

# The Syrian Involvement in Lebanon Since 1975

Reuven Avi-Ran



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# Contents

<i>Preface</i>	1
Chapter 1: Introduction: Origins of the Syrian Involvement in Lebanon	3
<b>PART ONE: The Syrian Involvement in the Lebanese Civil War, 1975-1976</b>	17
Chapter 2: The Process of Syrian Involvement in the Civil War	19
Chapter 3: Syria and External Factors	49
<b>PART TWO: Syria's Failure to Turn Military Achievement to Political Advantage, 1977-1981</b>	67
Chapter 4: The Beginnings of the Consolidation of Syrian Power in Lebanon	69
Chapter 5: The Conflict between Syria and the Christian Camp (1978)	81
Chapter 6: The Struggle for Southern Lebanon	97
<b>PART THREE: Syria and the Lebanese War, 1981-1985</b>	105
Chapter 7: Renewed Hostilities between Syria and the Lebanese Forces (December 1980-June 1981)	107
Chapter 8: The "Missile Crisis" and the Events Leading Up to the Peace for Galilee Operation (April 1981-June 5, 1982)	117
Chapter 9: Syria's Role in the Peace for Galilee Operation (June 6-September 1, 1982)	131

Chapter 10: Syria's Struggle against the Achievements of the Peace for Galilee Operation (September 1982-May 1985)	147
<b>PART FOUR: The Effects of the Lebanese Crisis on the Assad Regime</b>	<b>185</b>
Chapter 11: The Assad Regime and the Lebanese Crisis	187
Chapter 12: The Period since the Lebanese War: Syria's Continuing Challenges	211
Chapter 13: Syria in Lebanon: An Overview	225
<i>Bibliography</i>	231
<i>Index</i>	235

## Preface

In April 1975, a civil war broke out in Lebanon which destroyed the traditional structure of the Lebanese state and society and produced a new crisis in Lebanon and the whole of the Middle East which has lasted until the present day. Syria was drawn into this crisis, at first in the role of an intermediary between the rival factions and later as a party directly involved in the Lebanese conflict. This involvement increased until it led to a massive Syrian military intervention and a continuous expenditure of political effort and military and diplomatic resources over a decade in an attempt to impose Syrian hegemony on Lebanon, and to use the Lebanese crisis as a means of promoting the objectives of the Assad regime in the Arab world and in the struggle against Israel.

This book is the first attempt at a comprehensive examination of the Syrian involvement in the Lebanese crisis. Among the subjects treated are the Syrian interests in Lebanon, the motivation of the Assad regime for intervening in the Lebanese crisis, the pattern of Syrian actions in Lebanon, Syria's relationship with the Lebanese power factions, the Syrian-Israeli rivalry for influence in Lebanon, and the various factors which influenced Syrian policies in Lebanon. We shall also consider the effects of the Syrian intervention in Lebanon on the stability of the Assad regime, on Syria's position in the Arab world, and on its capability of action in the Arab-Israeli conflict.

The terminology used in connection with the Lebanese crisis has been subject to dispute. Thus, for example, the term "Lebanese civil war" used in this book is not accepted by the Christian leaders in Lebanon, who claim that the events of the years 1975-1976 mainly represented a conflict between Lebanese and Palestinians. However, the fighting which began in April 1975 and ended with the Riyadh and Cairo Conference (October 1976) may nevertheless be regarded as a civil war in all respects, for it was essentially the product of a deep-rooted intercommunal hostility and in its first stages (until the beginning of 1976) was mainly confined to the rival Lebanese factions. The term "Lebanese crisis" refers to the period beginning in April 1975 and lasting until the present day, which has been marked by outbreaks of intermittent fighting between the rival

Lebanese factions against a background of active intervention by external forces such as the Palestinian organizations, Syria, Israel, inter-Arab forces, and international forces. Even more problematic are terms such as "left" and "right," the "Muslim camp" and the "Christian camp," used to describe the complexities and the shades of difference of the rival factions in Lebanon. In all cases where I have used general terms of this kind, I have tried to define the nature of the entities which these terms refer to.

In view of the absence of an academic literature dealing with all aspects of the Syrian involvement in Lebanon over the last decade, this study has been based mainly on firsthand sources. These include the Syrian, Lebanese, and Palestinian press and other Arab newspapers, as well as Arab radio broadcasts and the reports of the Arab and Western news agencies on the Lebanese crisis. In addition, in recent years the memoirs have appeared of Lebanese and Palestinian figures who played a key role in the Lebanese crisis, and these provide a valuable source for an understanding of Syrian actions in Lebanon. I was afforded an insight into the part played by Israel and the United States in Syrian policies in Lebanon by the interviews granted me by Yitzhak Rabin, prime minister of Israel in 1974-1977, Simcha Dinitz, Israeli ambassador to Washington in 1973-1978, Mordechai Gur, Israel Defense Forces (IDF) chief of staff in 1974-1978, and others.

*Reuven Avi-Ran*

# 1

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## Introduction: Origins of the Syrian Involvement in Lebanon

### Historical Origins of the Concept of the Unity of Syria and Lebanon

In Arab-Muslim historical geography, the Syria and Lebanon of today formed part of a region called *bilad al-Sham*, or “the land of the north”—that is, the area to the north of the Arabian Peninsula, whose boundaries were the Taurus Mountains to the north, the Hejaz, the Gulf of Eilat, and the Sinai Peninsula to the south, the Tigris and Euphrates to the east, and the Mediterranean to the west. This region constituted a separate territorial-political unit under the rule of the House of Ummayya (661-750), and from then until the beginning of the twentieth century was part of various empires whose centers lay outside its boundaries. In the second half of the nineteenth century, a handful of young Christians in Beirut and Damascus, progenitors of the Arab national movement, gave the term *bilad al-Sham* and the ancient name Syria (whose origin was Hellenistic) a new, political significance. Following the massacre of Christians in Lebanon and Damascus in 1860, these people saw the solution to the problem of the Christian community in the replacement of the religious communal allegiances which fragmented the population with a secular Syrian patriotism based on language, culture, history, and an allegiance to the Syrian motherland. They regarded Lebanon as forming part of a larger Syrian entity, and the first Arab political platform, which was drawn up by a secret society of young Christians in Beirut in 1875, spoke specifically of “the grant of independence to Syria, *in union with Lebanon*”<sup>1</sup> (italics added). The idea of the unification of Syria and Lebanon was unacceptable, however, to the vast majority of the Christian popu-

lation in Mount Lebanon, which preferred to continue to remain segregated from the Muslims by the communal framework and foreign protection which were embodied in the transformation of Mount Lebanon in 1861 into an autonomous province of the section of the Ottoman Empire controlled by the European powers.

The idea of the creation of a unified and independent Arab state in the Fertile Crescent gained a new actuality with the breakup of the Ottoman Empire during the First World War. Feisal ibn-Hussein, who ruled Syria for a short period (1918-1920), and the activists of Arab societies who surrounded him<sup>2</sup> demanded the unification of Syria within its "natural frontiers," which the first Pan-Syrian Congress, held in Damascus on July 2, 1919, defined as extending from the Taurus Mountains in the north to Rafiah and Aqaba in the south, and from the Mediterranean in the west to the Euphrates and the Khabur in the east.<sup>3</sup> The Syria, Lebanon, Israel, and Jordan of today are all included within the boundaries of this territory, which the Syrian nationalists regard as a single entity or Greater Syria. Within this framework, Lebanon constitutes the western part of Syria,<sup>4</sup> "Filastin" is the southern part,<sup>5</sup> and Jordan the southeastern part.<sup>6</sup> The idea underlying this concept of the Syrian nationalists is that all the Arab inhabitants of Greater Syria—or, at any rate, the great majority—belong to the same national group, and the religious and communal differences dividing the population have no political significance and ought not to be accorded any.

The political arrangements in the Middle East as they crystallized in the years 1918-1923 divided up the Ottoman Empire into separate parts and prevented the emergence of a unified Arab state in accordance with the aspirations of the Syrian nationalists. France received the mandate over Syria and Lebanon, and sought to strengthen the Lebanese entity, where it traditionally enjoyed the sympathy of the Maronite Christians, and to weaken Syria, where it met with opposition. The French therefore acceded to the request of the Maronite leaders, and on August 13, 1920 founded the "State of Greater Lebanon," which consisted of the previously autonomous province of Mount Lebanon plus some other areas of a Muslim character: i.e., the city of Beirut, Tripoli and the north, Sidon and the south, and the Bekaa Valley. As against this, the French divided Syria into separate political entities: the "state" of Damascus, the "state" of Aleppo, the Jabal Druze, the Alawite province, the Jezira area, and Alexandretta. Whereas all these political entities with the exception of Alexandretta were finally incorporated into the Syrian state, Lebanon, which the Syrian nationalists classed in the same category as these "statelets,"<sup>7</sup> developed into a separate entity under the rule of the French Mandate and afterward. It is hardly surprising that the Syrian nationalists and a large part of the Muslim population in the provinces annexed

to Mount Lebanon refused to acquiesce in the existence of that entity, which they regarded as a product of "Western imperialism," and saw their separation from Syria as an arbitrary and unjustifiable act.

A striking expression of this sentiment of the Syrian nationalists is to be found in a newspaper interview given in the summer of 1985 by Dr. Georges Jabbour, an adviser to Hafez al-Assad and head of the "research bureau" in the presidential palace:

Syria and Lebanon, and—more than that—the whole *bilad al-Sham*, were a single area and to a certain extent still are a single area. I think that a Lebanese cannot be a true Lebanese if he does not recognize that Syria has a special task. . . . I am from the small town of Safita.<sup>8</sup> The large town nearest to it is Tripoli and not Latakia, which is the center of its district. . . . [One] of the strangest days in history was the day when Syria was cut off from Lebanon—economically cut off. The people of Safita did not understand this cutting off. The people of Safita and all the people of Syria used the Syrian pound and the Lebanese pound as if they were a single pound. I remember how my relatives worked together with the late Abd al-Hamid Karami<sup>9</sup> to join northern Lebanon to Syria, for Syria was unified in 1936 and the states of Aleppo, Latakia, etc., were abolished. In that same year, a unified Syria was founded on the remnants of the states created by French imperialism. At that time, Christians and Muslims in northern Lebanon worked for the return of that region to its original condition. . . . *There can be no doubt that the two states are really one state, and, together with them, Jordan and Palestine.*<sup>10</sup> (italics added)

Under the French Mandatory regime, the Syrian nationalists refrained from turning the Lebanese problem into a bone of contention with France in order not to jeopardize their struggle to liberate Syria, and because they believed that, when Syria and Lebanon had gained independence, that would in any case lead to the disappearance of the "artificial frontiers" between them and to their reunification through a natural process. The irredentist aspiration (i.e., the desire for annexation) with regard to Lebanon still remained deeply rooted in the consciousness of the Syrian nationalists after both Syria and Lebanon had achieved independence, despite the fact that the Lebanese were careful to preserve their independence from Syria, and despite the fact that Lebanon's independence had been officially recognized by all the Arab states, including Syria, already in 1944.<sup>11</sup> The irredentism found expression in the inclusion of Lebanon within the political boundaries of Syria in maps printed in Syria in the 1940s and '50s,<sup>12</sup> and in the stubborn refusal of the Syrians to establish diplomatic relations with Lebanon as is usual between two independent states, out of a fear that it might be interpreted as a recognition of the existence of Lebanon as a separate political entity. The

official Syrian explanation for the refusal to establish diplomatic ties was that the relations between them were so close that there was no need to set up embassies in the two countries, as such an action could only imply a weakening in their relationship. This claim, of course, did not correspond to the reality since the relationship between the two countries since Lebanon received independence had been characterized by endless friction.

Since the Baath Party came to power (1963) and especially under the Assad regime, many Syrian leaders have laid emphasis on the special closeness between Lebanon and Syria, over and above the routine declarations about Arab unity. A remarkable expression of this theme is to be found in Hafez al-Assad's speech of July 20, 1976 justifying the Syrian intervention in Lebanon. The Syrian president said:

Historically, Syria and Lebanon have constituted one state and one people. And for that reason they have genuine common interests and close relationships . . . and this gives rise to a common security. This also gives rise to a close relationship between the peoples of the two countries. Thousands of families in Syria have branches in Lebanon, and thousands of families in Lebanon have branches in Syria.<sup>13</sup>

The Syrian foreign minister, Abd al-Halim Khaddam, however, gave a more specific expression of the Syrian annexational intentions toward Lebanon. When, at the height of the civil war, the country seemed to the Syrians to be in danger of splitting up,<sup>14</sup> Khaddam told the Kuwaiti newspaper *Al-Ray al-Aam*:

We shall not allow Lebanon to be divided. Any such step would necessitate our immediate intervention. Lebanon was part of Syria, and we shall reclaim it as soon as it actually attempts to split up. It should be made clear that we are referring to the four provinces<sup>15</sup> and not only to the coast, and, furthermore, we are referring also to Mount Lebanon. Lebanon should either be a single state or else it should return to Syria.<sup>16</sup>

### The Syrian Interests in Lebanon

The Syrian ambition of dominating Lebanon also derives from the mass of vital interests—security, military, and economic—which Syria has in that country. It could be said that the thirty years which passed from the time when Syria and Lebanon received their independence until Syria's intervention in the Lebanese civil war were one long series of frictions and disagreements, even if Syria, because of its weakness, did

not make any real effort to carry out its ambitions in Lebanon, and Nasserist Egypt and not Syria was the country which played the key role there.

Syria's most vital interest in Lebanon, at least until Hafez al-Assad came to power, was its security interest. In view of the continuous struggle for power and the chronic instability which characterized Syria's political life until the period of Assad, the primary aim of all regimes which came to office was to preserve their existence and prevent the formation of an effective opposition against them. Their attention was therefore repeatedly focused on Lebanon and on its capital Beirut, which had always served as a center of conspiracy and subversion against the Syrian regimes. There were many reasons for this: Lebanon's proximity to Syria, the Lebanese tradition of political freedom and of granting asylum to political exiles, the relative freedom enjoyed by the Lebanese press, Lebanon's political weakness which facilitated the political activities of Arab states within its borders, and its pro-Western orientation which allowed the activities of the Western security services. All these factors created a situation in which rumors, intrigues, and machinations against the Syrian regimes had always flourished,<sup>17</sup> and the latter tried to neutralize this center of subversion both by acts of violence against their opponents in Lebanon<sup>18</sup> and by exerting pressures on the Lebanese governments (most usually threats and warnings, economic sanctions, and closing the Syrian-Lebanese frontier).

Syria also had vital military interests in Lebanon. Essentially, Syria aimed to change Lebanon from an "auxiliary front" whose practical involvement in the Arab-Israeli dispute was limited to the spheres of politics and propaganda, into a "direct front" which would form part of "a single front extending from Ras Naqoura on the coast of Lebanon to the port of Aqaba in Jordan."<sup>19</sup> As a Syrian spokesman declared on April 9, 1974, at the time of the war of attrition on the Golan: "Lebanon cannot be neutral in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Those who would ascribe such a character to Lebanon desecrate the will of the Lebanese people which regards itself as part of the Arab nation . . . and believes that what harms Syria harms itself and what harms Lebanon harms Syria, and the two states constitute a natural extension of each other."<sup>20</sup>

From a practical point of view, the Syrians were especially concerned about the military weakness of Lebanon, which in their opinion was fraught with potential dangers for Syria in time of war with Israel. The Syrians feared that in a war the Israeli forces might outflank the Golan Heights from the west via "Fatahland" and the Bekaa Valley, or reach the Syrian industrial centers in the north (Homs, Hama) via the Bekaa. These fears grew stronger after the October War and the Golan war of attrition and became real in the Lebanese War. In the introduction to the book

*The Israeli Invasion of Lebanon*, which appeared in Damascus after the Peace for Galilee operation under the auspices of Syrian Defense Minister Mustafa Tlass, the military advantages of the Bekaa for Israel were enumerated: "The Bekaa region permits the Golan Heights to be cut off from more than one direction, allows military efforts to be transferred to other fronts, and prevents the Syrian forces from attempting to strike at the Israeli forces in the Golan from Lebanon." Moreover, the Bekaa region "easily permits the war to be shifted to deep within the Syrian-Lebanese Arab territories without it constituting a genuine threat to the economic and military depth of Israel." In addition, from the lookout posts at Jebel el-Sheikh (Mount Hermon), and at Jebel Barouk and Mount Sannine—which command the Bekaa—one can "directly monitor Arab movements on land, sea, and air through a combination of observation and listening."<sup>21</sup>

Until Assad came to power, Syria's weakness and the mutual suspicions and endless frictions between Syria and Lebanon prevented an effective dialogue between them on the subject of military cooperation against Israel. A serious attempt by the Syrians at such a dialogue was made in the years 1954-1956, when they conducted negotiations with the Lebanese president, Camille Chamoun, for a military agreement within the terms of which they could send a brigade to what later became Fatahland. These contacts petered out because of the fears of the Lebanese that the entry of the Syrian army into Lebanon would lead to Syrian domination of their country,<sup>22</sup> and they were not renewed. In the period of Hafez al-Assad, the Syrians once again began to pressure the Lebanese government to agree to the entry of the Syrian army into the eastern sector and to a change in the character of the Lebanese army through its enlargement, its equipment with effective weapons, the allocation of a proportion of the national budget sufficient for its needs, and a pro-Syrian orientation. Yet, despite the fact that at the beginning of the Assad period it was possible to observe signs of cooperation between the two, such as tours of the Israeli-Lebanese border by senior Syrian officers in the years 1971-1972,<sup>23</sup> the Syrians did not succeed until the civil war in finding a suitable answer to the problem of the military weakness of Lebanon.

In the economic sphere, the interests of Syria and Lebanon were often opposed. Syria, which from the end of the 1950s had moved in the direction of socialist government, a planned economy, and the building of an industrial infrastructure, wished to impose protective duties in order to support its fledgling industry, whereas Lebanon, whose economy was based on private enterprise, commerce, services, and arbitration, wanted a minimum of restriction and customs duties. Syria wished to profit from the transit trade through its territory, and for that reason

(as also for political considerations) it often imposed taxes and restrictions on the Lebanese transit trade, whereas Lebanon, whose transit trade was an important branch of its economy, demanded freedom of movement for its continental transportation through Syria. Syria, after it received independence, began to develop the port of Latakia—which competed with Beirut, whereas Lebanon wanted to preserve the unique status of Beirut. In the 1960s, Syria began a unilateral exploitation of the waters of the Assi River (the Orontes), which was an important source of water supply for both states, and refused to make any significant concession of its rights when the Lebanese, in the 1970s, began to ask for a reasonable share of the waters. Before the civil war, the Lebanese employed more than 300,000 Syrian workers<sup>24</sup> in low-grade jobs in agriculture, industry, and the services—generally in substandard conditions, at a miserable salary, and without any legal recognition of their status as residents in Lebanon;<sup>25</sup> Syria, on the other hand, asked the Lebanese to recognize these workers as legal residents and to make them subject to the Lebanese Labor Law.<sup>26</sup> Previous to the civil war several attempts were made to bridge these opposing interests, but their success was very limited, not only because neither side was inclined to relinquish its vital economic interests but also because the political conflict between Syria and Lebanon prevented the solution of economic problems. As Syrian Foreign Minister Khaddam pointed out to a Lebanese reporter: "Politics are not separate from economics, and they [economics] must serve politics by serving the higher national interests."<sup>27</sup>

With regard to the Palestinians, Syria traditionally saw itself as the standard-bearer of the Palestinian problem and the patron of the Palestinian national movement. This was because the Syrians regarded the Palestinian problem and the Palestinian organizations as an important and effective tool for furthering their interests in the Arab-Israeli dispute and in the international and inter-Arab arenas. Syria had a particular interest in extending its patronage over the PLO, Fatah, and the other Palestinian organizations. In this connection Lebanon had a special importance, especially from the beginning of the 1970s onward (after the Palestinians had been expelled from Jordan following the events of September 1970), when it became the center of Palestinian political and military activities. A powerful means of increasing Syria's influence among the Palestinians was the vigorous assistance which it provided them in Lebanon, not only in the form of supplies, training, weapons, and money, but also in acting as an obstacle to the attempts of the Lebanese government in the years 1968-1973 to prevent the Palestinians from gaining a foothold in Lebanon and to impose restrictions on their freedom of movement in the country. The Lebanese government made two notable attempts to do this—the Cairo Agreement of October 1969

and the Melkart Agreement of May 1973<sup>28</sup>—but because of the weakness of the Lebanese army, the indecisiveness of the Lebanese leadership, the strong resistance of the Palestinians, and Syrian pressures, these attempts ended with compromise arrangements which did not suffice to stop the Palestinians from gaining a foothold in Lebanon. In these agreements the Palestinians accepted a number of restrictions on the scope of their activities, the weapons they were allowed to carry, the way in which they operated against Israel, and their relations with the Lebanese population; but in practice the Palestinians never honored these agreements.

As noted in Chapter 1, ever since the Lebanese state was founded the Syrians had refused on principle to accept its existence. Lebanon was regarded by the Syrian nationalists as an artificial creation of “Western imperialism,” and they wished to obliterate the “artificial boundaries” dividing Syria and Lebanon and to reunite them as a single political entity. These irredentist ambitions together with Syria’s vital interests in Lebanon impelled it to try to influence the character and policies of the Lebanese regime. From the end of the 1950s, the Syrians completely rejected the Lebanese political and social order and the country’s pro-Western orientation, not only on ideological grounds but because they constituted an effective obstacle to Syrian ambitions. In fact, Syria, in the years 1957-1958, tried, together with Nasserist Egypt, to bring about the creation of a leftist-Muslim state in Lebanon by supporting the rebels against President Camille Chamoun, and in the 1960s and ’70s the Syrians gave military and political backing to the Palestinians and some of the leftist parties—the very elements which were undermining the Lebanese regime from within.

In the Assad period, Syria moderated—at least tactically—its approach to the Lebanese regime,<sup>29</sup> in consequence of the change which had taken place in Syria’s inter-Arab policies,<sup>30</sup> Assad’s personal friendship with Lebanon’s former President Suleiman Franjeh, and his pragmatic evaluation that it was after all the traditional Lebanese regime with all its weaknesses which could best facilitate the imposition of Syrian overlordship on Lebanon.

### **The Removal of the Obstacles to Syrian Ambitions in Lebanon (1970-1975)**

In relation to this context of Syrian annexational ambitions, vital Syrian interests, and the presence of political elements sympathetic to Syria in Lebanon, two questions must be asked which are important for understanding the causes of the Syrian intervention in Lebanon at the

time of the civil war. First, what were the obstacles which for about thirty years before the Lebanese crisis prevented Syria from taking control of Lebanon, and how did Lebanon, despite its weakness and the many crises which it experienced (especially the civil war of 1958), succeed in withstanding Syrian pressures and in protecting its independence and freedom of action? And second, what processes removed these obstacles and thus prepared the way for the Syrian involvement in the civil war and the conquest of a considerable part of Lebanon by the Syrian army?

Until the early 1970s, there were four main factors which restrained Syrian ambitions in Lebanon.

1. *Syria's internal weakness.* From the time it gained its independence until Hafez al-Assad assumed office, Syria had suffered from chronic instability, with frequent changes of rulers and regimes. Syria's internal weakness stemmed chiefly from the lack of a tradition of politics and governance, from the strength of the territorial centers of the various communities as compared with the weakness of the central government and its institutions, and from a lack of political leadership of stature. This weakness impaired Syria's capacity to pursue an effective foreign policy and to extend its influence to its neighbors, including Lebanon. At the same time, Syria itself was subject to the pressures of rival Arab states, especially Egypt and Iraq, which attempted to gain influence in Syria and to win it to their policies.

2. *The old Lebanese regime's capacity of survival.* This regime was chiefly based on the National Pact—an unwritten compromise between the Christian leadership and the traditional Muslim leadership arrived at when independent Lebanon was founded (1943). According to the terms of this compromise, the Muslim political establishment recognized the existence of the independent Lebanese state, in its existing borders as determined upon the establishment of Greater Lebanon in 1920, the hegemony of the Christians within it, and its links with the West, whereas the Christian leadership recognized that Lebanon was part of the Arab world and a member of the Arab League. With regard to internal Lebanese politics, the major political positions were divided among the various communities in accordance with a scheme determined and agreed upon in advance (the three major positions were: the president, a Maronite Christian, the prime minister, a Sunni Muslim, and the speaker of parliament, a Shiite). Despite the frequent upheavals experienced by the old Lebanese regime, it demonstrated an undeniable capacity for survival. Not only was the Christian camp eager to preserve the system of internal balances, but the traditional Muslim leadership also derived benefit from the old regime, and despite all its disadvantages its replacement by a Syrian or Nasserist domination of Lebanon seemed to it a far less attractive alternative.<sup>31</sup>

3. *Western protection.* Traditionally, the West was regarded as the protector of the independence and special character of the Christian-Lebanese entity. From 1860, France gave its protection to the autonomy of Mount Lebanon, and it was France which initiated the creation of a "Greater Lebanon" after the First World War. From the 1950s, it seemed that the United States had taken the place of France as the protector of the Lebanese state. This impression was based on the precedent of the dispatch of a force of American Marines during the civil war of 1958 (on July 15), at the request of President Chamoun.<sup>32</sup>

4. *The Israeli deterrent.* The military strength of Israel and its capacity to confront a hostile Arab world was a deterrent factor for Syria. The Syrians realized that any attempt at a direct military intervention in Lebanon could involve them in a military confrontation with Israel, especially as the Israeli leaders had several times declared their opposition to the entry of foreign forces into Lebanon.

In the first half of the 1970s, however, from the time when Assad came to power until the outbreak of the Lebanese civil war, the following obstacles to Syrian ambitions were removed:

1. For the first time since Syria gained its independence, a stable and effective regime was set up in Damascus under the leadership of Assad which sought to radically alter Syria's position in the area. Under the Assad regime, Syria ceased being the object of Egyptian-Iraqi rivalry and became a state which in its own right could compete with them for leadership of the Arab world. This competition increased following the split between Syria and Egypt after the October War of 1973—a development which was obviously dangerous for Lebanon, as, both because of its weakness and because of Syrian ambitions and interests, it became a major focus of Syrian policy aimed at turning it into a protectorate.

2. The unity and stability of the Lebanese state was upset by a number of internal and external factors. In Lebanon itself, one can point to the growth in the Muslim population and its rising expectations, and the consolidation of the Palestinian organizations and their transformation into a political and military force of the first magnitude. There was also, under the leadership of Suleiman Franjeh, the Lebanese government's weakness and difficulty in functioning properly in the face of the accumulating pressures. Other factors were the October War, the energy crisis, and the related accumulation of unprecedented wealth by the Arab oil states, which created a feeling of Arab and Muslim power that, in turn, influenced the Muslims and Arab nationalists in Lebanon and encouraged them to oppose the existing order.<sup>33</sup> All these factors hastened the outbreak of the civil war and lessened Lebanon's capacity to deal with the Syrian pressures effectively.

3. The effectiveness of Western protection and the Israeli deterrent decreased after 1973. The United States, torn apart by the Vietnam conflict, despite its increased political importance in the Arab world—or perhaps because of it—did not now appear likely to intervene militarily in Lebanon in order to defend its regime against outside interference as it did in 1958. Israel, too, looked less formidable to the Syrians and Arabs after the October War and the Golan war of attrition (1974), although Israel still remained a deterrent factor to the Syrians and the Israeli risk remained a primary consideration of the Syrian leadership at the time of the civil war and subsequently.

There were thus three main elements underlying the Syrian intervention in the Lebanese crisis: (1) the deep-rooted Syrian ambition to annex Lebanon; (2) the existence of vital Syrian interests in that country; and (3) the new strategic situation in the Fertile Crescent and the whole Middle East in the first half of the 1970s, a situation which removed the series of obstacles that in the past had prevented the realization of Syrian ambitions, and prepared the way for a new Syrian policy in Lebanon.

### Notes

1. George Antonious, *The Arab Awakening* (Beirut: Khayats, n.d.; reprinted, Norwich, Jarrold & Sons, n.d.), p. 84.

2. Among them were also Muslim activists from Beirut, Sidon, and Tripoli who joined the administration created by Feisal.

3. Ihsan Hindi, *The Struggle of the Arabic People of Syria 1908-1948* (Arabic) (Damascus: Mtaba al-Idara al-Shun al-Ama wal-Tougi al-Manawi, 1962).

4. *Ibid.*, p. 208.

5. *Ibid.*

6. Hafez al-Assad expressed this concept in his speech to the Farmers' Congress on April 26, 1981: "[Hussein's] regime was really established in order to fragment Syria. We and Jordan constitute one country, one people. They gave King Hussein's grandfather a piece of Syria and made him a prince in East Jordan. . . . They cut off East Jordan from us and called it a principedom" (Radio Damascus, April 26, 1981, according to Itim 841022, April 27, 1981).

7. The Baath historians did not distinguish between the "state of Greater Lebanon" and the "state of Damascus," the "state of Aleppo" or the "Alawite state." They regarded them all as "statelets" established by "French imperialism" in the *balad* ("land") of Syria (see Syria, General Headquarters of the Army and Armed Forces, Political-Administrative Department, *Selections from National and Socialist Culture* [Arabic], Damascus: Mtaba al-Idara al-Siasia Liljish wal-Qhwat al-Musahla, 1973).

8. A town in northwestern Syria, near Tartus.

9. Abd al-Hamid Karami, father of the Lebanese politician Rashid Karami,

at the beginning of the 1930s headed the militant group based in Tripoli which totally refused to recognize the Lebanese state and demanded immediate union with Syria. The root of this problem was the severe blow caused to Tripoli's economy by its severance from Syria and its annexation to Lebanon. The Sunni leaders in Beirut, on the other hand, favored the incorporation of the Muslims into the Lebanese state.

10. *Al-Sayad*, Beirut, June 26, 1985 (according to Itim 843/041, June 17, 1985).

11. The Alexandria Protocol drawn up by the preparatory committee for the foundation of the Arab League (September-October 1944) included a special decision to respect the "independence of Lebanon and its sovereignty within the existing frontiers." Syria was among the states which signed this protocol (October 2-7, 1944). See Asher Goren, *The Arab League 1945-1954* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Ayanot, 1954), p. 376.

12. In November 1953, *Al-Amal*, the Phalange journal in Lebanon, attacked Syria because Syrian official institutions printed a map in which Lebanon was included within the political boundaries of Syria and the name of Lebanon was not mentioned (*Al-Hayat*, Lebanon, November 5, 1953).

13. Assad's speech to the elected councils of the provinces, Radio Damascus, July 20, 1976 (Itim 843/00046, July 21, 1976). This idea was also expressed in Assad's interviews with *Al-Nahar* (*Al-Nahar*, Beirut, March 17, 1971) and with *Al-Anwar* (*Al-Anwar*, Beirut, August 10, 1972).

14. For the background to this declaration, see Ch. 2.

15. This refers to the Hasbaya, Rashaya, Bekaa, and Baalbek regions, which in the nineteenth century belonged to the vilayet of Damascus and in August 1920 were annexed to Greater Lebanon.

16. Interview with Khaddam in *Al-Ray al-Aam*, as reported by the Qatar news agency via MENA (Middle East News Agency) in Cairo, January 7, 1976 (Itim 836/04941, January 7, 1976).

17. See Patrick Seale, *Syria: Struggle for the Leadership* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Ma'arachot, 1968), pp. 294-339.

18. On personal terror as an instrument of Syrian policy, see Ch. 10.

19. Radio Damascus, September 16, 1975 (Itim 863/922, September 16, 1975).

20. Radio Damascus, April 2, 1974 (Itim 874/4, April 9, 1974).

21. A "research team" under the direction of Major General Mustafa Tlass. *The Israeli Invasion of Lebanon* (Arabic) (Damascus, 1983), p. 199.

22. This episode was widely covered in the Syrian and Lebanese media in the years 1954-1956. Some twenty years later, the Lebanese journal *Al-Jadid* published the draft of a military agreement between Syria and Lebanon which it claimed had been presented by the Syrians to a Jordanian envoy in August 1956. The text of the agreement appears to be authentic (see *Al-Jadid*, Beirut, January 24, 1975).

23. One of the groups of Syrian officers touring the Lebanese frontier was taken prisoner by the IDF on June 21, 1972.

24. Before the civil war, many Syrian nationals resided in Lebanon, the majority of them workers. Estimates of their numbers ranged from 300,000 to 500,000, but, even at the lowest estimate the Syrian nationals constituted more than 10 percent of the total population of Lebanon! A large proportion of the

Syrian workers left Lebanon at the time of the civil war, and this paralyzed many Lebanese factories and institutions.

25. This policy was motivated by a fear of changing the delicate intercommunal demographic equilibrium in Lebanon.

26. Interview with the Syrian premier Mahmoud al-Ayoubi, *Al-Ahram* (Egypt), August 3, 1973.

27. *Al-Sayad* (Beirut), June 14, 1973.

28. These documents, which at the time of the Lebanese crisis were to serve as the sole basis for the Syrian approach to the regulation of Lebanon's relationship to the Palestinians, were not officially published before the civil war but were leaked to the Lebanese press (see the text of the Cairo Agreement in *Al-Nahar*, Beirut, April 20, 1970; for the text of the Melkart Agreement, see *Al-Ousbou al-Arabi*, Beirut, December 15, 1970). At the time of the Lebanese civil war, these agreements were first published by the Lebanese Foreign Ministry; see République Libanaise, Ministre des Affaires Etrangères et des Libanais d'outre-mer, *Le Livre Blanc Libanais: Documents Diplomatiques 1975-1976* (Beirut, 1976), pp. 196-198, 200ff., as cited in Walid Khalidi, *Conflict and Violence in Lebanon: Confrontation in the Middle East* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), pp. 164, 185-187.

29. One expression of this moderation was the cessation of public attacks on the Lebanese regime. Before Assad came to power, in the years 1963-1970, the Syrian media represented the Lebanese regime as "a tribal, communal structure," "an inheritance of the Mandate and colonialism," serving the interests of Israel and Western imperialism (*Al-Thawra*, Damascus, April 6, 1968; *Al-Baath*, Damascus, November 24, 1965, and January 12, 1969).

30. Assad's immediate aim when he came to power was to take Syria out of its position of isolation in the Arab world, and for this purpose he was ready to maintain normal relations with "reactionary" Arab states such as Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Lebanon with whom Baathist Syria in the years 1967-1970 had had especially poor relations.

31. Itamar Rabinovich, "Religion and Nationalism in the Middle East: The Example of Lebanon," in Aharon Amir, ed., *Lebanon: Land, People, War* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Hadar, 1979), p. 39.

32. The American intervention was not motivated solely by a wish to defend the Lebanese regime, but chiefly by the danger which existed at that time to the position of the West in the whole region, for only one day before the Americans landed in Lebanon, the pro-Western regime in Iraq had been overthrown in a military coup.

33. Rabinovich, p. 47.



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## Part One

### The Syrian Involvement in the Lebanese Civil War, 1975-1976

*On the 13th of April 1975 at two o'clock in the afternoon . . . we were about to consecrate a new church in Ain Rumaneh in the presence of Sheikh Pierre. A bus full of armed Palestinians wanted to pass in front of the church. A police roadblock tried to stop them, so that they would not come into conflict with the group of Phalangists at the entrance to the church. . . . The bus broke through the barrier. . . . Outside the church, our regulars asked the bus to go back. By way of an answer, we received a hail of bullets. . . . That is how it began. (Bashir Jemayel, in an interview in the French weekly *Le Nouvel Observateur* a few weeks before the beginning of the Peace for Galilee operation, according to *Ma'ario*, September 17, 1972)*



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