

New Directions

Volume 12 | Issue 4

Article 16

10-1-1985

The Politics of Violence

Sulayman S. Nyang

Follow this and additional works at: <http://dh.howard.edu/newdirections>

Recommended Citation

Nyang, Sulayman S. (1985) "The Politics of Violence," *New Directions*: Vol. 12: Iss. 4, Article 16.

Available at: <http://dh.howard.edu/newdirections/vol12/iss4/16>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Howard @ Howard University. It has been accepted for inclusion in New Directions by an authorized administrator of Digital Howard @ Howard University. For more information, please contact lopez.matthews@howard.edu.

The Politics Of Violence

18

LEBANON



By Sulayman S. Nyang

Since the outbreak of the Lebanese civil war in 1975, this small country in the Middle East has been in the news constantly. Scholars and journalists have written profusely about the civil war and, most recently, about the expulsion of the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization) from Lebanon by the Israelis, following the Israeli invasion of the country. Added to the Israeli invasion was the heightening of tensions and violence between the two main religious communities in Lebanon, the Muslims and the Christians.

What has actually complicated matters in Lebanon is the history of external involvement in this Arab state. There was the civil war of 1958 and the intervention of the United States on behalf of the Lebanese regime. The U.S. was also destined to get involved again in Lebanon in the 1980s. This time, though, the role of the American troops was that of a peacekeeper between the Israelis and the Lebanese militia groups who were fighting the invading Israelis as well as other Lebanese they perceived to be collaborating with the foreign enemy. However, the U.S. forces ultimately did take sides in their bombardment of Lebanese "enemy" strongholds.

Background of the Present Conflict

The modern state of Lebanon came into being after 1918 following the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in World War I, first under French mandatory rule from 1920, and as a sovereign state since November 1941. Its establishment cancelled the *Mustassarrijiyah* system which had been adopted in Lebanon in the 19th century after the civil war of 1860. This administrative arrangement that granted extended autonomy to the Christian inhabitants of Mount Leba-

non was the result of Western pressures on the Ottoman rulers. The rise of Greater Lebanon in 1920 ushered a new situation and altered the power balance between the various ethnic and religious groupings within Lebanon. The *Mustasarrijiyah*, which was characterized by sectarian homogeneity, was replaced by a new arrangement which brought under one roof a large number of Muslim and Christian sects, none of which had an absolute majority. This state of affairs was destined to affect the course of history in the Arab world; that is to say, the expansion of Lebanon in 1920 paradoxically sowed the seeds of its near destruction since the mid-1970s.

Indeed, "the problem of Lebanon since 1920 can be described as that of a Christian minority, which has traditionally feared political and cultural assimilation and the loss of its national identity in an Arab Muslim society but which, by the realization of its aspirations for an independent state, created the problem of a large Muslim minority, which itself fears the loss of its own identity in an essentially Christian Lebanese state. . . ."¹

In light of this analysis, one can argue that the Lebanese civil war of 1975/76 was the latest expression of this conflict dating back to 1920s when the French decided to render to the Maronites of Mount Lebanon all that they felt France owed to them. Hence the decision to annex the surrounding areas—areas with a large Muslim majority. The new state of Lebanon incorporated the Beka'a Valley, the Akkar region with its large Greek Orthodox and Sunni population, the southern region of Jabal Amel with its predominantly Shiite population, and the western part where the coastal Sunni towns of Tripoli and Sidon and the major city of Beirut are located.

To many historians, the decision to create Greater Lebanon was carefully studied by France, with the hope that Lebanon could serve as an effective French staging ground in the universe of Superpower rivalry in the Middle East. But the train of historical events has not proven policymakers of the French Republic correct. Lebanon gradually became entangled in the large web of Pan Arab politics, and her people began to shed blood of their brethren in the name of one sect or the other. [Population estimates of Lebanon in 1974, one year before the civil war, was 3.1 million, and in 1979 2.6 million.]

As a result of the strange way the state of Lebanon came about, the demographic balance was shaken. In 1932 the government statistical data gave a breakdown of those sects which inhabited Greater Lebanon. It showed that the followers of Christianity formed a six to five majority. This ratio, five Muslims to six Christians, was the basis of the political arrangement between Muslim leaders and their Christian counterparts at the time of decolonization from France in 1941.

By adopting the above arrangement, the Lebanese leaders introduced into their political and social life a *Lebanese ethnic arithmetical formula* that required of all government posts to be parcelled out according to the proportionate representation of a given religious and ethnic group in the country. Thus from 1932 onwards, the Lebanese government has learned to come to terms with the religious division in the country. To institutionalize the division, it made sure that a factor of 11 was taken into account in the allocation of positions in government. Moreover, the Lebanese elites agreed amongst themselves that

the President of the country always be a Christian Maronite, the Prime Minister a Sunni Muslim, the Speaker a Shiite Muslim, and so on.

One dilemma of the Lebanese leadership since independence has been the failure to realize that a rigid mathematical formula can never accommodate rising new groups and political forces. This sociological fact has become evident to all Lebanese since the eruption of the 1975 civil war. The struggle for authority, power and influence led to intense and at times deadly competition among the Lebanese. There was the competition between Maronites against other Christians; the struggle between the Christians and the Muslims; the struggle between Sunnis and Shiites. All these, however, took place within the framework of the *Zaim* system. Under this political arrangement, each grouping in the country has its own leaders, who spoke for their respective communities. Their privilege and prestige depended on how they performed before their colleagues and on behalf of their communities.²

Geographical Distribution of Lebanese Sects

The sectarian geography of the state of Lebanon falls into four major regions:

■ Mount Lebanon, the home base of the Maronites, has the largest Christian groupings.

■ The Northwestern Region, which extends from the coast to the western mountains, including Tripoli and Akkar, with a Sunni Muslim majority.

■ The Northeastern Region, which forms the eastern slope of the Akkar mountains, northern Beka'a and the northern part of Lebanon's eastern mountain range, Ba'albek and Hermil fall into this category, with a majority Shiite Muslims.

■ The Southern Region, which extends

from the slopes of Jabal Sheikh in the east to the Sidon-Tyre coast, with a Shiite majority.

Between these geographical categories, or within them, one finds pockets of the various sects in the country. Three sects have the highest dispersion rate. They are the Maronites, the Sunnis and the Greek Orthodox. The Shiites and the Druzes have the lowest. The majority of Sunnis are found in major cities like Sidon, Beirut and Tripoli. The Maronites, at the beginning of independence the majority by plurality, later began to migrate to the cities in large numbers.

In looking into the distribution of sects across the length and breadth of Lebanon, one can argue that the pattern of distribution has a logic to it. According to Jamal al-Toubi, "there is a tendency among the Greek Orthodox to coexist with the Sunni, the Greek Catholic with the Shiite, and the Maronites with the Druze."³ He goes on to assert that this pattern of coexistence between Lebanon's groups was not coincidental, rather the result of Middle East religious history. In the past, interaction between sects rarely reached beyond commercial transactions or personal friendships.

Because of the above limitation, one may now hold the view that perhaps the insistence by Maronites on a sanctuary for themselves in the province of Mount Lebanon is the result of their realization that political power can get back to them only when they are in full command of events in Lebanon. Unlike the Shiites who look up to Iran's Imam Khomeini as their spiritual leader, the Maronites could count on only those of their numbers living in Syria, Cyprus and in other places in the Middle East. So long as Maronite numerical strength remains the same, the Maronite leadership would have no problem sitting down with the other Lebanese sectarian leaders to resolve common problems.

What has upset this Lebanese political appellation? Consider these key factors:

The creation of the state of Israel made it very difficult for the Lebanese to bolt the Arab caravan and work out direct and close relationship with the West. It is true that some Lebanese factions would have liked this arrange-

ment, but the forces of history were too strong and no Lebanese leader was in a position to resist the call for Arab unity to tackle the emerging Israeli threat. As a result of this development, the Lebanese reluctantly joined the Arab caravan and so assumed part of the burden of being a member of the Arab fraternity.

What was the main responsibility of the Lebanese leadership in the contest of will between the Arabs and the Israelis? As fate would have it, the Lebanese were pushed forward by changing events in the area to serve as a host country to the Palestinians—those driven out of Palestine by the Israelis.

Following the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, a stream of Palestinians began to enter Lebanese society. By the time the 1975

The struggle for authority, power and influence led to intense and at times deadly competition among the Lebanese.

Lebanese civil war exploded, there were more than 150,000 Palestinians in Lebanon. Initially, most of these men, women and children were treated as "refugees". No efforts were made to change their conditions. As a result of their growing frustration and dissatisfaction, the process of radicalization began to develop among the Palestinians in Lebanon. In 1970, when King Hussein of Jordan went on the offensive against the Palestinians in his country, his actions were the prologue to the real and bloody drama in Lebanon. What happened in Jordan presaged what later developed in Lebanon. The king's men stormed the Palestinian strongholds and wiped them out, forcing thousands to flee to Lebanon, where they swelled the ranks of their compatriots who belonged to an earlier generation of refugees.

This sudden increase in the number of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon was

destabilizing to the Lebanese political system and became socially stressful due to the increase in conflict between the various factions in the Lebanese religious system. In retrospect, one can argue that the arrival of the Palestinians complicated what was already a complex and dangerous social and political order in the Middle East.⁴

The discovery of oil in the Gulf states, another key factor, contributed to the expansion of the Lebanese economy. The Gulf leaders saw in Lebanon a financial haven for their deposits and a place to relax and play. As a result of the enormous investments in Lebanon, the economy boomed and many Lebanese profited from the changed economic conditions. Another important factor was the emergence in 1964 of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).

As I noted earlier, 1970 was a bad year for the Palestinians. And due to the dissatisfaction of the young Palestinians who were denied the right to a homeland, many of them decided to take up the challenge and wage their own battles with Israel. Men like George Habash founded their movements and the variegated groups within the Palestinian community were soon brought together under one roof. They set out and launched a series of attacks against Israeli or Israeli-supported targets. These acts of terror, for the first time, drew the attention of the world to the plight of the Palestinians who for a long time were treated as "refugees".

The leaders of the United States and the world began to pay attention. Although in Washington no positive response to the PLO was made, there is enough evidence to prove that attitudes towards and opinions on the Palestinian problem changed remarkably. This change of image for the Palestinians and the PLO had an impact on the Lebanese society. Those social groups in Lebanon who felt cheated and short-changed by the system saw an ally in the PLO and its leader Yasir Arafat. And when the Jordanians drove away the Palestinians, many of these Lebanese received the fleeing Palestinians with open arms.

The Palestinian Presence

In examining the impact of the Palestin-

ian presence in Lebanon and the role of the Palestinians in the civil war, four points can be made here.

First, it should be noted that one can discern *the mode of perception* of the various groupings in the Lebanese conflict if one analyzes the words used for the violent struggle raging in the country.

The Maronite leadership perceived the struggle as the "war" (*al-harb*), thus emphasizing that it is essentially a Lebanese-Palestinian conflict. Those Lebanese opposed to the *status quo* saw the conflict as a revolution (*al-thawra*), thereby justifying their support for the Palestinians and the need for a political reform in their country. The Palestinians who collaborated with the Lebanese rejectionists, on the other hand, perceived the struggle as a civil war (*harb-ahliya*), thus identifying it as a Lebanese-Lebanese fight and not a Lebanese-Palestinian conflict.

Second, up to 1982 when the Israelis decided to launch operation Peace for Galilee, this was how the conflict in Lebanon was perceived by the various forces in the country. Thus, the Israeli factor was minimal. However, it should be noted that some of the Christian leaders, such as the late Lebanese President Bashir Gemayel, collaborated with the Israelis before and after their 1982 invasion of Lebanon. These Maronite Christians saw in Israel a covert if not an overt ally in their battle with the Palestinians.

The Israeli factor, which Bashir Gemayel hoped would enable the Christians in general, and Maronites in particular, to establish a separate state called the Republic of Juniyah, became a liability to the Christians during and after the invasion. In retrospect, one can now argue that the Israeli invasion helped accelerate the process of radicalization among the Lebanese militants. Because the Israelis humiliated them, many of those Christians who earlier rallied around the invaders began to waver in their support. Conditions deteriorated dramatically following the Sabra and Chatila massacres. Israel suffered embarrassment in the international community, and Christian groups—such as the Phalangists and the small militia of Saad Haddad—

became increasingly alienated from Israel.

In fact, the conflict between the Phalangists and the Israelis predated the Sabra and Chatila massacres of Palestinians by pro-Israeli Christian militia. In their calculations and preparations for the invasion of Lebanon, the Israeli strategists factored the Phalangists of the late Bashir Gemayel, who was assassinated three weeks after his 1981 election. But the late president, at the time just a leader of a major faction, found the Israeli proposal unacceptable. Not only was he fearful of the consequences of dancing a political tango with Israel in public but he and his aides soon realized the economic consequences of Israeli penetration of the Lebanese market, an important pre-

The sudden increase in the number of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon was destabilizing the Lebanese political system...

serve of the Maronite merchants in Beirut. Indeed it is a fact that the Phalangists made it a point to warn their merchants and shopkeepers in Beirut *not to buy* goods from Israel.

Third, the decision of the Lebanese government to give a blind eye to the shipment of arms into areas close to the Israeli border facilitated the development of an arms buildup in the Palestinian strongholds. Added to this was the wide circulation of weapons throughout the country. Thus when the civil war broke out, each community and the various militias were virtually armed to the teeth. The Palestinians, as stockpilers of arms for the struggle against the state of Israel, became a useful ally to the Lebanese radicals who in earlier times suffered at the hands of the rulers of the Lebanese state. This fact sheds light on the nature of the

Lebanese conflict and the reasons for the Israeli invasion.

Related to the third point is the fourth factor, the Syrian role in the civil war. Syria's role in the Lebanese crisis was inevitable because of a number of reasons. Arab nationalists have always dreamed of a Greater Syria merger of the states which the British and the French seized from the faltering Ottoman Empire. However, their wish was never to materialize because neither the Western powers nor the Christian minorities in the region were sufficiently interested in the realization of such a dream. As a result, the Syrian leadership decided reluctantly to concede the independence of Lebanon.

When the civil war broke out, the Syrians, who had allies still committed to the merger idea, felt it necessary to assert their presence. Using geopolitical arguments, they warned the various Lebanese parties about the danger to Syrian interests and the possibility of Israeli manipulation of the crisis. But this Syrian concern was not heeded by the more powerful groups. At the time, each faction was preoccupied with its territory and the danger posed to it by the rival groups. With the escalation of the violence and the greater insecurity of the Arab countries and their interests in Lebanon, an Arab peacekeeping force was hurriedly formed by the Arab League. This effort by the League proved unsatisfactory and in the end the Arab states, through the League, agreed to leave the peacekeeping function to Syria. With a mandate to restore law and order, the government of President Hafez al-Assad sent troops into Lebanon. This was to be the long assignment of the Syrian army outside its borders. They came, fought and got bogged down in the cycle of violence in Lebanon. Law was partially maintained and order partially restored.

Trying to balance the competing factions in Lebanon, the Syrians began the delicate task of strengthening favorites and weakening potential enemies.

While the Palestinian leadership, under Yasir Arafat, collaborated with Syria, events favored them well in Lebanon. This state of affairs continued until the Israelis felt that life for Jewish settlers in the areas bordering Lebanon was no longer bearable.

Many reasons have been given by the Israelis for their invasion of Lebanon. But in retrospect, one can now argue that the Israeli leadership came to realize some of its misperceptions and the unexpected blunders committed by some of its field commanders. The Sabra and Chatila massacres became the straw that broke the camel's back. As a result of worldwide outcry, the Israeli government decided to make certain changes in policy. And it accepted the resignation of Defense Minister Ariel Sharon, following investigation by a blue ribbon panel.

22

The Role of Fundamentalists

Up until the eruption of the Iranian Revolution in 1979, the Shiites in Lebanon were the *invisible men* of the Lebanese society. Relegated to lower status in the social hierarchy and condemned to play second fiddle to the Christian and Sunni Muslim fellow citizens, they lived very much in poverty and rage. The outbreak of the civil war transformed their community from a passive into an active/assertive one. Allied to the Palestinians in their struggle for respectability in Lebanese society and looking for opportunities for themselves, they set out to create their own political niche in Lebanon. But when the Palestinians were routed by Israeli troops, some of the Shiite leaders and villagers began to collaborate with the Israelis.

The Israelis saw the Shiites and other minorities in Lebanon as potential allies against the Syrians, the Palestinians and the Sunni Muslims. Thus when Israel invaded Lebanon in 1982, the Israeli commanders made it clear that they were in search of local Lebanese collaborators.

The Israelis, who long before the civil war had established contacts with Christian rightists in Lebanon, were seeking Shiite and Druze Lebanese to work with them against the Palestinians and the Syrians. Some of the Shiites agreed to cooperate and were thus provided with a steady flow of arms. But unknown to the Israelis, the Shiites were playing the age-old game of *tahiya* (holy deception) with their Israeli benefactors. Arms furnished to Shiites in the Souf region of Lebanon found their way into Beirut and soon



Israeli soldiers were being killed with arms supplied by their government.

It was indeed this state of affairs that made the Israeli invasion a trap. Between September 1982 and November 1983, the Israelis suffered more than 147 fatalities in Lebanon. This figure may be insignificant to an American but any self-respecting Israeli leader cannot tolerate such statistics. It was owing to this shifting fortune in Lebanon that the Israeli leaders decided to wring concessions from the Lebanese regime, this time headed by President Amin Gemayel.

The Lebanese government, banking on full U.S. support, engaged in the politics of foot-dragging and as a result stalled talks with Israel. The Israelis kept on putting more pressure and finally got an agreement worked out for a conditional pullback of Israeli troops. But as history would have it, this was a temporary victory. The agreement was rejected by many Lebanese, who saw it as the beginning of the end of the independence of their country. The Syrians, who have a vested interest in Lebanon, decided to wage a campaign of vilification and subversion of the agreement.

The pressure was on the Gemayel government, which in the end unilaterally abrogated the agreement.⁵ This was a shock to the Israelis and the Israeli government issued a strong warning to the Lebanese about the dangers involved in such an act. However, nothing happened from the Israeli side.

Other factors must have affected the Gemayel decision. The Syrian pressure was high but the deterioration in the military and political power of the Phalangists and the untenability of any close association with Israel most likely influenced President Gemayel and his advisers. And, bent on avoiding the destiny of his late brother but determined to work closely with both the U.S. and Syria, Amin Gemayel took the decision that for him was the path of sanity and survivability.

Because of the deterioration in the power of the central government in Beirut and the increasing strength of the various factions, the Shiites and the other fundamentalists began to assert themselves more visibly.

The creation of an Islamic state in Iran made it possible for the Lebanese

Shiites to have a powerful Big Brother in the neighborhood. Prior to the 1979, the government of the Shah did not pay particular attention to the fortunes of the Shiites in other parts of the Middle East. This was not to be the case with the Khomeini regime.

Since the Iranian revolution, many Lebanese Shiites have made pilgrimages to Iran to re-establish contacts with their fellow Shiites. Because of these contacts, the Shiites in Lebanon soon began to build stronger and more powerful alliances with other radical

**The Israeli factor,
which Bashir Gemayel
hoped would enable the
Christians . . . to establish
a separate state . . .
became a liability . . .**

groups in the Middle East. True, radical Muslim groups existed in Lebanon prior to the outbreak of the civil war but their impact was virtually nil. The apparent secularism of the pre-war period made them irrelevant in Lebanese society.

Conditions changed for the better for the fundamentalist groups in Lebanon during the late 1970s when the radicalization process as well as the eruption of the Iranian revolution made it appealing to assert openly one's fundamentalist allegiance. Hence the emergence of the more Islamized segment of the *Amal* and the more fundamentalist *Hizbullah*.⁶ These two groups are simply the coordinators of the activities among the various Shiite and fundamentalist groups in the area. They may have control over some of the groups but each group has its agenda and its own personnel.

The U.S. Role

The United States became a factor in Lebanon only after the Second World War. But American missionaries and merchants plied the seas and took risks

working in the Levant long before the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire. In fact, the irony is, the leaders of the PLO which the U.S. does not recognize are the intellectual products of the American University of Beirut, a legacy of American missionary labor and philanthropy. Regardless of this manifestation of history's game of anomalies and ironies in human society, a good look at the American record in Lebanon is in order. First, be it noted that the initial American military involvement was in 1958, in response to a call from then President Camille Chamoun. Threatened by the rising forces of Arab nationalism under Egypt's Gamal Abdul Nasser and determined to face the challenge, President Chamoun appealed to the late U.S. President Dwight Eisenhower. Approximately 10,000 American troops went to his rescue in July 1958, and law and order was restored. America's prestige was universally recognized and the American troops returned home a short time later, standing tall.

During the second American involvement in the 1980s, the picture seems to have changed radically. Two things explain this development. First, the civil war had changed the Lebanese mentality from what it was in the 1950s. Instead of a people led by *Zaims* (traditional leaders), the Lebanese the Americans encountered in 1983 were tough, opportunistic, assertive and fanatically committed to one ideology or the other. Second, American prestige in Lebanon and elsewhere was devalued by the *Vietnam syndrome*. For this reason, outsiders were more willing to challenge America's right to be the policeman of the world.

In Lebanon, Islamic fundamentalism, for the most part, contributed very much to the changed attitudes of the average Muslim Lebanese, Sunni or Shiite. Emboldened by the success of the Iranian militants and reassured of a life after death by their mullahs, many of the Shiites in Lebanon fought the Americans and the Israelis with the firm belief that a *jihad* (holy war) against America or Israel was not only rewarding spiritually but materially significant.

To the Shiites of the *Amal*, a challenge to the U.S. was the beginning of the end of Christian hegemony in Leba-

non. The argument is made that "we lick the Yankee protector of Maronite privilege, then the Maronite would sooner or later come to terms with us." This is a powerful argument. The only way one can refute it, perhaps, is to pay the same price that the holder is willing to pay. That is, the will to die at any time for a cause. Not many Lebanese Christians are that committed. Hence the exodus of many Christians from Lebanon to the U.S. and other points in the world. Because of this emigration, some analysts are convinced that the Shiites are now close to 40 percent of the Lebanese population. These statistics are difficult to prove because Lebanon has not conducted a census since 1932.

The politics of numbers has been a thorn in the Lebanese body politic and, as is true of pluralistic societies, its leaders are reluctant to face the uncertainty of a head count. Even if one does not accept the figure bandied about in certain circles about the strong Shiite presence in Lebanon, one must concede that over the past 18 months the Shiites have made their point to the U.S. and to the rest of the world, particularly to the Gemayel regime.

President Reagan reminded the American public, in a letter to Congress dated March 30, 1984, that American participation in the multinational force (MNF) resulted in "grievous losses" in terms of 264 military personnel killed and 137 wounded in service. This act of terror against the U.S. was perpetrated by one of the radical groups operating in Lebanon.⁷

To add insult to injury, they also kidnapped a number of American civilians and most gruesomely assassinated one of the best friends of the Arabs among American scholars, Malcolm Kerr. (A distinguished scholar with a charming personality, Kerr went to Lebanon to take up the presidency of the American University of Beirut. He was very enthusiastic about his mission when I last saw him at a conference at Duke University.) Thus Malcolm Kerr, too, was a victim of the cycle of violence in Lebanon.

Many more Americans died or were injured as a result of the irrational war in this once peaceful land. But what further created a serious problem for the

Reagan administration was the recent hijacking [to Beirut] of a Trans World Airlines jet on a flight from Athens to Rome. Hostages were taken and one American serviceman killed. The hijackers demanded the immediate release of more than 700 Shiites who were taken to Israel and imprisoned by the Israelis at the time of their withdrawal from southern Lebanon. In assessing the causes and consequences of the hijacking, one can put forth four points.

The Syrians came as a peacekeeping force, but in the very execution of that task they created enemies and further compounded the problem.

First, the groups that claimed responsibility for the hijacking belonged to small splinter associations within the Lebanese fundamentalists. Clouded in secrecy, and ruthless in their dealings with the external forces, these clandestine groups have been difficult to penetrate. As a result, they have been able to operate with impunity within Lebanon. This was very evident during the recent hostage crisis.

Second, this group or any other clandestine operation usually has foreign or local financial backers. And since these backers are, in most instances, at loggerheads with the U.S. or its allies in the Middle East, they care very little about the outcome of their clients' acts of terror. This has become very evident in the last 20 years, as the acts of terrorism became the work of both governments and private dissident groups.

Third, the lower social and political status of the Shiites in Lebanon has made them quite willing to upset the Lebanese balance of power. They had so little to lose.

Fourth, sensing the close alliance between Syria and Iran, the Shiites feel that Big Brother Syria can be very helpful in the future distribution of

resources and political power in Lebanon. Hence the opportunistic game of taking two steps towards Damascus and moving one step backwards towards Beirut.

Conclusions

The Lebanese situation involves a host of forces, each with its own particular agenda. Added to this is the role of external forces. Given this reality, I offer the following conclusions:

■ The current Lebanese crisis which started in 1975 went through three phases.

First, it began as a struggle for power between some Lebanese factions but soon deteriorated into a conflict between the radicals and the *status quo* defenders.

Second, the struggle became more complicated with the intrusion of regional powers such as Syria and Israel. These two countries, trying to capitalize on the confusion in this small country, exacerbated the conflict.

The Syrians came as a peacekeeping force, but in the very execution of that task they created enemies and further compounded the problem.

The Israelis, on the other hand, came to Lebanon as invaders because they felt their national interest was threatened. Hence Operation Peace for Galilee. This act of self-interest on the part of the government of then Prime Minister Menachem Begin backfired with the discovery of the Sabra and Chatila massacres, an atrocity which *was not* committed by the Israelis but got Israel's reputation tainted through association with Lebanese renegades such as Saad Haddad and his Christian militia.

The Israelis tried to clean their image immediately by setting up a Commission of Enquiry and later by asking for the resignation of Ariel Sharon.

Third, the struggle in Lebanon progressed a stage further when the combination of the radicalization process and the emergence of Islamic fundamentalism made the appearance of small terroristic bands fashionable. Hence the *internationalization* of the Lebanese crisis.

■ The Lebanese crisis made it clear that in this age of nuclear weapons, a small band of guerrillas/terrorists can



render big arms irrelevant. The way in which the U.S. hurriedly retreated from Lebanon, and the large number of casualties suffered by the Israelis, makes it clear that more attention must be given to dissident groups in the formulation of strategy and policy.

■ The level of violence in Lebanon has reached a point whereby death is commonplace and life is precarious in the streets of Beirut and other cities and towns. Because of this development, one wonders how the international powers can help in the stabilization of Lebanon.

■ Due to the changed situations in future political arrangements, the Shiites and the Druzes must be taken into account. They have both amassed much power in Lebanon, and their capacity to inflict pain and fear makes

them both dangerous and politically worthy of negotiation.

Ironically, one may conclude, it took Israel's invasion for the Shiites to replace the Palestinians in the Lebanese situation as a community of well-armed people in a position to extract concessions hitherto unthinkable. □

Sulayman S. Nyang, Ph.D. is associate professor of government and public administration at Howard University.

REFERENCES

1. See Meir Zamir, "Smaller and Greater Lebanon—The Squaring of a Circle," *Jerusalem Quarterly*, Volume 23 (Spring, 1982), p. 35.
2. For some discussion of the pre-war Lebanese political system, see Ralph E. Crow, "Religion Sectarianism in the Lebanese Political System," *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 24 (August, 1962), pp. 489-520; Albert Hourani, "Lebanon: The Development of a Political System," in Leonard Binder (edited) *Politics in Lebanon* (New York: John Wiley and Sons 1966), pp. 13-29.
3. See Jamal Toubi, "Social Dynamics in War-Torn Lebanon," *Jerusalem Quarterly*, Volume 17 (Fall, 1980), p. 86.
4. See Mahmud Faksh, "The Tragedy of Lebanon: Demise of a Fragmented Country," *The American Journal of Islamic Studies*, Volume 1, No. 1, (Spring, 1984), pp. 27-52.
5. See "Israel in Lebanon: Can The Israelis Achieve Their Maximalist Aims?" *The Middle East*, (Number 105), July, 1983, pp. 12-16.
6. For some discussion of Islam and politics in the Muslim world today, see Jerrold D. Green, "Islam and Politics: Politics and Islam," *Middle East Insight*, Volume Three, Number 5, 1984, pp. 3-7.
7. For an analysis of the lessons that Americans must have learned from Lebanon, see Robert J. Prangler, "Lebanon's Lessons," *The Middle East Insight*, (Number 105), July, 1983, p. 40.