LEBANON'S CONUNDRUM

Augustus Richard Norton

LEBANON'S CIVIL WAR CAME TO AN END in the autumn of 1990, when, with silent approval from Washington, Syrian forces assaulted the presidential palace in Ba'abda and brought the rebellion of General Michel Aoun to an end. Aoun had resisted implementing the Ta'if Accord of 1989, which he and his followers viewed as a legitimation of Syria's occupation of Lebanon. Aoun's objections notwithstanding, many Lebanese were understandably relieved that the sixteen-year civil war was finally over.[1] Unfortunately, nearly ten years after the agreement to end the war was signed in Ta'if, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon is still wracked by problems, especially because Lebanon continues to be a site for the Arab-Israeli conflict.

On the positive side, most of the war's detritus has been carted away and the landscape of destruction is being transformed throughout Lebanon. Even in the south, where the Israeli occupation zone continues to be a magnet for resistance attacks, the pace of construction is impressive. The potential for Lebanon to rebound financially is reflected in the international financial markets. Two Lebanese offerings on the Eurobond market were snapped up by investors. The result is that Lebanon has been able to capitalize its postwar rebuilding of infrastructure with deficit financing. The plans are ambitious and include state of the art telecommunications, a world class airport, and extensive renovation of port facilities in Beirut and in Sidon (former Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri's home town). The reconstruction project, called Horizon 2000, has cost three quarters of a billion dollars annually since 1993, and is projected to cost a billion dollars a year through 2001, large expenditures in a country of three million citizens.

In Beirut, the commercial center of the city is being recreated in a mammoth project by Solidere, a private company created for the purpose in

---

Augustus Richard Norton is Professor of International Relations and Anthropology at Boston University. A briefer version of this paper appeared in *Current History* (January 1997); reprinted by permission of *Current History*.

Copyright © 1999. All rights reserved.

1993. Solidere, described by the *Middle East Economic Digest* as the most ambitious construction project in the world, is the brainchild of billionaire and former Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri. Hariri stands not only to leave a magnificent legacy in Beirut, but, as a major stockholder in Solidere, to see his personal fortune grow as well. As a result, Lebanese have commonly complained that he acted as though he were a CEO and Lebanon his company.

Although it would be hard to discern so judging from the conspicuous consumption of some well-to-do Lebanese, the domestic economy has only grown modestly since 1990. The General Confederation of Labor, which is the umbrella for most of Lebanon's unions, has mounted several nationwide strikes to protest low wages and a galloping cost of living, most notably in 1992, when labor protests precipitated the fall of the government of Prime Minister Omar Karami, and again in 1995, when the Labor Confederation defied a government ban and organized protests against large increases in the price of gasoline. The construction boom has benefited some Lebanese, but it has also attracted about 500,000 Syrian workers. Only a tiny fraction of the Syrian workers' wages is spent in Lebanon; most of it is repatriated to Syria. Since the Syrians habitually perform menial jobs that Lebanese spurn, as they did before the civil war as well, it is hard to argue that they are stealing jobs from the Lebanese. This does not stop the issue from being a source of angry, if muted complaint.[2] Many members of the middle class have only been able to stave off a deep decline in their standard of living by selling off real estate and other fixed assets. In fact, many members of the middle class have left Lebanon, seeking opportunity elsewhere. The emigration flood has been especially heavy among the Maronites and other Christians, to the effect that the Christian communities are now estimated to account for a third or less of Lebanon's total population of three million. The human drain has been propelled not only by a quest for the good life, but by ominous limitations on personal freedom, including heavy government tampering with elections and a growing intolerance for dissent.

Syria's influence on Lebanon has grown tremendously since the late 1980s, just as Michel Aoun and his supporters feared. Few political decisions are made without consulting Damascus, and it is widely understood that Syria routinely intervenes in the Lebanese government. Decisions are tailored to suit the preferences of President Hafez al-Asad and his lieutenants, and no decision is taken that would have even the remote likelihood of offending Damascus. Lebanon has basically tied its destiny to Syria in the peace process and, since 1993, President Elias Hrawi has repeatedly emphasized that there will be continued cooperation between Lebanon and Syria. While many Lebanese privately express their distaste for Lebanon's cheek to jowl relationship with Syria, many others argue that Lebanon has little choice. Were Lebanon to try to make its own way, independent of Syria's wishes, it would not only provoke Syria, but it would also be in a weaker position vis-à-vis Israel. For their part, after their own unhappy attempts to shape events in Lebanon during the 1980s, both Israel and the United States have been content to let Syria call the shots in Lebanon.

Copyright © 1999. All rights reserved.

RESHAPING THE PARLIAMENT

After a twenty-year hiatus as a result of the civil war of 1975 to 1990, parliamentary elections were resumed in Lebanon in 1992.[3] Ordinarily, the resumption of elections would be an occasion for celebration, but the 1992 election law was ramrodded through the parliament, and protections provided in the Ta'if agreement, including a Constitutional Council, were not implemented in time to function for the elections that were hastily scheduled for August 1992. Given the short time available to confirm lists of voters and otherwise monitor the conduct of the election, many Lebanese viewed the 1992 elections as a ploy by Syria to increase its control over the Beirut government. By ensuring the election of a majority of pro-Syrian parliamentary deputies, Syria could avoid the inconvenience of a recalcitrant legislature that might insist on the enforcement of the Ta'if Accord. That agreement required Syria to withdraw its 40,000 soldiers to positions in Lebanon's Biqa‘ valley two years after implementation, that is, by September 1992, but this aspect of the agreement was suspended by the Lebanese parliament.

Sensing a fixed election, many Lebanese, especially Christians, mounted a boycott. As a result, in several electoral areas fewer than five percent of eligible Christians voted, and no area had an overall participation higher than 37 percent. In one district (Jubayl), only one Christian vote was cast for every 200 eligible Christian voters. The rates of participation among the Muslims were higher but still well below the customary voting rates.

Arguably the most authentic result of the 1992 elections was in the Shiite Muslim community, where a number of the traditional political bosses were shunted aside by the voters in favor of candidates from Hizballah (the Party of God) and Amal (the Shiite reformist movement).[4] Although the Shiite Muslims account for at least a third of Lebanon's population and are the largest single confessional group in the country, they have been habitually impoverished and poorly represented in government. In many ways, the long process of politicization and political mobilization among the Shiites that began in the 1950s and culminated in the 1990s has been the central challenge facing Lebanon for some time. After generations of marginalization and being kept outside the system, the Shiites now found themselves in the halls of parliament. Counting victories by its non-Shiite allies, Hizballah won a total of twelve seats in the 1992 elections, making it the largest bloc in parliament. Of course, Hizballah gained notoriety and international opprobrium in the 1980s for its complicity in the kidnapping of foreigners and the devastating 1983 attacks on French soldiers and American marines deployed in Beirut as part of the multinational force. More than 280 American and French servicemen were killed when bomb-laden trucks were driven into their positions. The 1992 elections seem to mark the beginning of a period of transition as Hizballah sought to recreate itself as a political party.

Copyright © 1999. All rights reserved.

As the 1996 parliamentary elections approached, a new electoral law was passed in July of that year. Like the previous law, this one ignored key provisions of the Ta'if Accord and stipulated that elections in Mount Lebanon, one of Lebanon's five provinces and the center of opposition to the government, would be organized not on the basis of the province, but, exceptionally, on the basis of the *caza* or district. The transparent purpose was to ensure the election of government supporters and to fragment the opposition. Although there was some audible grumbling in parliament, the new law was dutifully passed and elections were announced to begin in August (elections are conducted on five succeeding weeks, in one province after another). As in 1992, the elections were to begin in Mount Lebanon, apparently to give the opposition as little time to prepare as possible.

Some well-known personalities called for a boycott of the elections, including General Michel Aoun; Dory Chamoun, son of a former president; Raymond Edde, the aging but respected head of the National Bloc Party; and former president Amin Gemayel. But even leading participants in the 1992 boycott argued against a repeat. Albert Mukhaibar, the respected Greek Orthodox oppositional figure who was a stalwart of the earlier boycott, argued that it was counterproductive and announced that he would stand for election. (Ironically, Mukhaibar later lost his bid for a seat.) For its part, the U.S. embassy in Beirut urged broad participation in the elections. The U.S. enthusiasm for elections evoked cynicism among many informed Lebanese who anticipated that the election would be anything but fair.

Parliamentary elections in Lebanon are organized using a unique list system, which invites deal making and complicated alliances. Although parliamentary seats are allocated on a confessional bases, voters cast a ballot for every empty seat in their voting district. Thus, in the North province, which accounts for 28 seats in parliament, voters elect nine Maronite, two Alawite, six Greek Orthodox, and eleven Sunni members of parliament. Prominent candidates seek to organize coalitions and often try to persuade their supporters to vote for every member in the electoral coalition. However, voters routinely split their ballot, crossing out less preferred candidates and writing in more popular candidates from other lists, or even independent candidates. As a result, pre-election coalitions sometimes backfire. For instance, voters in Beirut defied government manipulation in order to elect several opposition candidates, including Salim al-Hoss, the respected former prime minister (elected again to that post in late 1998), and Najah Wakim, an outspoken Greek Orthodox critic of the government.

While voting irregularities varied from place to place, reliable reports indicate that a systematic pattern of tampering by the government occurred. Voter lists were often incomplete and inaccurate, newly naturalized citizens were instructed to vote for the government approved list (and did so for fear of losing their coveted identity cards), ballot boxes were stuffed to prevent some embarrassing defeats (apparently including that of Foreign Minister Faris Buwayz), and voters were sometimes denied the right to cast a secret ballot. No

Copyright © 1999. All rights reserved.

doubt, not all the abuses occurred at the hands of government, but the lion's share clearly did.

The result was a resounding if tainted government victory. In Beirut, where Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri headed his own list, the list captured 14 of 19 seats and only two opposition candidates won seats. The results in Beirut were indicative of the pattern throughout the country. Oppositionists did manage to capture a few seats, but the lion's share of the 128 seats are firmly in the government's and Syria's corner. This means that the Beirut government will continue to acquiesce obediently to Syria's ultimate control over Lebanon.

As noted above, one of the most dramatic aspects of the 1992 elections was the entry of Hizballah, the Party of God, into Lebanese parliamentary politics. Of 27 seats assigned to Shiite Muslims, Hizballah won 8 in 1992, but there was no doubt that the Hizballah candidates were assisted by the Christian boycott. Were they not boycotting, many Christian voters could have been expected to cast a vote against Hizballah.

Contrary to the anxious concerns of some Lebanese, and particularly some western officials, Hizballah performed responsibly in parliament. In fact, the party's deputies proved to be just as pragmatic as their secular colleagues, and often brokered deals and built legislative alliances in order to promote desirable legislation. In this sense, and as a number of leading Lebanese politicians have emphasized in private interviews conducted in 1995 and 1996, the entry of Hizballah into parliament is a success story, yet another proof that participation in the political game tends to moderate radical players. Muhammad Ra'd, president of Hizballah's Political Council, told the author in 1996 that, despite its earlier rejection of any participation in Lebanese political institutions, the party had come to the conclusion that the Ta'if Accord changed the structure of the system so that constructive participation was now possible.

Nonetheless, despite its strong base of popular support, Hizballah faced strong competition in the 1996 elections. Hizballah's campaign stressed its role in resisting Israel's occupation of Lebanon's soil. Thus one ubiquitous poster in West Beirut, which referred to the leading role played by Hizballah fighters in the resistance, said: "They resist with their blood, resist with your vote." Thanks to its record of clean, non-corrupt politics, Hizballah has a broad base of support among the Shiite Muslims, particularly in the southern suburbs of Beirut (called the *dahiya*), but even if its candidates can count on a heavy vote from fellow Shiites, the mixed list system often gives the final word to non-Shiite voters who have the option of choosing other Shiite candidates. Hence in the Ba'abda *caza* the popular Hizballah deputy 'Ali 'Ammar was defeated by a combination of Maronite and Druze enmity and some strong armed manipulation by the Maronite leader of an opposing list.

In addition, Hariri and his colleagues in Syria seem to have been intent to ensure that Hizballah would not expand its role in the political system. In this sense, there may have been a meeting of the minds of the Lebanese government, the Syrians, and U. S. officials. Only seven of the twenty-seven Shiite deputies

Copyright © 1999. All rights reserved.

elected were from Hizballah. Success in the Lebanese electoral system requires candidates to seek alliances, given the need for electoral support across confessional lines. Hizballah candidates did not fare well in areas where the Shiite Muslims comprise a minority. Non-Shiite voters preferred to vote for more moderate candidates. Moreover, Nabih Berri, the speaker of parliament and head of the rival Amal movement, is in a position to dispense vast patronage, and he is supported by Syria to boot. Including his own seat, eleven of the successful Shiite candidates were allies of Nabih Berri. Two were allies of al-Hariri, one was an ally of al-Hoss, two had a base in a leading party, and four were from traditionally powerful families.

THE NINE-YEAR PRESIDENTIAL TERM

The term for the president in Lebanon is six years, and incumbents are constitutionally prohibited from succeeding themselves. Although the prerogatives of the president were reduced in the Ta'if Agreement, the position continues to be preserved for a Maronite. Whereas prior to Ta'if the presidency was the strongest political position in Lebanon, it is now checked by the prime minister, a Sunni Muslim, and the speaker of parliament, a Shiite Muslim. In effect, the top leadership is now a troika of presidents: the president of the republic, the president of the cabinet, and the president of the parliament.

In the autumn of 1995, an election was scheduled to replace President Elias Hrawi, a second tier politician from the town of Zahle in the Biqa' Valley. Hrawi was elected in 1989, following the assassination of President René Moawad, who was killed three weeks after his election. Of the troika, Hrawi's public profile was by far the lowest. He maintained friendly ties with Syria, and Syria was clearly content with his presidential style, as was Prime Minister Hariri. Despite the constitutional prohibition, parliament voted on 19 October 1995 to extend Hrawi's term of office for three years. Speaker Nabih Berri put aside his declared opposition and lent his support to the extraordinary measure. For its part, Syria signaled its preference somewhat subtly, but Lebanese politicians strain hard to read Syrian signals, and they are willing, as in this case, to contort and even ignore Lebanese laws in order to please their Syria brothers.

In the 128-seat parliament only eleven members found the will to oppose the extension of Hrawi's term, which eventually expired in 1998. Resisting the interpreted will of Damascus has its costs. Of the eleven members who voted against the term extension, only six managed to win reelection in the 1996 elections. Among the victims of government manipulation of the elections were several popular and well-regarded figures, including the leftist Habib Sadeq, who has strong popular support in southern Lebanon; Mikhail Daher, who was promoted for the presidency by Syria in 1988; and 'Isam Na'man, a respected Beirut attorney.

As this example illustrates, while some restructuring of the political system has occurred, there is little prospect for comprehensive political reforms so long as power remains in the grip of a coterie of politicians on good terms

Copyright © 1999. All rights reserved.

with Damascus. Instead, the government is used like a giant patronage machine, enabling newly entrenched political bosses to busily create networks of clients and to grow richer on sweetheart deals. For instance, in September 1997 the government decided to reduce the number of authorized television stations to four. On the face of it, the decision was sensible, since a crazy-quilt of stations had emerged during the war, most associated with one militia group or another. The details tell a different story. The four authorized stations are owned by the prime minister, the speaker of the parliament, the interior minister, and a wealthy businessman in partnership with the grandson of a former president. Not only are the stations important sources of advertising revenue, but the government seems to be intent on controlling the political coverage offered by television, just as it has sometimes sought to intimidate and control the stubbornly outspoken print media. Reportedly, Syria objected that the government's decision affected al-Manar, the Hizballah television station, and on 2 October of the same year, al-Manar was allowed to resume broadcasting.[5]

FRIENDS

Since 1991 Syria has enveloped Lebanon politically and diplomatically. A web of agreements and pacts now link the two countries and serve to legitimate Syrian meddling in Lebanese affairs. These range from a Treaty of Brotherhood, Cooperation, and Coordination and a Pact on Defense and Security, signed in 1991, to bilateral agreements on agriculture, social and economic affairs, health, and the movement of individuals and goods, signed in 1993. The common denominator is that each agreement has served to bring Lebanon closer to the embrace of Syria.

Lebanon, like Syria, attended the Madrid peace conference in 1991, and, with the exception of a brief period in 1993, Beirut has basically followed the lead of Damascus in negotiations with Israel. Syria has, for instance, refused to participate in the multilateral negotiations launched under U.S. and Russian sponsorship in Moscow in January 1992. Hafez al-Asad has argued that the multilateral talks, which deal with the environment, economic development, security, water, and the issue of refugees, serve to lend legitimacy to Israel, conferring the prizes of peace before Israel has earned them by withdrawing from occupied Arab territory. Lebanon has followed the Syrian lead scrupulously, despite the fact the one of the most pressing issues confronting Lebanon in the peace process is the fate of the approximately 350,000 Palestinian refugees living in Lebanon. Arguably, it would serve Lebanon's interests to participate in the multilateral talks at least on the refugee question, especially since the government has emphatically declared that it opposes "normalizing" the refugees and integrating them into Lebanese society.

Early in his tenure as prime minister, in February 1993, Rafiq al-Hariri outlined the parameters for negotiations with Israel. Lebanon was willing, he declared, to sign any agreement with Israel, short of a peace treaty, based on

Copyright © 1999. All rights reserved.

United Nations Security Council Resolution 425, the 1978 resolution that calls for the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Lebanon. He rejected any linkage with Resolutions 242 and 338, which deal with the Arab-Israeli conflict and the principle of land for peace, since the occupation of southern Lebanon by Israel is unequivocally rejected in Resolution 425, and in Resolution 425, unlike Resolutions 242 and 338, there is no suggestion of a principle of territorial adjustment. Finally, he declared his refusal to wait for progress by other parties negotiating with Israel. Hariri's independent position did not survive the spring, and by October 1993 Lebanon announced a policy of "total coordination" with Syria.

Diplomatically, Lebanon has been relatively isolated since 1993, when it became clear that Beirut had tied its fate to Syria in the peace process. In Washington it became increasingly common for officials to presume that Lebanon's "zip code" was the same as Syria's. The United States has continued to emphasize its continuing commitment to the territorial integrity of the country, to the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Lebanese soil, and to the reestablishment of peace and security. Nonetheless, U.S. Middle East policy under President Bill Clinton has been remarkably partial to Israeli perspectives, and especially so in southern Lebanon, where Washington has often offered unconditional support for Israel's actions. This penchant was clearly demonstrated in April 1996, during Israel's "Grapes of Wrath" operation (discussed below). Despite the fact that Israel's continuing presence in the south is in clear violation of Resolution 425, which the United States sponsored, President Bill Clinton accepted Israel's assertions that it was acting only to protect its own security and took no action except to emphasize its support for Israel.

Some U.S. policies have served to isolate Lebanon and arguably have further nudged Lebanon into Syria's brotherly embrace, none more so than the passport ban. Since 1985, when hijackers sympathetic to Hizballah hijacked a TWA airliner to Beirut and killed an American sailor who was a passenger, American citizens have been prohibited from using their passports to travel to Lebanon (this policy is typically mislabeled as a "travel ban," but such a ban would be hard to sustain under constitutional challenge). In fact, more than 40,000 U.S. citizens have traveled to Lebanon, either using a Lebanese passport, in the case of some Lebanese-Americans, or simply by securing a Lebanese visa on a piece of paper that substitutes for the passport. In point of fact, outside the occupied south, the physical dangers confronting the traveler are far more extreme in many other countries and regions, including Russia, Latin America, and Africa, and there has not been an act of political violence against a westerner since the 1980s. Politically, there is no serious domestic incentive for the ban to be listed, and it also lends U.S. diplomats a prize that can be awarded to Lebanon should the peace process move forward. The United States has refused to lift the ban despite persistent Lebanese requests, citing continuing but undisclosed dangers in Lebanon. Those dangers are emphasized on the scene by U.S. diplomats who travel only in heavily armored convoys accompanied by

Copyright © 1999. All rights reserved.

their own SWAT teams, or "Ninjas," as the Lebanese term them. Symbolically, the continuation of the passport ban (now lifted) dampened investment in Lebanon, especially by U.S. business.

The U.S. position, both on the passport ban and on broader Arab-Israeli issues, has opened a path for France to reassert its historic role in Lebanon. Prime Minister Hariri was quick to welcome France's involvement. In fact, Hariri garnered significant credit for his relationship with President Jacques Chirac, which helped reduce Lebanon's sense of diplomatic isolation. Following the artillery massacre of Lebanese civilians who sought refuge at the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) camp in Qana in April 1996, when both Israel and the United States became anxious to bring the embarrassing violence to an end, it was a French draft of the cease-fire plan that carried the day, notably preserving the right of the Lebanese to resist the continuing Israeli occupation.

THE BLEEDING SOUTH

Israel has been heavily involved in southern Lebanon since the civil war began in 1975. Since then it has sought to cultivate and fortify local allies who, in return for Israeli support, would assist in securing Israel's northern border. Since 1985 this policy has taken the form of the self-declared "Security Zone," an area that comprises about 10 percent of all Lebanese territory. From the perspective of many observers as well as the Lebanese government, the Security Zone is little more than a euphemism for occupation, a position that is buttressed by Resolution 425, which calls unconditionally for Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon. Israel, for its part, argues that its only objective is security, that it has no territorial ambitions in Lebanon, and that it will withdraw provided satisfactory security arrangements are made. Since 1993, the question of the south has been captive to the Israeli-Syrian peace negotiations. In effect, it is presumed by Washington, Tel Aviv, Damascus, and Beirut that an Israeli-Syrian agreement will deal not only with the fate of the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights but with the Security Zone as well. Attempts by Lebanon to negotiate directly with Israel, especially in 1983 and 1993, have foundered on Syrian objections to separate negotiations (which would isolate Syria).

For more than a decade a deadly war of resistance to the Israeli occupation has been fought by Lebanese, and especially by the Iranian-backed Hizballah, which is the dominant force in the self-styled "Islamic Resistance." Attacks occur almost daily, and all sides have suffered losses. In 1996, through September and excluding the "Grapes of Wrath" operation discussed below, 21 Israeli soldiers, 16 members of Israel's proxy militia (the South Lebanon Army or SLA), 33 members of the Islamic resistance, 8 Palestinian fighters, and 15 civilians were killed.

Over time very clear—but unstable—rules of the game have emerged between the Israelis and the SLA on the one hand, and the resistance forces on the other. Israel would refrain from attacking civilian targets in Lebanon, while

Copyright © 1999. All rights reserved.

the resistance would focus its actions on the Security Zone. This modus vivendi was formalized as an oral agreement in 1993, following Israel's Operation Accountability, launched in July of that year. Nonetheless, the 1993 agreement only sufficed to temporarily reduce the intensity of violence and counter-violence. By 1996, after Hizballah fired *katyusha* rockets into Israel in retaliation for the killing of Lebanese civilians, the IDF again launched a major campaign into Lebanon. Operation Grapes of Wrath, initiated in April 1996, was intended to undermine popular support for Hizballah among the Lebanese, as well as to prompt Syria to rein in Hizballah. The strategy failed, largely as a result of the horrible slaughter at a UN base in southern Lebanon, where scores of civilians seeking refuge from IDF air and ground attacks were killed by Israeli artillery. As CNN broadcast horrific pictures of mangled and burned civilians, U.S. diplomacy swung into action. Secretary of State Warren Christopher succeeded in gaining acceptance by all sides to the same rules that had been orally accepted in 1993. This time, the agreement was committed to an unsigned piece of paper.

The April understanding specifies that armed groups are not allowed to launch attacks against Israeli territory; that Israel and its allies are not allowed to bombard civilians or civilian targets; that both sides commit themselves to avoid attacks on civilians and launching attacks from civilian areas; and that nothing in the agreement would prevent the right to self-defense. The agreement also provides for a monitoring group of the United States, France, Lebanon, Syria, and Israel to oversee the implementation of the agreement and to receive complaints of violations, and for a consultative group, including France, the United States, the European Union, and Russia, to help Lebanon in its reconstruction efforts. It is noteworthy that, while Israel asserts that it is not an occupying force, it has tacitly accepted the right of the Lebanese to attack Israeli soldiers on Lebanese soil.

Of course, the rules of the game will inevitably be violated. Both sides have blatantly disregarded time-honored principles of non-combatant immunity and proportionality.[6] Resistance attacks spark Israeli reprisals, which lead to civilian deaths simply because Israel's standards for discriminate retaliation are sometimes quite loose, especially after Israeli soldiers have been killed. In addition, on a day to day basis the IDF often adopts a shoot first, ask questions later policy, which makes daily life more than a bit risky for those who live in the shadow of the Security Zone. In point of fact, civilians are regularly killed "by accident," and in greater cumulative numbers than either members of the resistance or the IDF or SLA.

Over the course of the Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon there have been relatively few civilians killed in Israel as a result of fire from Lebanon. Since 1982 twelve Israeli civilians have been killed as a result of attacks launched from the South, and since 1993 only three have died. These deaths are regrettable, but they are modest in number by comparison with the toll in Lebanese civilians, for whom the price of Israeli security has been high. The combined Lebanese civilian deaths incurred during the 1993 and 1996 invasions

Copyright © 1999. All rights reserved.

total nearly 300, including the 103 or 104 people massacred in the Israeli shelling of the UNIFIL base in Qana in April 1996. In the period between Operation Accountability in 1993 and Operation Grapes of Wrath, 45 Lebanese civilians were killed by the Israelis or their allies, compared to three Israeli civilians.

The report of the UN Secretary General's military advisor demonstrates that it is likely Israel fired on the UNIFIL site in Qana intentionally and with disregard for the lives of civilians housed there, as well as the safety of UNIFIL soldiers.[7] The report shows that the thirteen shells that fell on the compound were decisively not accidental overshots, but exploded where they had been aimed. This tragic incident illustrates the disdain for innocent lives that often characterizes the actions of the IDF in Israel.

The logic of Israel's "iron fist" is to punish Lebanese civilians disproportionately for the IDF's inability to prevent attacks on its own soldiers as well for the retaliatory firing of katyusha rockets at Israel. Israeli strategists consistently assume that by imposing an awesome burden on the Lebanese—as when 400,000 people were roused from their homes and given a few hours to flee on threat of bombardment in April 1996—support for the resistance will wither. This is a clear strategic miscalculation reflecting an inability to understand that the attacks on the Security Zone are widely popular because many Lebanese believe that a reduction in pressure will induce Israel not to leave but to stay.

Washington and Tel Aviv call regularly for the disarming of Hizballah, and Israel has made the de-fanging of Hizballah a precondition for withdrawal, as though it were merely a collection of fanatically-crazed gunmen directed by Iran and manipulated by Syria. In effect, Israel and its friends in Washington often assume that Hizballah is a mirror image of the SLA, namely, an easily manipulated and completely dependent proxy force. This is a faulty image. Hizballah's role in the resistance has won it support, especially among the Shiites of the Beirut suburbs, whose roots are usually in the south, and Hizballah looks more and more like an efficient political party.

Although Hizballah refuses to engage in any direct negotiations with Israel, which it routinely excoriates in brutal language, it has negotiated indirectly with Israel. It did so most recently in July 1996, when, through German mediators, Israel and Hizballah agreed to the exchange of the remains of their fallen fighters. A small step, obviously, but the corpse talks may have opened a useful channel for further dialogue. Hizballah has maintained a position of calculated ambiguity in terms of what it will do should Israel actually withdraw from the south. While it is widely believed in Lebanon that the violence against Israel would then stop, Hizballah has avoided saying this directly. In this sense, its calculated ambiguity makes it far easier for Israel to justify staying than leaving.

In fact, if Israel withdraws from the south, it will be a relatively simple matter for the Lebanese army to disarm Hizballah, because its raison d'être is not

Copyright © 1999. All rights reserved.

limited to bullets and bombs. Conversely, without an Israeli withdrawal, Hizballah has broad support for refusing to put down its weapons. As for Hizballah's external friends Iran and Syria, they have no incentive to end the resistance. For Iran, Israel is anathema, and for Syria, Hizballah's pressure on Israel serves an instrumental purpose; namely, it raises Syria's value as a negotiating partner and increases the likelihood that Syrian suzerainty in Lebanon will be formally recognized to the disadvantage of the Lebanese.

In July 1996, responding to pressure from the Israeli military, which has begun to question the tenability of the Israeli position in Lebanon, especially after the heavy criticism that followed the Qana massacre, and in a patent attempt to send a message to Syria, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu released a new trial balloon to test the idea of a "Lebanon first" option. Rather than considering the question of the South as an adjunct to broader negotiations with Syria, Netanyahu proposed the idea of an Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon in return for appropriate security arrangements, including the disarming of Hizballah. From Israel's perspective, the idea has a lot to recommend it. First, and perhaps primarily, it might relieve the pressure on Israel from the United States to make concessions in other realms of the peace process, namely, in the remaining occupied areas of the West Bank. Equally enticing, by leaving southern Lebanon, Israel would be eliminating Syria's trump card. Predictably, Syria rejected the proposal, arguing that Damascus holds the key to peace in South Lebanon. The Lebanese obediently followed suit, citing the proposal as a ploy intended to weaken Syria and therefore Lebanon. At the end of the day, the trial balloon may have been good public relations, but it only served to underline that Israeli-Syrian negotiations are the only game in town.

CONCLUSION

Lebanon continues to be captive to the peace process. Lebanon's senior politicians have shown no enthusiasm for staking out an independent path and have resigned themselves to following the Syrian lead. Israel has been perfectly content to accept Syria as it main interlocutor for Lebanese matters, and the United States, while maintaining diplomatic representation in Beirut, has also presumed that the Lebanese are not masters of their own fate. Threatening troop movements by the Israeli, Lebanese, and Syrian armies in October 1996 served to highlight the stakes in the peace process for all concerned parties, although the maneuvers were clearly moves on the diplomatic chessboard as the players repositioned themselves for the next stage in negotiations.

The subordination of Lebanese politics to Syrian interests is for now a fact. Lebanon's independence is a hostage to the peace process. Whether the hostage will be released at the end of the process remains a central question.

Copyright © 1999. All rights reserved.

NOTES

1. For a fuller discussion see Ronald D. McLaurin, "Lebanon: Into or Out of Oblivion?" *Current History* (January 1992): 29-33.

2. Precise data on the number of Syrian workers do not exist, since few of them have work permits but instead enter Lebanon on three-week tourist permits.

3. Excellent coverage of Lebanon's elections is found in *al-Nahar* and *al-Safir*, the leading Beirut dailies, as well as *al-Hayat*, now the newspaper of record in the Arab world. For an analysis of the 1992 elections in English see Jillian Schwedler, "Swiss Soldiers, Ta'if Clocks, and Early Elections: Towards a Happy Ending in Lebanon?" *Middle East Insight* 10, no. 1 (November-December 1993): 45-54; for an excellent summary of the 1996 elections see *Lebanon Report*, new series, 3 (Fall 1996).

4. For a discussion of the emergence of these Shiite groups see the author's "Estrangement and Fragmentation in Lebanon," *Current History* (February 1986): 58-62, 88-89.

5. For more details see *Lebanon Report*, new series, no. 3 (Fall 1996): 8-10.

6. A recent and carefully researched study by Human Rights Watch is essential for understanding events in southern Lebanon. See *Civilian Pawns: Laws of War Violations and the Use of Weapons on the Israel-Lebanon Border* (New York, London, Brussels, and Washington: Human Rights Watch, 1996).

7. The report, prepared by Major-General Franklin van Kappen, a Dutch officer serving on the staff of the Secretary General, is Security Council document S/1996/137, dated 7 May 1996. A 1997 report by Amnesty International reached similar conclusions.

Copyright © 1999. All rights reserved.