



## MOVING TARGETS

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# Lebanon on the Global Exchequer

### A Conversation with Claude Cheysson

**E** *The first question I would like to ask you is whether you believe that one can still address the problem of Lebanon as the problem of any other country, or have we come to such a point in the decline and disintegration of Lebanon that, in the end, one must rather address the problem of the lot of the populations of what was once Lebanon. Isn't there today, in the regional context, just a problem of the exchange of populations, a problem of refugees, of emigration similar to the problem, for example, of the Christians migrating from Syria and from Jordan? In other words, is it still reasonable, is it still realistic to approach Lebanon as an entity?*

**Claude Cheysson** - Rationally, your question does come up, this is true. But I find that the Lebanese themselves have an answer for this: it is that, whatever happens to Lebanon, the Lebanese remain very attached to their country. This is something that struck me enormously. Since 1975 there have been civil war, invasions, bombardments, occupations, etc., and as soon as there is a moment of calm, the Lebanese come back.

The spectacle of Beirut is extraordinary: in moments, the bombardments create considerable destruction, you recall the Israeli siege of Beirut. Eight days of interruption and you see the people moving back into the third story of a house that is otherwise destroyed, that has no more ground floor; they climb a ladder to get home. Fifteen days later there are flowers on the balcony and a little shop has re-established itself below. The zone which separates East Beirut from

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West Beirut is one of the most moving spectacles one could imagine: totally destroyed, and yet from place to place Lebanon re-emerges. There is such an attachment of the Lebanese to Lebanon that against all reason, my answer to your question is yes: there is a future for Lebanon.

**E**<sub>I</sub> *Is there still a Lebanese entity?*

**Claude Cheysson** - There is this extraordinary Lebanese personality which one could consider to be created by this opposition between different communities, and yet which is the Lebanese entity. For me, this is a totally fundamental phenomenon, and one must look for it far back in history, for, Lebanon, I mean the zone of Lebanon-Palestine, has withstood everything in history, everything; and yet they are still there, they are themselves, divided, but themselves.

There is an irrational answer and account of the Lebanese situation. But I would like to say one thing, which is that we Europeans, as "others", have no right to ask this question, we Mediterranean European "others", and I would say we Christian "others", and Jews as well. For in the hard times of Lebanon and in all those that have preceded them we have a responsibility. Similarly, one could say that these populations of the southern Mediterranean have a little responsibility in what happened, by their entry into Europe, by the tensions they maintained in Europe.

No, these peoples of the Mediterranean, they have their personality, their identity, not one of them will disappear. Emigration is no longer an answer. There was a moment when some Europeans left to create a new country, that was the United States; this moment has passed. We are Europeans, we are Mediterraneans, we belong to cultures and we will return. And it must be this way: it is almost a right of man to be able to return to his own civilisation, his own culture, which is not the American culture, which is not the Soviet culture. We each have our own.

**E**<sub>I</sub> *That is, to be oneself now becomes a kind of right, concretely...*

**Claude Cheysson** - A universal right. I profoundly believe in this. I profoundly believe in this. It is very rare in history that one succeeds at being oneself after emigration. You may tell me there are exceptions: the Armenians in France have kept their Armenian personality and they are in their third or fourth generation, but the exceptions are very rare.

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**E** Do you exclude, then, the possibility of revising the borders in the Near  
**I** East, in the sense of a partition or of an occupation that becomes more and more legitimate? Do you believe that the borders of Lebanon, as it was created in 1920 by General Gouraud, are still defensible and to be defended?

**Claude Cheysson** - I do not think that the borders are destined eternally to be the same, hence there will be a few changes, but I think that the problem goes much further than that. After all, a Lebanon that is fifty kilometres greater or fifty kilometres smaller, that does not change anything regarding the question that you were asking beforehand, which was on the existence itself of Lebanon, of this mosaic forming a country, culture, and economic capacity. As for the borders, then, there will be perhaps some adjustment. But as for the future of Lebanon, for years I have thought that it will have the future of a singular country.

In terms of international law, I believe the future of Lebanon is as a neutral country. This does not mean neutralised, but rather proclaiming itself its own neutrality. A neutrality protected perhaps by the presence of foreign forces, or by international guarantees at the global and at the regional level. Its economic structure should be guaranteed as well, and this would be one of the aspects of its neutrality. For a long time Lebanon has lived in a market economy, and it has for long been the only country in the region to live in a market economy. Even at present it is still the sole one to live in a market economy.

**E** This is absolutely true from an historical point of view. In principle,  
**I** however, a war economy can hardly be considered a market economy.

**Claude Cheysson** - The case of Lebanon proves the contrary, almost. The Lebanese economy is not the economy of war led by a state, because there no longer is a state. Each group conducts his own war, and it is true that there is practically an economy along those lines.

**E** Going back to the possible neutrality of Lebanon...  
**I**

**Claude Cheysson** - I have the tendency to believe that two or three times over the past years the opportunity has been missed. I would like to recall that when I saw Amin Gemayyel immediately after the assassination of his brother Bashir, I raised the question if he should not very rapidly and spectacularly proclaim the neutrality of Lebanon, with the departure of all foreign forces in

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perspective, and ask the Security Council to guarantee this and ask all its neighbours to approve it. Curiously, his minister of internal affairs at the time, Kalem, although coming out of an American university and only barely French-speaking, immediately supported my project, which had surprised President Gemayyel. But at the moment the president placed what I would call a blind faith in the Americans, and well, the Americans were opposed to this project.

They were opposed because it was evident that the neutrality of Lebanon had to be guaranteed by the Soviet Union as well, at the same time as by the United States and others. In a way, it would have needed even more a Soviet guarantee than one from the United States, because the USSR is practically a neighbour, while the US is, after all, all the way on the other side of the world. Secondly, this neutrality would have posed the problem of the real evacuation of the Israeli military forces—an evacuation which has never been carried out—more rapidly than the Americans seriously wished. In other words, it would have required the real application of the Security Council resolution that had placed a United Nations force in the south of Lebanon—in principle, to obstruct all foreign penetrations.

Now this resolution, as you know, was applied with irresponsible and scandalous hypocrisy, since the protection does not go all the way to the border with Israel, but instead leaves a strip north of the border practically free to Israeli military control. The Americans, then, were opposed to any neutrality. At that time, however, Gemayyel had such a total faith in the Americans that he even told me: “After all, the Americans can perhaps renew an operation of the Camp David type, this time between us and the Syrians”. This idea, and I won’t hide it, surprised me a great deal. One can understand that to put the Arabs in contact with a foreign country, Israel, there is the need for an intermediary, but to put two Arab countries in contact, two neighbours from eternity, the intervention of a very distant country, the United States—this just isn’t done.

I have said that the opportunity was not seized; I believe it was an interesting one. I believe even more so that in my reasoning there is room for a status of neutrality in other countries besides Lebanon: this is just in passage, but in Afghanistan, Cambodia, perhaps even Namibia, perhaps even the Red Sea which could be neutralised as are the Dardanelle Straits under the Bosphorus Convention.... This systematic recourse to neutrality, there where the tensions

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are so great, to me appears interesting as far as international law and the political reality are concerned. In any case, in my opinion, this was the answer for the Lebanese question.

The opportunity was missed, the Israelis invaded Lebanon, and the Americans obliged President Gemayyel to conclude an agreement with the Israelis which was destined to be null and void from the outset. And of course Assad was quite amused by these slightly awkward attempts, particularly awkward on the part of the Americans. The opportunity was missed. But getting back to your first question, not only do I believe in Lebanon because the Lebanese believe in Lebanon. I also think that the fact that Lebanon lends itself to the creation of a neutral country in an area torn by conflicts contributes to identifying its personality in an even clearer way.

**E** *Was there not another opportunity missed with the Soviet opposition to*  
**I** *an initiative that you yourself had undertaken? When you were minister of foreign affairs in January, 1984, you attempted to replace the multinational force by a UN force. Do you not think that there, France had engaged in an operation that would have led to the same result, if it actually had been brought to an end?*

**Claude Cheysson** - In my opinion, it was not at that moment that the operation failed. It was during the siege of Beirut and soon afterwards. We had, if I may say so, provoked the events by sending, together with the Italian government, a contingent in Lebanon. And it was after a personal telephone call from President Mitterrand to President Reagan that the Americans joined in. On our part, we had obtained at that time an agreement to demobilise all the forces. *On paper*, we had traced a perimetre within which the Palestinian forces would have to be concentrated under international control. The pre-condition of this plan was the opening of a Conference on Palestine in relation to Israel; a conference which we French very much wished would concern as well this neutrality in Lebanon. For a first time, the Americans went against the United Nations. Thus, in order to please the Americans we partly transformed this into a project for a Franco-Egyptian resolution. Is this what you are referring to?

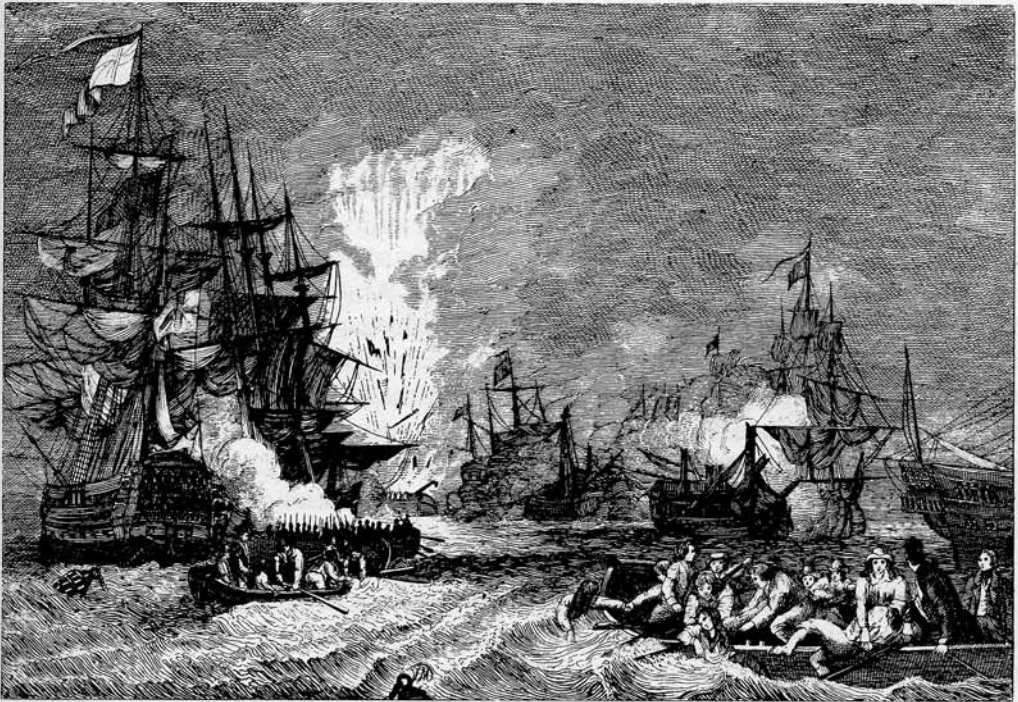
**E** *Yes, exactly.*  
**I**

**Claude Cheysson** - The Americans would renounce their power of veto, if the project were put to discussion. But the project only reached the table of the

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Security Council, and did not go any further. We therefore transformed our presence in Lebanon, which could have been the guarantee of this negotiation, we transformed it into an instrument to have the PLO leave, and at the same time to save Yasser Arafat, whom we thought one day we would need for some future negotiation. This certainly was a missed opportunity to open international negotiations. And these, in my opinion, should not have dealt just with Palestine, but also with the status of Lebanon.



*Aboukir: French tradition in the Middle East.*

In general, however, I must also say, and this I say with some anxiety, that I do not see how one can really deal with the Lebanese problems, whatever Lebanese problems these are, if the great problems of the Near East are not taken care of beforehand, or at least simultaneously. The dramatic fact, the scandalous fact, *scandalous* from the historic and human point of view, is that

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whatever event there is in the Near East, always the consequences immediately fall on Lebanon.

Inversely, what happens in Lebanon does not interest so much the Middle Eastern countries: the Iran-Iraq War has an impact on Lebanon; the progress of fundamentalism in Iran has an impact on Lebanon; Israeli mistrust, justified or not, has an impact on Lebanon; the will of the Syrians to show their strength and to affirm it in the face of all others, first of all in the face of the Palestinians, has an impact on Lebanon. Whatever the events in the Middle East, the Lebanese are the victims.

**E** *You do not seem to expect much from the new initiative of the Arab League which, compared to the past, is demonstrating at least the beginning of an interest in the Lebanese question.*

**Claude Cheysson** - I'm even satisfied that the Arab League has dared to say it exists. At the same time I'm worried—but with caution, for I am not Arab, I am not a man of the region. I am worried that in this region when Syria puts its fist on the table, everyone bows his head. This same Arab League, at the Casablanca Summit, agreed not even to designate the Syrians as occupants of Lebanon, and this is strange. It would nevertheless be a happy moment if this new initiative could lead to the reconvening of the Lebanese Parliament in one way or another. Whatever may be the reserves one could have about a parliament that is pretty old right now, and allow me to say also a bit mangy and missing several elements, if in the end this reconvening could be done, it would be a positive development.

This development, of course, is not going to lead very far. We will not progress sensibly on Lebanon and in Lebanon as long as international talks are not opened on the Palestinian question. This is an indisputable fact, and I use the expression "international talks", meaning discussions and consultations in the framework of one conference, as well as several conferences or several occasions of contact.

**E** *Do you always see the problems of Lebanon from within the regional context? Can't one instead try to isolate the Lebanese problem from the Arab-Israeli conflict and try to define a European policy, or at least a French policy, that would not be influenced by an excessive number of uncontrollable variables?*

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**Claude Cheysson** - That which can be done in Lebanon in order to address the specifically Lebanese problems is to take care of the emergency situations: thus, to try to stop the bombardments—I wouldn't say to compensate, but to aid in the reconstruction of all that was destroyed and not to hesitate in doing so even if it is only going to be destroyed all over again; to bring humanitarian aid; to insist that the injured be cared for, etc.... This must be done, and I won't hide from you that I am scandalised that France has been practically the only country to do so—*scandalised*. Practically nothing is being done in this area.

At the time when there was the French humanitarian aid operation, certain persons accused me of having expressed criticism. I did not have the least reserves about the French humanitarian operation, not the least. What I did express some reserves about was the attitude of the media who said "We are finally *dealing* with the Lebanese problem!". Of course, I have no reserves, but only as long as France doesn't just create the illusion that it is dealing with the Lebanese problems.

If Europe wants to do something about Lebanon, then it must continue to exert pressure, and it must do so with much more energy than has been used up to now; and possibly it must take the initiative so that negotiations are engaged on the Palestinian problem. This first step would be of fundamental importance—absolutely fundamental. Only after that would one be able to begin speaking of the status of Lebanon. What is more, in my opinion, it is impossible to deal with the Lebanese problem without dealing with the Palestinian problem, the same as it is not possible to solve the Palestinian problem without dealing with the Lebanese one, for to deal with all this bunch of political problems it is necessary to recognise the rights of the Palestinian people, which are the same as the rights of the Israeli people.

The Israelis have the right to security, and consequently they have the right to have guarantees as far as the utilisation of Lebanon against them is concerned. The Palestinian people themselves, too, have the right to their security and therefore, also in their case, to the neutrality of Lebanon, which would, in my opinion, be one of the elements of a rather all-encompassing regulation process, which would include the creation of the Palestinian State.

**E** For a good number of years there had been in the Middle East a sort of  
**I** Egypt-dominated order. Subsequently, after the war of 1967, the region



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*was under an Israeli order. After the unsuccessful Israeli invasion of Lebanon, and up until recently, a sort of Syrian order seemed to be in the making, at least as far as Lebanon was concerned. Today, however, the perspective of such a Syrian predominance appears seriously weakened. The recent events all have gone against Syria: the growing entente between East and West, the end of the Gulf War, these are all factors that weaken Syria.*

**Claude Cheysson** - If you will allow me, I don't think you are posing the question in quite the right way. You ask a good question, but in an imperfect way, for there are no possible Syrian roles if there is a Palestine. One of the keys to the Middle East that people never say out loud is about Syria, that without Greater Syria it is a secondary country, except in conditions of tension. It is not by chance that at the moment of the departure of the Turks, the Syrians pushed for a Greater Syria: history taught them that they needed the Palestinians in their bosom. In its current shape, Syria, then, is a country that counts, that can counterbalance Iraq, but otherwise it is not one of the great players—except if there is war, except if there is tension.

It is absolutely fundamental, and this explains all the internal difficulties of the PLO, as well as why there is no possible reconciliation between Asad and Arafat. All of this is fundamental. Therefore, as long as there is no Greater Syria, Syria's advantage lies in the outbreak of war. Unfortunately, it is as simple as that, and the Israelis must understand that they need there to be a Palestine....

**E**  
**I** ... to counterbalance Syria.

**Claude Cheysson** - Returning to this Syria-Palestine question, there is a considerable historic simplicity in this affair. The English well understood this, and this is why after 1917-1918, they created a particular mandate in Palestine so that there would be no Greater Syria. They put the Ashemite dynasty in place in Iraq and in little Transjordan. Thus, there is no possible Syrian order without Palestine. Since Syria and Palestine are not going to merge, there will be no possible Palestinian order. Palestine, the day that it is created, will have a poor territory. It probably will not have access to the sea, or access will be very difficult.

And now we come to the idea that seems fundamental to me, and which surprises a lot of people: it is that the future of Palestine lies in creating an

economic community with Israel. I don't find that the authors of Resolution 181 of November 1947 were imbeciles, as they had given instructions to Britain, which had the Mandate over Palestine, to create two independent states tied by an economic union. These are the elements of a possible equilibrium in the Middle East: Palestine and Israel in an economic union, a neutral Lebanon with substantial economic guarantees for its market economy, integrating into this through a series of economic structures. All this, in my opinion, should be completed with a well coordinated relation with the European Community, the largest market in the world and a neighbouring market. This relationship would go beyond free exchange, and would imply the acceptance of a certain number of elements of integration in customs norms, in economic life, in banking, perhaps even one day in monetary relations.

These could be the foundations of a peaceful equilibrium in the Middle East, of which we would be one of the elements, we the Community. For it is thanks to relations with our market, with our monetary system, with our banking strength, with our structure, with our economic capacity in the world, it is thanks to this that these countries would be able to find a level of prosperity that they could never reach individually. Look, for instance, at Palestine: all by itself its economic condition would be terrible. One of the leading Palestinians told me one day: "We are going to depend totally on the generosity of our Arab brothers". But the picture would be radically different if they succeeded in creating a common market in the region, with a tight commercial relationship with the EEC that would mean development and prosperity.

You see how interesting all of this is. But in this ideal description that I have given you, I do not manage to find a place for Syria, and the Syrians themselves, they won't find it either. Syrians would have all the advantages if a settlement of this kind proved impossible to find. When one goes back along the course of history, when one reconsiders what has occurred over the centuries, the analysis of the Middle Eastern problem becomes extraordinarily simple, but also what becomes evident is the impossibility on the part of certain partners to accept the geopolitical reality.

**E** *This perspective seems to go against the trend that has dominated in*  
**I** *Israel in the last several years. On one side, indeed, Israel would have to overcome Arab hostility and to associate with the Palestinians. On the other side, it should turn towards Europe, while in the recent past it has looked more and more to the US, and has even established free trade with the Americans.*

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**Claude Cheysson** - You see, this is a subject I have reflected on quite a bit, practically since 1948, when I happened to be in the region. At that time, I was a military observer for the United Nations during the war in Palestine, so this brings me to thinking about it with even more ease. But, leaving this personal aspect aside, let's go back to UN Resolution 181 of November 1947: two states in economic union; proclamation of the independence of Israel. Then, in March 1948, declaration of independence, and in this declaration you see the idea of cooperation with Israel's neighbours. The founders of the Jewish State thought they were heading towards economic union. Their territory was very small; within the borders of the time, I do not see how Israel could have survived.

Many years later, in 1976, as European Commissioner, I negotiated some agreements of cooperation, and was very much under the conviction that they should be concluded at the same time with Israel and with its four Arab neighbours—Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and Egypt. From among them, three signed an accord at the same table on the same day. Only Lebanon was missing, for it was in the midst of civil war. A few days after the Arabs, Israel came to sign in Brussels, represented by Yigal Allon, who was then vice-prime minister and minister of foreign affairs, and who is a Sabra, a son of Sabras, and for whom the fatherland is there, is that region and no other region. In Brussels, on that occasion, Allon delivered an impassioned speech that had been approved the previous Sunday by the Council of Ministers in Israel, and in which he declared: "The importance of the agreement of cooperation that we are signing with you, is that it is the same one that you have signed with our Arab neighbours and with which you have prejudged what the cooperation between us and our neighbours will be like in its relations with the law".

Afterwards, things fell to pieces: but at that moment a few men saw that the future of Israel was in its integration into the region. Israel felt threatened, and

**Claude Cheysson was Member of the European Commission from 1973 to 1981. He served under President François Mitterrand as Minister of Foreign Affairs from 1981 to 1984. Currently he is President of the Institut Pierre Mendès-France.**

started putting a blind faith in its strength and in the American alliance which it thought to be eternal. Thus, Israel became completely estranged from the region. Then came the power-brokering of the religious parties, who were not in power but who arbitrated it, and the Begin period, which gave a profound, religious inspiration to political choices—much more than with his predecessors.

When Israel began to exist—I wouldn't say its leadership was totally secularised—many of them were practicing their faith. But they had a secular approach to politics, as Arafat has on his part. Begin gave a more marked religious inspiration; the fundamentalist movement began to develop in Jerusalem, and at this point, Israel completed the turning of its back to any idea of sharing in an economic future, of integration in the region, of developing thanks to its integration, up to a point at least.

Yigal Allon asked me in 1976 to study the possibility of creating, across the whole northern part of Israel—therefore the region from the sea to Lake Tiberias—a zone that would have an internationally recognised status, internationally guaranteed, with freedom of establishment, guaranteed free transfers of revenues, etc..., with the idea of making this a type of open zone under Israeli supervision but with an international guarantee, and one could even have had an international presence to confirm this—the great zone of transformation in the Middle East.

The Israelis, taking into account their technological advancement, would in any way have been the masters of this game. But in addition, Israel would in this way have had access to the countries of the hinterland, and this, together with the relationship with the Community, would have given this zone a substantial chance at development. Allon told me to look for something along the lines of what the Tangier accord was for the free Moroccan zone that had a particular, special status. The reference to the Tangier accord is, of course, outdated as is the convention establishing it; but this was the idea, proposed to me by Yigal Allon himself, and this shows there was a period when the Israelis, who did not imagine living in any other part of the world, envisioned very well this idea of economic integration among neighbours. All this was and still is very interesting. This is a design in which Europe would have to play its great role: Europe, not the United States.

**E** *Let us say, then, that this attachment to the United States is, in the end,*  
**I** *second best for Israel, since the right train has been missed.*

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**Claude Cheysson** - The right train has been missed and the Israelis are now in a hurry to get back to it. Under the pressure of the *intifada*, they are in the process of losing the illusion that at some point the Palestinians will accept the occupation. I have not lost hope, therefore, in a return to a more realistic approach. Yet it is tough to lose an illusion.

At the current moment there is not five per cent of the Israeli population which still believe that the Palestinians will accept the occupation, ninety-five per cent recognise that, whatever happens, they cannot annex the occupied territories, so that these territories will have to be occupied permanently. No one any longer defends the idea that it will possible to get around the obstacle of difference in status between the occupied territories in Israel, not even Shamir. As for Ariel Sharon, I heard him say: "These Palestinians, there is nothing to be done with them, they must be thrown out. Of course they'll have a state, but they'll just have to have it elsewhere." And Sharon told me one day: "During the war you thought of creating the 'Jewish national home' in Madagascar; well then, stick your Palestinians in Madagascar; they have to have a state, as far away as possible." But the Israelis have not yet fully realised the consequences of this change; it is too tough. In my opinion, however, things are improving.

You have now a very large number of Israelis who say "all right, let's begin by getting out of Gaza, Gaza must have a status". But there are many other Israelis saying "who cares about Gaza?". There is progress in thinking, but the conclusions have yet to be accepted, far from it. We must therefore maintain the pressure, and maintain it in the name of principles. In this direction, I must say that the American about-face is useful. It is not that they are going to impose something on Israel; they will not do so. But the fact that Baker and others are now saying that it is good that the Palestinians see their rights recognised is an improvement, in terms of principle. This contributes to the evolution in spirit. The *intifada* is evidently a new element, and it is very probable, I am ready to admit it now, that what we had sketched in 1982 was premature.

**E** *The fact that having started our conversation speaking of Lebanon, we*  
**I** *have arrived at the Palestinian problem shows how, in the end, the*  
*Lebanese question is a secondary theatre of a greater confrontation, that*  
*Lebanon is just a part of the global chessboard.*

**Claude Cheysson** - Who could doubt this? It is part of the chessboard because of the game the Syrians play, which would not be possible if the Palestinian problem were dealt with. It is part of the chessboard because of the push of Iranian fundamentalism which has its effects in Lebanon, and if there were an easing of the tension on the Islamic front, the effects would immediately be felt in Lebanon. It is part of the chessboard because of the opposition between the two branches of the Ba'ath party, and because of the fact that Iraq is never going to skip the opportunity to stick *banderillos* in the side of its Syrian brother.

Now if the Palestinian problem were to begin to be dealt with, the Americans also would have less reasons to interfere in this region. The Americans do not have a foreign policy in the Near East, as they do not have a foreign policy in general. It has internal impulses which oblige the government to take positions on world issues, and this is completely different from having a foreign policy. They pay attention to the Near East only for one reason: because it has an echo in their internal politics. If there were an appeasement between the Israelis and the Palestinians, the internal impulses of the Jewish lobby would no longer enter into play. Perhaps the impulses of the Catholic lobby would enter into it, on the Jerusalem issue.

The Soviets instead traditionally have, and cannot afford not having, a foreign policy in the Middle East. And if we place ourselves in the perspective of peace, I also see another actor re-appearing: Turkey, another actor that cannot do without a Middle Eastern policy, and to which I attach a fair amount of importance. The picture of the Middle East situation would not be complete if we did not mention the role of Turkey in this development. After many decades of lack of interest, Turkey once again is taking up very close relations with all of these countries. This, I believe, is a very positive development. Turkey is one of the elements of stability in the region.

Turkey always has had an interest in the Middle East, a capacity in the Middle East which is an extraordinarily interesting element. Of course, this time it will be manifested by other means than Ottoman troops. There is, for instance, a fantastic project that has been suggested by the Americans for the rational management of the water resources of the region: two aqueducts coming from Mount Ararat, from the Turco-Soviet border—a fantastic project. Technically speaking, it seems to be sound. There are, in the Caucasus region, considerable water resources. The project has been studied also from an economic point of view, and reveals itself to be economically feasible. One aqueduct would go all

## Frankish Prisoners Freed from the Saracens

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**F**erunt filia a Sarraconum liberati.



Frankish Prisoners Freed from the Saracens.

the way down to the Arab peninsula and another aqueduct would go all the way to the Sinai, through Lebanon, Israel, practically to the Suez Canal.

This is an issue that will certainly create emotional reactions, but is an issue about which I have strong convictions, because I believe that the moment has come to integrate these countries via their economic interest. There is a great future in integration. We speak about a common economic interest in the European market, in the European financial, economic and banking system, and all this seems to us very obvious: but in a region with the physical features of the Middle East, the common benefit that could be derived from a process of economic integration related to a vast water-supply system is much stronger than anything we can imagine in Europe. Everybody in the area would directly benefit from an effort to integrate economically, perhaps from Turkey to Saudia Arabia up to the Suez Canal, and if that works well, maybe even Egypt. Let me add that if the countries of the region can find such a project in their overall interest, the integration and development of the economies of the Middle East would be in the interest of the Europeans, as well. Indeed, without a radical improvement in the economic situation of all these countries, the demographic pressure would be such that black labour and illegal immigration would flood all over Europe. And nothing is worse than illegal immigration. It is the putrefaction of society, the encouragement not only of moonlighting, but also of more dangerous forms of clandestine businesses and outright crime.

The Americans are very distant partners of the Middle East; the Soviets are closer, and would be involved in full in such a project. But the greatest advantage of having peace and economic development in the Near East would be for us Europeans. Turkey, a country that is both European and Middle Eastern (although, in my opinion, more on the side of the Middle East), would of course have a pivotal role.

**E** *You see Turkey more as an Asian than as a European country. Others could say that Atatürk's modernisation, and the important developments of the last forty years, have succeeded in giving the country a European soul at least as strong as its Asian one. This seems to me to be the drama of contemporary Turkey: to be split in half between two worlds. In any case, it would be hard to deny that the about-face on the part of Turkey is evident. After fifty years of stressing their European side the Turks are rediscovering their Asian side, and therefore an increasing role in Middle Eastern affairs. Yet this return of Turkey on the regional exchequer should reopen the*



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*discussion on the treaties with which the First World War was ended in the Levant, and thus destabilise the region even further.*

**Claude Cheysson** - Of course not. Of course, Turkey is turning around—I don't know if one should say towards Asia or towards the Muslim world—was written in history. Turkey, like Morocco, is a borderland. Turkey and Morocco are at the two ends of the Mediterranean Muslim world; and because of this have always had two souls, that could always be seen in their view of the outside world.

This is absolutely evident in the case of Morocco that, throughout its history has always glanced more towards the north, the Iberian peninsula, than towards the east. In France the Moors went all the way up to Poitiers, and on the Iberian peninsula they fought to keep a foothold up to the beginning of the sixteenth century (and that was extremely important for their civilisation). On the contrary, even during the Ottoman Empire's period of great weakness in Algeria, Morocco never tried to gain territory towards the east.

The case of Turkey is more complex, both from the historical and the geopolitical points of view. Historically, the Turks, in their drive to establish their Empire on European soil, went all the way to Vienna. But at the same time they conquered the Near East. Geographically, Turkey straddles the two continents. At the same time both Turkey and Morocco also contribute to stressing the unity of the Mediterranean world. Out of the two worlds, they largely helped create one, with a common civilisation. When I think of the Mediterranean's past, I am very much struck by the profound roots of the Mediterranean civilisations. The Mediterranean reality is an elementary part of the history of the past, just as of the history of tomorrow. This is why to have Spain in the European Community was so necessary; but it is not certain whether or not there is a real need for England.

**E** *Do you think that this very French vision that you propose, which*  
**I** *links up with the one elaborated by President Mitterand, is presently in the process of being adopted by France's European partners? There have been reticences, most notably about the Lebanese ordeal and with regard to the Palestinian affair, as well. How do the other Europeans perceive this? Do you think that France is in a position to take its partners along?*

## Claude Cheysson

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**Claude Cheysson** - There are people with short reasoning, or intellectual myopia if you will, and then there are people who see a little further. You should not be surprised that my vision of things is so close to the vision of President Mitterand: of course it is the same vision. We are very close, François Mitterand and I, if it weren't for this he would not have named me as his minister of foreign affairs. But it was de Gaulle's vision as well, to be exact. And Mitterand and de Gaulle are not on the same political shores. I do not see how a Frenchman who makes an effort to think about these problems could have any other vision.



*The Battle of Hattin.*

What is more complicated is the second question: how do the other Europeans perceive this? The Danish and the Irish tell us: "The Mediterranean, it is a little lake of little importance". The Germans, whose role in the construction of Europe is absolutely crucial, do not really take much pleasure engaging in Mediterranean affairs, since this is a political environment where the risk of receiving a few bruises is very high, and because dealing with Israel always evokes a few problems. Look at the distance they have taken from the problems of the Iran-Iraq war. They have played a game *à la japonaise*, by dealing with both.

On issues in which the Mediterranean is concerned, however, they are unlikely to say flatly: no. This means that if the French, the Italians, the Spaniards and the Greeks are determined to pursue a common action in the region, they will not be prevented from doing so by any of the European partners. They just have to engage themselves, and openly assert their political weight in Europe, and no one will dare deny this them. Look at the steps the *troika*, with Spain, France and Greece, has made in recent times in the Near East: no one in the Community will dare try to prevent them performing their role. And this in spite of the fact that Margaret Thatcher is quite tempted to do so, out of the fear that someone might go against the wishes of the Americans, and in spite of the fact that the Germans have shown that what they want above all is to wash their hands of the Middle Eastern matter. Moreover, about the position of Germany, it has to be added that at present no Mediterranean policy is possible any longer if it does not include Turkey; and Germany is very much interested in Turkey. One has only to look at the volume of investments and at the level of trade relations to see how strong the involvement of Germany in the Turkish economic scene is, once the problem of immigration solved. The fact that we are bringing Turkey back into Mediterranean politics might irritate them a bit, but will certainly shake their lack interest, and affect in a positive manner their attitude towards the problems of this part of the world.

I would not say that, at the time when I was a Member of the Commission, our agreements on the Maghreb, the Mashrak and Israel were received favourably by the English, the Germans, *et coetera*. But, with the help of a some friendly presidencies, it was decided to go ahead and this was sufficient to come to a positive conclusion.

In other words, it is possible to have a European policy in the Mediterranean. But it will not come from a truly common initiative: one should not expect any impulses from the Community. It is up to the three or four Mediterranean countries to take the initiative; it is they who can do or undo it in the name of Europe. And I am speaking from experience; Europe will follow.