

Report from Lebanon by John Judis

A MINI WORLD WAR

Lebanon used to be the intellectual and financial capital of the Mideast. Tourists flocked to its seaside resorts and to Beirut's fashionable Hamra district.

It was also a country where different religious and national groups lived side-by-side: Maronite and Greek Orthodox Christians, Sunni, Shi'ite and Druze Moslems, Jews and Palestinians. Before the war, when both Christian and Moslem Lebanese championed the Palestinian cause, they pointed to themselves as evidence that a democratic secular state could work in the Mideast.

But now Lebanese religious and national groups have become warring armies bent upon each other's destruction, and Beirut and much of southern Lebanon is a shambles.

The center of Beirut is bombed-out rubble. Weeds grow through the cracked walls of uninhabited seaside resorts. Refugees from the Israeli invasion of the south squat in abandoned buildings and in tent cities.

Beirut is no longer one city, but two, divided by the *Place des Martyrs*, across which the Phalangists and Lebanese National Movement lobbed rockets at each other. To get from one side to the other, it is necessary to change taxis at the *Place des Martyrs*; taxi drivers from each side are unwilling to journey to the other.

East Beirut, as well as northern Lebanon, is largely Christian territory, ruled by the Phalangist and National Liberal party militia. The Palestinian refugee camps that used to dot its perimeter were forcibly evacuated during the war.

West Beirut retains its mixture of Moslems, Christians, Lebanese and Palestinians. It includes cosmopolitan *Ras Beirut*, where the embassies and university remain, as well as the tumbledown shacks of the "belt of misery" and the Palestinian refugee camps. The PLO and the different Lebanese parties have their own militia anxiously guarding their buildings and the surrounding streets.

There are no Lebanese police and hardly any army. And without police or army, the Lebanese state cannot enforce its will over its feuding citizens. For all intents and purposes, there is no Lebanese state.

In Beirut, the largely Syrian Arab Deterrent Force limits the war to minor bombardments and occasional sniping. The Force is nominally under the Lebanese president's control, but it answers only to Syrian President Hafez Assad. These troops are stationed behind sandbags throughout West Beirut and at the border with the East.

In southern Lebanon, a 6,000-strong UN force stands between the Israelis and the Lebanese National Movement.

A recipe for war.

Talking to representatives from the different parties, one hears widely different accounts of the war's cause. The National Front of the Phalangists and National Liberals blame it on the Palestinians and, secondarily, the Soviets and the pan-Arab, pan-Islamic forces. The Lebanese National Movement blames it on Israel, the U.S., and the National Front, in roughly that order.

But the most compelling description I heard of Lebanon's problems came from a man caught in the middle, Cebay Habib, who heads the Mid-



Tyre after Israeli shelling.

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dle East Council of Churches. Habib rejected explanations that looked solely at one side or the other. "What is going on is a mini-world war by proxy," he said.

According to Habib, Lebanon has become a battleground for Christians and Moslems, for pan-Arabism, for the Israelis and the Palestinians, and for the U.S. and the Soviet Union.

Superimpose these conflicts upon a divided society with a weak state, glaring inequalities, and historic rivalries among national and religious groups, and you have a recipe for war.

You also have a situation that defies internal solution.

Moslem vs. Christian.

When the French carved Lebanon out of Greater Syria in 1926, Beirut served as a trade center between Europe and the Mideast. After the creation of Israel in 1948, it replaced Haifa as the major trading city for the Mideast. With the growth of oil revenues, Beirut and Lebanon boomed during the '60s.

But in the '70s, the world recession stalled Lebanon's growth. Beirut's suburbs became swelled by impoverished Moslem immigrants from the countryside, refugees from rural poverty and Israeli bombs. The differences in development between the largely Christian north and largely Moslem south became more pronounced.

This poverty and inequality fueled historic resentments between the Moslems and the Maronite Christians. The resentments centered on Lebanon's political system.

Since 1943, Lebanon has been governed by a "national covenant" that divided up power and

offices among the different religious groups according to a French-conducted 1932 census. The Maronite Christians got the most powerful government posts of president and army head and also enjoyed a six-to-five edge over the Moslems in parliamentary representation.

The Moslems charged that the Christians had used their political power to develop the roads, schools and electricity of the north, while letting the south deteriorate.

The Moslems demanded that the proportions be rearranged according to a new census, one that would show that the Moslems were now a majority. But the Christians refused to conduct a census. In 1958, this was to be an issue in the brief Moslem uprising. In the '70s, it again became an issue.

PLO base in Lebanon.

The other major issue was the Palestinians.

An estimated 200,000 Palestinians migrated to Lebanon in 1948, most of whom settled in UN-funded refugee camps. By the '70s, their numbers were estimated as high as 600,000, or one-sixth of Lebanon's estimated population.

Initially, all Lebanese politicians championed the Palestinian cause. Many Palestinian refugee camps in northern Lebanon were on land donated by Christian monasteries. But Israeli reprisals for PLO actions inside Israel took their toll on Christian support. On Dec. 31, 1968, the Israelis blew up 13 Lebanese airliners at the Beirut airport and began retaliatory bombing raids in the south.

The Lebanese army attempted to curb PLO commando operations in the south, which led to frequent armed clashes. The Arab states then stepped in and arranged a meeting in Cairo in November 1969 at which the Lebanese government and the PLO signed an agreement guaranteeing PLO freedom of movement and armed presence within Lebanon.

When King Hussein drove the PLO out of Jordan in late 1970, Lebanon now became the PLO's main base of operations, and Israeli raids increased.

The PLO, for its part, attempted to stay out of Lebanese politics and to present itself as an advocate of compromise and moderation. But, fearful of becoming isolated from the Lebanese populace, it also established ties with Lebanese workers and with the Lebanese National Movement. As a result, it found itself increasingly linked, in right-wing Christian eyes, with the Moslem and left-wing threat to their ascendancy.

Political polarization.

By 1975, Lebanon had become polarized between a largely Christian National Front, on the one hand, and the Lebanese National Movement, on the other. The differences between the two groups, though complex, tended to break down along lines of right vs. left.

The Front parties were pro-Western, pro-capitalism, and in favor of maintaining the political status quo. They denied that Lebanon was part of the "Arab world." "Lebanon is Arab only in the sense that it speaks better Arabic than the rest of the Arab world put together," former UN representative and Front leader Charles Malik told me.

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LEBANON

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The Phalangists, who got their name from Franco's Spain, were the larger, more mass-based party. The National Liberals were more clearly the party of the Lebanese Christian bourgeoisie.

By 1975, with no Mideast settlement in sight, the parties of the Front began to see the Palestinian link with the Lebanese left as a threat. They began to demand that the Palestinians be disarmed and, where possible, dispersed among the other Arab countries. Later in the war, when the tide was turning against them, they advocated partitioning Lebanon between a Christian north and a Moslem south.

The predominantly Moslem Lebanese National Movement (LNM) was formed in the early '70s as a coalition of left parties all committed to political reform and support of the Palestinians. LNM's largest parties were the social-democratic Progressive Socialists, a largely Druze party led by Kamal Jumblatt and now by his son, Walid, and the Independent Nasserist party, which took its ideology from Nasser's pan-Arab socialism. Two Marxist-Leninist organizations, the Communist Action Organization and the Communist party, play a role in the coalition.

In a 1975 program, the LNM called for the secularization of Lebanese politics. While the Moslem moderates had advocated retaining the system but changing the proportions, the LNM called for replacing it with one person/one vote. They also advocated electoral reforms that would eliminate the hereditary control by a few families over Lebanese legislative districts and permit the urban poor to participate in elections.

These modest political reforms threatened to turn Lebanese politics upside down.

Between the Front and the LNM stood the moderate Moslems and Christians. During the war, most went over to their respective religious grouping, which only increased the war's bitter-

ness. The Maronites, in particular, were as fearful of the pan-Islamic tendencies of the Saudi-backed moderate Moslems as they were of the LNM's democratic radicalism.

Syrian Intervention.

Chroniclers of the war, which began on April 13, 1975, divide it into different phases. The first pitted the PLO and the LNM against the Front. By mid-1976, the PLO and the LNM had driven the Front into northern Lebanon. At this point, the Syrians intervened against their former allies, the PLO and the LNM, and helped the Front drive them into the south.

But in fall 1976, the Syrians turned on their erstwhile Christian allies and stopped their march southward. The Syrians effectively created a stalemate, and at Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, in October 1976, the Arab states endorsed a Syrian plan to establish a deterrent force and maintain the peace.

Syria's role in the war was dictated by its national interests and by changing alliances within the Mideast. While Syria wanted to prevent a Christian victory over the PLO, which would have weakened its bargaining power with Israel, it also feared a PLO/LNM victory, because that would have created a politically explosive neighbor and might also have invited an Israeli invasion on behalf of the Christians. The *New York Times'* Ihsan Hijazi said that the Syrian intervention was part of a deal with the U.S. in which the U.S. would pressure the Israelis to yield on the Golan Heights in exchange for Syrian action against the PLO.

CIA role.

But Syria was merely the most visible foreign influence on the Lebanese war. Israel also played a complicated game during the war. In its early stages, its gunboats unaccountably permitted arms shipments to the PLO through the Lebanese port of Tyre, while it furnished arms to the Christian Front. After Syria's invasion, it suddenly began to block PLO arms shipments.

Lebanese politicians of all stripes suspect Is-

raeli motives, believing that they wanted to create a Lebanese civil war because it would weaken the PLO and would prove the impossibility of a democratic secular state. "Lebanon was the example of a future Palestine, and Israel had to do something to destroy it," Gaby Habib said.

The U.S. has also been active in the war. Its strategy in the Mideast has been to create a bloc of pro-Western states, including Egypt, Israel and Saudi Arabia. It sees the PLO as a threat to this plan. In Lebanon, it therefore played a deceptive game. While the U.S. ambassador advocated compromise and negotiation, the Israeli section of the CIA is supposed to have funneled up to \$50 million in aid to the Christian front during the war's beginning.

Both the U.S. and USSR, which backed the LNM and PLO, attempted to pressure other countries within the area to aid their respective favorites in the struggle. The U.S., as noted, probably had some responsibility for Syria's intervention, as well as for the later Saudi role in backing the Syrians, while the Soviets, shut out of Egypt and betrayed by Syria, had their interests represented by the Iraqis and Libyans.

Israeli invasion.

By the time of the Israeli invasion last March, the war was already threatening to enter a new phase. Thrown back into the PLO's arms by Sadat's visit to Jerusalem, the Syrians began to appear partial to the left in their Lebanese peace-keeping operations. Twice in early 1978, they clashed with Front troops over what they charged was the Front's attempt to transfer Lebanese government weapons into their arsenals.

While the Israeli invasion in March was an immediate response to a PLO commando operation in Tel Aviv that resulted in 37 Israelis killed and 82 wounded, it had been previously threatened and was widely anticipated in Lebanon. Lebanese leftists speculated that the Israelis had two different motives: a military motive in weakening the PLO in southern Lebanon, but a more important political motive in reshuffling the Leb-

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A LIBERAL OR A FASCIST PARTY?

Lebanese leftists describe the National Liberal party and the Phalangists as "fascists." Suspicious of such labels, I went with several other journalists to talk to NLP leader Dory Chamoun.

I didn't learn that he was, strictly speaking, a fascist, but I learned why he and his allies were called fascists.

The NLP party headquarters are in a heavily guarded East Beirut highrise. In contrast with West Beirut militias, the soldiers carry American M-16s rather than Soviet Kalishnikovs.

The NLP are sometimes described simply as "Chamounists," because the party was founded by the venerable Lebanese leader Camille Chamoun (as the Lebanese president in 1958, Chamoun called in the U.S. Marines to squelch an alleged Nasserite plot against his rule), and it is now run by Chamoun and his two sons, Dory and Dany.

Dany is the military leader, and Dory is the political leader. Dany looks like a Sunbelt American: he is big and burly with curly red hair. He was wearing levis, cowboy boots, and a powder blue polo shirt with the sleeves rolled up to show his biceps. After chatting briefly with us, he roared off in his Ford Land-Rover.

Dory is more the elegant European type, with a pinstriped suit, tie, carefully coiffured dark brown hair. He could easily pass as a French or Italian parliamentarian.

He received us in a sumptuous office looking out over Beirut. Like his brother, he seemed eager to speak with Americans. (Everyone we met there was either just back from or on the way to the U.S.)

When I asked Chamoun what he thought the cause of the Lebanese civil war was, he stopped me in my tracks. "It is not a civil war," he said. "It is a war between the Lebanese and Palestinians." The war took place, he explained, because the Palestinians "decided to overturn the system in Lebanon and take control." He added that the whole move was "master-planned by the Russian embassy."

Chamoun accused the Palestinians of initiating the civil war by staging provocative confessional killings that were intended to "throw the Moslems into the lap of the socialists."

Chamoun denied, when asked, that Lebanon had any "internal problems" of its own, even in the underdeveloped south. "If the people don't want to work in the south, you can't blame the government," he said.

Chamoun said that he would have been willing to back a secular system in Lebanon, but that the war had shown that the Christians and Moslems would have to "sleep in separate beds." He now favored a confederal system of a Christian north and Moslem south.

We asked where the Palestinians would fit. "They don't fit in that state," he said. "They're misfits."

Chamoun said that he advocated sending what he called the "fairweather Palestinians" back to their "little Arab brothers." These were Palestinians who, according to Chamoun, came to Lebanon from Syria or Jordan because of the weather. As for what he estimated as the 200,000 Palestinians who had come to Lebanon from

Palestine, he would tell them, "You can stay until there is a solution, but no mucking around."

When one of us questioned whether their "little Arab brothers," and in particular Jordan's King Hussein, would accept a new influx of Palestinians, Chamoun got irritated. Referring to Hussein, he said, "Let him take them and kill them. It's not my responsibility."

Chamoun suspected that the Palestinians could solve all their problems if they used the money they got for arms differently. He recommended that they move to Lybia and undertake a joint development project with the Lybians.

"In Lybia," Chamoun said, "they could give their people decent conditions of living and make them into decent citizens. If they got a state, they wouldn't populate it with rabble."

We asked Chamoun about the relations between Israel and the Front. "When two people need each other, it doesn't take them long to find each other," he said. They had a "common interest" with the Israelis, he said. It was "to knock the Palestinians on the head." He acknowledged that the Israelis now "wanted Lebanon to be split."

When I asked him whether he considered himself an Arab, he replied, "I am just as much an Arab as you are an Englishman. Just because you speak English, you are not an Englishman."

He rejects the charge that he and his Phalangist allies are "fascists." "We are basically a liberal party," he said. "We believe in a liberal economy and a liberal democracy. We are Western in our thinking."