

Lebanese Rules

Between 1975 and 1991, Lebanon suffered a bloody civil war that had massive repercussions regionally and globally. Among other things, the hostage crisis in the 1980's detonated the Iran-Contra crisis that almost destroyed the Reagan presidency. Today, Lebanon is relatively peaceful, though under a repressive Syrian hegemony, and the whole story may seem of little importance to anyone except a regional specialist. But the Lebanese experience might well provide a foretaste of conditions in the West, and specifically Europe. Above all, the Lebanese meltdown should raise alarms about contemporary Western concepts of nations and nationalism and the seemingly inevitable triumph of global capitalism.

A brief history is in order. Lebanon was an artificial entity created by the French in 1920, out of the ruins of the Ottoman Empire. To oversimplify, the society was heavily stratified, with an extraordinarily wealthy elite drawn from Maronite Christians, whose main rivals were Sunni Muslims. The lowest classes were Shiite Muslims. In 1943, Lebanese elites agreed on a National Covenant, which held good for 30 years. Political power and offices were shared out on the basis of a recent census, itself an outrageous piece of creative accounting that gravely underestimated the numbers of the poor and disinherited. Under the gerrymandered system, Christian elites agreed to respect the nation's Arab identity, while rich Muslims promised not to seek union with other Muslim or Arab states. The new Lebanon would operate purely as a business concern oriented to the creation and defense of wealth and privilege, as politics were taken out of the equation. The state existed as a means of doling out the spoils to the elites, and any sense of national identity or loyalty was scorned.

This idyllic arrangement ultimately collapsed, partly because of the glaring imbalance between rich and poor. New factors intervened, however, especially the forces of demography. The elites—the Maronites, in particular—suffered from the common Western and European fashion of strict family limitation, and their numbers declined relatively. The ranks of the poor swelled, though the

official prohibition on further censuses meant that these rising numbers would never achieve official recognition. Increasingly, the young and poor confronted the old and rich, with no hope of either joining or replacing them. This situation would be troubling enough, but then new external forces came into play, as the Shiite poor explored older forms of Islam, with their radical vision of social justice and emphases on apocalyptic, charismatic, and mystical traditions. And finally, in the 1960's, the arrival of exiled Palestinian militants meant that the disaffected in Lebanon came to see their cause as part of a global revolutionary movement. Moreover, the well-armed Palestinians were able and willing to challenge the local ruling classes.

In 1975, the Lebanese dream collapsed, as radicals of various shades confronted the Christian-dominated state. Soon, the war became more explicitly religious, as the anti-regime cause was increasingly led by the radicalized forces of Shiite Islam, by militias such as Amal and Hezbollah. The carnage seemed all the more bizarre since the fighting occurred among the proud monuments of global capitalism: One decisive conflict in the 1975-76 struggle for Beirut was the Battle of the Holiday Inn. Once unleashed, the violence raged until the nation was all but consumed, with 200,000 dead.

Today, the Lebanese war would seem long ago and far away, except that, in crucial respects, its underlying causes find striking echoes in the modern West, and, above all, in contemporary Europe. Here, too, a grand political settlement has tried to extinguish national loyalties, to replace the old politics with the exclusive pursuit of wealth. Like Lebanon, though, the new Europe cannot ignore the facts of demography, especially when the clash of generations is simultaneously a conflict of religions and worldviews. Old-stock white populations of Christian inheritance are aging rapidly, as birth-rates fall well below replacement—to 1.1 or 1.2 per woman in many areas. Much of the population growth is found among immigrant populations, who—unlike in the United States—are chiefly Muslim in background. Within 30 years, Mus-



lims could make up a quarter of the populations of France, Germany, and the Netherlands. The link between wealth, religion, and generational conflict is obvious today in the cities—in the housing estates surrounding French cities, for example. Young Muslims are all too likely to encounter the mechanisms of the state in the baneful form of police, prisons, and the criminal-justice system.

The presence of a large Muslim underclass need not of itself portend disaster, were it not that we can see some of the same factors that operated in Lebanon circa 1970 or 1975, especially in the spread of internationalist and apocalyptic forms of Islam. Across Europe, we see fervent evangelism by the Salafists, by Takfir wal Hijra, by the Tablighi Jama'at, by various *jihad*-oriented groups. And the example of Al Qaeda—and now, perhaps, the Iraqi resistance—encourages dissidents to think in terms of explicitly military challenges to the state, to see the European regimes as oppressive crusaders.

For some years, European elites have presented their new society as a world living after the end of history, with the turbulence of the 20th century concluded, with all passion spent. The Lebanese example, however, showed that money-making alone cannot substitute for cultural and national loyalties; that ideology and religious activism can never be wholly suppressed; and that, ultimately, demographic pressures have the capacity to overturn even the most stable-looking society. As in Lebanon, Europe's elites seem to believe that, if they no longer think in terms of religion, of national loyalty, of cultural identity, then nor will anyone else. I do not know if Western European cities will ever witness an apocalyptic struggle on the lines of Beirut's 1976 Battle for the Hotels; but the parallels are ominous.

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War on the Home Front

Real Homeland Security

by Wayne Allensworth

U.S. officialdom calls them “Special Interest Aliens,” as much because they might have a special interest in us as we in them. They are aliens from countries that are considered potential sources of terrorist attacks on the American homeland, and their numbers are reportedly growing. “People are coming here with bad intentions,” an anonymous Border Patrol agent stated in an interview with NBC 4 TV in Los Angeles last November. “We know for a fact that people coming from the Middle East are now coming into Mexico and spending a year, even two years in Mexico to learn how to speak Spanish.” These “Special Interest Aliens” (SIA’s) intended to pass themselves off as Mexicans, presumably to increase their chances of following the paths of millions of illegal Mexican immigrants who have entered the United States.

Rep. Dana Rohrabacher (R-CA) told NBC 4 that he and other members of Congress had sent a letter to the Department of Homeland Security demanding answers to important questions, including “How many people have been stopped at our southern border who would be hostile and [are] coming from hostile countries?” According to Rohrabacher, “It could be in the hundreds, it could be in the thousands.” Douglas, Arizona, resident Larry Vance showed NBC 4 a Middle Eastern prayer rug left behind by one of a host of illegal aliens who have used his property as a transit point to heartland America and said: “I think it would be incredibly naive, to the point of stupidity, to not [*sic*] believe there are terrorists coming through here.”

A Tucson, Arizona, NBC affiliate subsequently carried a similar report: A former Border Patrol supervisor claimed that aliens from states that are considered potential sources of terrorism are crossing the border at will; a diary written in Arabic was left behind by one illegal alien; and a Border Patrol agent told reporters of an incident involving an alien from Pakistan, apprehended along the Arizona-Mexico border, who was identified as an associate of an Islamic terrorist group, and another incident involving seven Middle Eastern men who were caught by the Border Patrol. The Border Patrol veteran told reporters, “We were told specifically that these people had terrorist pasts and they were coming here specifically to carry out a terrorist attack.”

The Los Angeles and Tucson television investigations followed on the heels of numerous reports about terrorists possibly entering the United States over the summer of 2004. In July, Farida Goolam Mohamed Ahmed was detained at a McAllen, Texas, airport, on her way to New York. She carried a South African passport and travel itineraries showing a July 8 flight from Johannesburg to London. From there, she flew to Mexico City before illegally crossing the Rio Grande near

McAllen. Ahmed was on a terrorism-watch list and has allegedly entered the United States as many as 250 times.

Border Patrol agents reportedly ran across dozens of Middle Eastern men trying to enter the United States illegally last summer. In June, 77 Middle Eastern men were reported to have been apprehended in Arizona alone. In September, U.S. agents were investigating a story about a suspected Al Qaeda cell leader, Adnan G. El Shukrijumah, trying to enter the United States along alien-smuggling routes on the U.S.-Mexican border.

Such stories did not let up last fall: In November, *Time* reported that a “key al-Qaeda operative” captured in Pakistan told an alarming story of the network’s plans to target the United States with “weapons of mass destruction.” Sharif al-Masri told interrogators that Al Qaeda was interested in smuggling “nuclear materials to Mexico, then operatives would carry the material into the U.S.” At about the time of Masri’s capture, Homeland Security officials were meeting with Mexican counterparts to discuss U.S. concerns about the terrorist threat along the Mexican border—including the possibility that illegal-alien-smuggling rings could aid terrorists in crossing into the United States. The American side was apparently worried about the use of aircraft in delivering biological or chemical attacks on U.S. soil; the Mexicans said they would focus on flight schools and aviation facilities on their side of the border. The reported theft of a crop duster south of San Diego, apparently by three men from Mexico who assaulted a security guard and flew off the plane in a southerly direction, had alarmed the Americans.

The rash of reports of terrorists crossing the border in Arizona and Texas caused some Texas congressmen to demand tightened security along the border. Rep. John Culberson (R-TX) has, among other things, led the fight against the acceptance of Mexican Matricula Consular cards as a valid form of identification and was prominent among those Texas congressmen demanding tightened border security. Last fall, Culberson said he had been told by U.S. prosecutors that Al Qaeda terrorists were slipping into the United States disguised as Mexicans, paying off alien-smuggling rings to get them over the border in the flood tide of Mexicans. The terrorists, according to Culberson, had obtained Matricula cards. Once in the United States, they became “sleeper agents,” awaiting the signal to carry out pre-planned terrorist acts.

At first glance, comments by Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and announced border-security measures gave the appearance that the Bush administration was beginning to take the border problem seriously. In November, Rumsfeld commented that smuggling routes for moving illegal aliens into the United States could be used “just as easily for terrorists.” At the same time, Homeland Security officials, partly in re-

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