement to the anti-Syrian protesters. Washington's ambassador to Syria was recalled for consultations in mid-February 2005. Furthermore, Secretary of State Rice consistently repeated the political refrain that Syria must remove its army and intelligence apparatus from Lebanon and implement UN resolution 1559. President Bush received Maronite Patriarch Cardinal Nasrallah Sfeir on March 16, insisting "Syria completely leave Lebanon... so that the election process will be free and fair."⁷⁸

The political wheel had finally turned, and the emerging situation was the potential revolutionary condition for sweeping change. Indeed, in the words of opposition personalities, the "Intifada [Uprising] of Independence" had begun. The 30-year nightmare of Syrian occupation seemed to be coming to an end. The national elections, conducted without manifest Syrian intervention, and the formation of a new

government by Prime Minister Fouad Siniora, seemed to indicate a fundamental political change. Sa'ad al-Hariri led a political bloc majority of 72 parliamentary deputies.

However, there were also very worrying developments as a wave of violence began. It appeared that if Syria could not directly and visibly rule Lebanon, then Lebanon would be ravaged by terror, fear, and bloodshed directed by Syria in order to prove the country could not exist without Syria's military presence. Syria's Lebanese proxies, including the Syrian Social National Party and Ba'th-controlled security agencies, were suspected to be behind the subversive multiple explosions against Christian targets in late March 2005, such as that in Kaslik, north of Beirut. Two well-known public personalities, Samir Kassir, a journalist at *al-Nahar*, and George Hawi, former head of the Communist Party, were killed in car bomb attacks. In July 2005, acting Defense Minister Elias Murr was slightly injured in a car bomb attack. In late September 2005, prominent TV journalist May Chidiac lost an arm and a leg when her booby-trapped car blew up in Junieh, north of Beirut. Then on December 12, 2005, Gibran Tuani, a member of parliament who as editor of *al-Nahar* was one of Lebanon's most outspoken critics of Syria's occupation, was murdered when his armored vehicle was blown up in East Beirut.

Meanwhile, the UN-appointed investigator of the Hariri assassination, German prosecutor Detlev Mehlis, pursued the probe with great diligence. Despite Syria's lack of cooperation in the investigation, in late August 2005, Mehlis successfully ordered the detention of four suspects. The suspects were Lebanese generals, the most prominent being Jamil al-Sayyid, former chief of the General Security Directorate.⁷⁹ It was later revealed

that each of the four had about \$150 million in their personal bank accounts.

This development in Lebanon, in addition to the Bush Administration persistent complaints about Syria's active support for terrorism in Iraq, indicated that Damascus would at the very least continue to be the object of diplomatic protest.⁸⁰ In a September 13, 2005 White House statement, President Bush remarked in regards to President Asad of Syria, that "we take his lack of action seriously." Syria was neither cooperating in the Mehlis investigation, nor in assisting Washington in ending the gun-running and terrorist-crossings from its territory into Iraq.

For its part, Hizballah refused to disarm in the face of UN resolution 1559. Nasrallah repeated incessantly that Hizballah leads the national resistance against Israel, specifically regarding the Shaba'a Farms dispute on Lebanon's southern border. Beirut did not yet have a government that exercised sovereign control over the entire country-neither in the terrorist-infested streets of Beirut nor in the south where Hizballah, rather than the army of Lebanon, held sway.

The Cedar Revolution of March 2005 was trapped and confined by the old forces of power that had dominated the political arena beforehand. Syria's direct political tutelage had been replaced by a new Syrian reign of terror, which includes the arming of Palestinians in their camps in Lebanon. President Lahoud and Hizballah symbolized the persistent role of Damascus in Lebanon. A few new faces, such as Michel Aoun, were unable to launch a different political process in Beirut. The fundamental questions of Lebanon's national future were put on the political backburner. Lebanese politicians continued the habit of traveling to Damascus and voicing their support for

close relations with Syria, and Iranian officials continued to visit Beirut, as if it were still a satrap of the ayatollahs in Tehran. Lebanon's revolution manquee was an exceptional failure and disappointment.

A free and democratic Lebanon is still struggling to emerge. There are many important issues to resolve: Lebanon's national identity must be restored and the pan-Arab ideology preventing its existence as a sovereign state quashed; its complete independence from Syria and Iran must be achieved; its detainees and refugees from Syria and Israel must return home; the electoral system needs to be revamped; political corruption must be eliminated, and a new president elected.

In mid-October 2005, the UN investigator Mehlis submitted his interim report on the Hariri assassination. He noted that, prior to the military withdrawal, Syria exercised "overall strategic influence on the governance of Lebanon," co-opting Lebanese military and security officials in order to serve Syria's interests in Lebanon. Senior Syrian officials, including Bashar's brother Maher and his brother-in-law Assef Shawkat, were mentioned as suspects in the murder.⁸¹ At the same time, international pressure on Syria increased when special UN envoy Terje Roed-Larsen reported that Syria had still not complied with UNSC resolution 1559 either, as it continued to maintain agents in the presidential palace, the army, and the intelligence organizations within Lebanon. On October 20, 2005, Ghazi Kana'an, former Syrian strongman running Lebanon, reportedly committed suicide, but it was generally suspected that his elimination was part of the attempt by Bashar Asad to cover up his own role in the Hariri assassination. A political earthquake threatened the Asad Alawi regime in Damascus, as Mehlis pursued his

investigation yet further into December 2005.

The end of Syrian occupation has not ended Lebanon's problems. It has, however, provided an opportunity to deal with them seriously for the first time in three decades. Yet the basic accommodations and the new system necessary for real progress have barely begun to be shaped.

**Etienne Sakr, known as Abu Arz, was born in the village of Ayn Ebel in south Lebanon. Sakr founded the Guardians of the Cedars Party in 1975 and initiated the Lebanese Front in 1976. From 1989-90, he was associated with General Michel Aoun and the "war of liberation" against Syrian occupation, founding the Broad Front for Liberation and Change. His Guardians of the Cedars Party was, however, not involved in the military struggle that ensued between General Aoun and Lebanese Forces commander Samir Geagea. It was a sacred Guardians principle not to engage in fighting against fellow Lebanese. Since May 2000, Etienne Sakr has been in exile.*

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