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Grand Rivalries and Local War

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Thousands of Lebanese Christians went during the very first days of the 1975 war to demonstrate below the balcony of the Maronite patriarch at Bkerke, to the north of Beirut. One of their banners called on the elderly dignitary to summon "the Powers" to the rescue of Lebanon. A tenacious myth was thus resurrected, that of a massive Western intervention on the side of the Lebanese legal authority, or at least that of the Christians who traditionally formed its substance. Alive in the spirit of the demonstrators was the crucial precedent of 1861. The "Powers" of that era did in effect intervene to limit Ottoman exclusive influence in the area without utterly destroying it, and in so doing, they structured the mountainous core of contemporary Lebanon as an autonomous entity, although formally kept within the Ottoman imperial framework. Henri Heine wrote at the time "Tout Paris tressaille au son du canon de Beyrouth" ("All Paris shudders at the sound of the cannon of Beirut"), and Napoleon III actually sent troops to accelerate the birth of the new autonomous entity.

More than a half century later, a second French intervention would make of Maysalun, the modest Syrian village on the eastern flank of Anti-Lebanon, another occasion for the West to demonstrate its support for an autonomous Lebanon. The Arab nationalist troops of King Faysal I of Syria were defeated then by General Gouraud, allowing Lebanon to survive within its present frontiers. In 1945, the pressures put by Great Britain on Free France hastened the independence of Lebanon, which General de Gaulle hesitated to accord to

it. The American intervention in 1958 would not be any less crucial, occurring when France was already weakened by the *faux pas* in the Suez and by the war in Algeria. The landing of the US Marines on the Lebanese shores marked a limit to the extension of Nasserism, then well established in neighbouring Syria. In February 1958, Egypt and Syria became a federal state under the name of the United Arab Republic (UAR) and there was a real threat that Lebanon would soon be pressured to join the Union.

Policy through a prism

They were indeed right, the demonstrators in 1975, to brandish these conclusive precedents before the ears of their patriarch. He, too, was right in not hearing them but halfway, for from 1861 ("the Powers'" guarantees for an autonomous Mount Lebanon) to 1920 (the creation of the modern state), from 1920 to 1958 (the US landing), and from 1958 to 1975 (the outbreak of the present war), the world had indeed changed, and the "Powers" as well. More than fourteen years after the beginning of the current war, Paris still shudders at the sound of the cannon of Beirut, but it was a hospital boat—and not a battleship—that was sent into the harbour of the murdered capital. Paris shudders, certainly, but a Parisian editorialist was not completely wrong in shouting that: "France allowed Lebanon to be massacred. France, Europe, the world allowed Lebanon to be massacred... To do nothing was intolerable. To do too much would lead to war. We chose the right words and humanitarian aid... The martyring of Beirut tolls the bell for human rights".[1] Paris still shudders, then, but to the noise of the cannon no cannon replies any longer, only the ring of pity.

It is very difficult, however, to translate nostalgia into actual policies, and those Lebanese who still scrutinise the horizon awaiting a friendly warship should begin to change their habits. A basic rule of their political existence has consisted, often with success, in finding in the world a counterweight for the pressure of their regional environment: this rule has become largely out of date. Save for a diplomatic miracle, the little countries of the region therefore will continue to be threatened constantly by bigger or more cynical neighbours, with the world not being very much affected by this. The "internationalisation" of their crisis is a weapon which certain Lebanese use to brandish, opposing it inaccurately to a domestic or regional solution. In its most common form, an international settlement rarely conflicts with a regional one. On the contrary, the first reaction of the truly great powers of this world has been to recognise the unfounded "rights" of the regional powers, and to accomodate them.

Yet it rarely happens that the two superpowers see Lebanon for itself and in itself. They always see it in relation, yesterday to Nasser's Egypt, today to Syria and Israel. Their strategy in Lebanon with few exceptions is not a "Lebanese strategy" but merely an extension of a more vast policy in which Lebanon occupies the place of the little impotent entity whose household problems impede it from reacting to the eating up of its garden by crass neighbours. Already in 1958, it took the threatening of the two monarchies of Jordan and Iraq for the US Marines to land in Beirut, and since 1970 at least, Moscow sees Lebanon only with difficulty, if not through a Palestinian or Syrian prism. Such is the drama of Lebanon, a country too small to be isolated from regional squabbles, and too complex and independence-minded to be reduced to some easy form of satellisation.

This is why Lebanon has not really constituted an international conflict except for at certain particularly critical moments in the history of its war, most notably during the period 1982-1983 when what began as a military victory for Israel and a political success for the United States, ended as a political and military victory for Syria and indirectly for the Soviet Union.

Apart from this limited episode, Lebanon has basically been an issue left by the superpowers to the poor treatment of regional forces. Indeed, such is the meaning of the bizarre declaration of the Security Council on April 24, 1989, handing the business of finding a proper settlement, or at least a truce, over to the Arab League, the protective screen for the great powers in want of a policy. Were more firmer resolutions adopted, those would remain deadletters like UN SC Resolutions 425, 508, and 509, which call for the withdrawal of foreign troops from Lebanon.[2]

Two targets

The American government, to begin with, has evidenced a quasi-total incapacity to see Lebanon in itself, if only across the grid of the Arab-Israeli conflict. For Washington, the affair began as an excellent opportunity to pursue the Kissinger-led peace process while some hostile actors were kept busy in Lebanon, to the detriment of that country. Many Lebanese think that Kissinger is the author of a scheme envisaging the destruction of their country. They are not totally wrong; but the nature of this scheme, which certainly deserves to be treated, remains to be clarified.

In 1975, Kissinger was all consumed by his policy of step-by-step diplomacy in the Middle East. Two steps were made under the form of two disengagement agreements on the Syrian and Egyptian fronts in 1974. The third step would be a new disengagement agreement on the Egyptian front, on a completely different, and basically political, scale. Sadat hesitated to engage himself in it due to the quasi-general Arab opposition. The war in Lebanon which broke out at this precise moment came at an opportune time, in order to preoccupy the Palestinian Liberation Organisation and to neutralise it. Washington, therefore, did nothing to stop a very useful conflict. Another occasion then arose on the horizon, that of implicating Syria as well, which Washington actively encouraged, namely by mediating to assure Syria of Israel's non-opposition to the deployment of Syrian troops in Lebanon. This made way for the illustrious " red lines" agreement of 1976 which allowed Syria to send troops into Lebanon, under four conditions put forth by Israel, practically making Lebanon at the same time a political satellite of Syria as well as its soft military underbelly.[3] A policy was thus devised with two concordant targets: to keep Syria busy in Lebanon was one shutter, to prevent a real Syrian-Israeli confrontation, the other.

With a sole exception, Washington really did not act but to save this accord of 1976, an accord which allowed Syria to keep in contact with the USA, to deploy its troops over the greater part of Lebanon and to make Lebanon an active sideshow tailored to its wishes while the show on the Golan Heights front was frozen still. In 1981, a minor crisis around the city of Zahleh in the Bekaa Valley would deteriorate to become a veritable Syrian-Israeli crisis. The two sides mutually accused each other of having broken the accord of 1976, Israel by shooting down Syrian helicopters, Syria by introducing surface-to-air missiles into Lebanon. The crisis was only provisionally moderated by a Washington then looking for a return to the *status quo ante* (at least until the completion of the Israeli withdrawal from Sinai, in application of the Camp David agreements, in April 1982).

The *status quo ante* was actually and massively broken in 1982 with Israel's invasion. An almost green light was given to Israeli Minister of DefenceAriel Sharon by then Secretary of State General Alexander Haig for this operation. There also, however, Washington hurried to prevent a Syrian-Israeli confrontation, and the Americans imposed a cease-fire on the fifth day of the conflict, that is to say, when Israel had finished its destruction of the Syrian missiles introduced into the Bekaa Valley, in this way bringing the situation

back to the original terms of the 1976 accord. The missiles having been destroyed (as well as more than a hundred Syrian jets) and the ceasefire with Syria established, Israel proceeded to invade Lebanon and to enter Beirut.

The scale of the invasion and its tragic consequences (notably the Sabra and Shatila massacres) would confirm a provisional change in US focus for nearly a year. In effect, between the summer of 1982 and the summer of 1983, the United States thought of disregarding the accord of 1976 and of founding its Lebanese policy on new bases less dependent of the Syrian-Israeli condominium. Instead of consolidating the *de facto* partition of the country into two zones of influence, where Syria would have a political-cum-territorial advantage and Israel a strategic one, the Reagan administration embarked on the project of rebuilding the Lebanese state as a strong, pro-Western

government, which would be freed of all foreign forces. President Reagan went as far as to consider Lebanon "a vital interest" for the US, while his envoy in Beirut, Philip Habib, was mentioning Christmas 1982 as a likely date for the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Lebanon.

But the policy, adopted in haste, was executed in confusion. This episode in US policy is crucial, because the undignified withdrawal of the Marines a year later was going to be used as an easy reminder of the futility of US peace making in Lebanon by those who wanted a policy of hands-off towards that country. In fact, the Reagan administration has first to blame its own diplomats for the incredible amount of contradictions in the policy as it was then carried out. The troops sent as contingents of the Multinational Force (MNF)[4] to maintain civil order in Beirut were doubled in their mission by a US mission to train the Lebanese army while no pressure was really put on President Gemayyel for an immediate reform of the country's institutions, which would have made the nascent army more acceptable to all Lebanese. If it were desired that the Multinational Force be effective in its mission, then French and Italian suggestions to reinforce it, as it was still in time to do so, should not have been ignored. But they were, mainly because of US reluctance to give a coherent mission to the MNF, arguing of the limitations put on the president by the War Powers' Act limitations.

Most importantly, the Reagan administration embarked on two conflicting policies asking Israel to withdraw from Lebanon and, at the same time, to accept the Reagan plan, submitted to the Israelis as their troops were still surrounding Beirut. Then the US government brokered an agreement with Israel where many concessions were made to Israel. When Lebanese leaders worried about Syria's opposition to the accord, the US government promised to do its best to make Syria accept the agreement and withdraw in its turn. Add to it the fact that if the US government had wanted to reunify Lebanon, it should not have helped in placing a Phalangist in the presidency of the republic, as opposed to some more neutral Maronite figure. These inumerable contradictions were to explode under the pressure of successful terrorist acts and the Soviet rearming of Syria.

If in September 1982 Reagan had affirmed that he would not withdraw the Marines as long as the Syrian and Israeli troops were not pulled out, in September 1983, and especially in October after the two attacks on the Marine and on the French paratrooper compounds, he looked for nothing other than a

pretext to leave. In July 1983, Washington had accepted the idea of unilateral Israeli pull-outs, what had been until then condemned. At the end of 1983, Washington was retracting all its support from Amin Gemayyel. In February 1984, the Marines were pulled out in haste. On July 25, 1984, Mr. Murphy, the newly appointed assistant secretary of state in charge of the Middle East at the State Department, brought American policy back to where it had been on the eve of the Israeli invasion, affirming before Congress that Syria had played a positive role in the re-establishment of stability in Lebanon. The so-called "Lebanese" episode of American diplomacy thus came to an end; it had hardly lasted a year, after which Washington once again resigned itself to accepting a situation which it had itself helped to create: that of a Lebanon actually divided between Syrians and Israelis.[5]

Beginning in 1984, Washington would do nothing that could affect this scene. Certainly there were moments of tension with Syria, and sometimes with Israel too, but Washington never took advantage of them to put an end to the effective partition of the country. On the contrary, after a phase of total disinterest between 1984 and 1987, dialogue was once again taken up with Damascus, having for an inevitable effect a perpetuation of the *status quo*. American policy in Lebanon could have been summarised, then, in three words—drugs, terrorism, hostages (HTD)—and Washington wanted to see Damascus cooperate on these three dossiers. Taken up by Vernon Walters in a visit to Damascus in June 1987, this dialogue attained surrealist heights when an American diplomat, otherwise intelligent, set out with a Syrian official to rewrite the Lebanese constitution (producing the famous "Glaspie-Khaddam paper"). This led nowhere. Later Mr. Murphy got to discussing with the same Syrian official the different candidates to the Lebanese presidential election, due in July 1988. The talks ended with Mr. Murphy's acceptance of Michel Dahir, the favorite of the Syrian vice-president to be the sole candidate. The Maronite Christians, completely reunited for the occasion, refused this Syrian *ukaze*, even when promoted by the US. It goes without saying that during this whole period, Washington exerted no pressure whatsoever on Israel in order to make it apply Resolution 425 of the Security Council.

In cahoots with whom?

Moscow, too, as already indicated, sees Lebanon through the regional lens. Contrary to the case with Washington, the war in Lebanon was not really welcomed by the USSR, for it unveiled and accelerated the rapid weakening of

Soviet influence in the Middle East. Not that Moscow was lacking local allies, but her fear of a brutal reaction by Israel led her to preach to them moderation. It is in this way that Asad in Moscow during the autumn of 1975 heard advice to hold back, for Moscow did not cease to repeat to her Lebanese and Palestinian friends that the balance of power between the local forces was not to be their compass, but instead they were to be guided by the possibility of external interference that was turning the creation of the "commune of Beirut", dreamt of by leftist Lebanese and Palestinians, into a dangerous adventure. Essential for Moscow at the time was to keep intact the Palestinian presence in Lebanon and to reinforce the Syrian-Palestinian alliance in face of the successive points marked by Kissinger's shuttle diplomacy and the rise in influence of the conservative Gulf petro-monarchies.

It is the preservation of this Syrian-PLO alliance, the pivotal point of impact of Soviet influence after the pro-Western shift in Egyptian politics, which explains Moscow's constant efforts to avoid a Syrian-Palestinian confrontation. This became inevitable from the moment that Damascus sent troops into Lebanon in June 1976. Moscow would try in vain to avoid this development, in order to support the PLO, of course, but also because in Moscow it was correctly guessed that this Syrian deployment in Lebanon occurred thanks to Amercian and Jordanian mediation. The Soviet analysis at the time was the following: either the deployment of Syrian troops in Lebanon took place with an Amercian guarantee of Israel's non-opposition, hence it was bad for Moscow's interests (because of the implied Syrian-American rapprochement), or this deployment took place without this American mediation and the risks of an Israeli-Syrian war rose at an inopportune moment.

The first analysis, quite understandably, was the right one, and it would require Sadat's visit to Jerusalem in November 1977 and the Camp David Accords in September 1978 to reconcile Moscow with a Syrian deployment

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originally contrary to its wishes. In fact, with the American successes in the region, Moscow disposed of fewer and fewer instruments of pressure on her allies, now having become precious because they were rare. Syria, a secondary country at the time of multiple Soviet alliances in the region, could now impose its own regional strategy in an era marked by the pro-American switch in Cairo and the emergence of Saudi Arabia as a potent country in the region. In fact, with the clear American success in Camp David, and in the unilateral peace treaty Cairo was going to sign, Moscow was left with the uneasy option of having to support not only some of the agreed-upon Syrian targets, but to swallow some unpalatable Syrian policies in the Arab world as well.

The first Israeli invasion of 1978 had proved to Moscow that Lebanon was becoming a danger zone for her allies, to which is due the growth of its military support for the PLO in Lebanon between 1978 and 1982,[6] and the fact that at that time, she was not opposed to the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 425.[7] Yet the deployment of the UNIFIL (UN Interim Force in southern Lebanon) forces would not prevent the invasion of 1982 from taking place nor from its being a new disaster for the USSR. Eight days after the beginning of the invasion, the USSR, without mentioning its 1980 friendship pact with Syria, was basically calling for a ceasefire, to the dismay of her many friends among the Palestinians and within the Lebanese left. The Soviet view was that the kind of military deployment Syria was allowed in Lebanon prevented her from properly resisting the invasion, hence the allusion to the 1980 pact with Syria that it did not imply the duty of mutual defence in the specific case of the Syrian troops stationed in Lebanon.

The 1982 invasion would end with an extended Israeli occupation and a Western military presence. The Soviet position picked up quickly from the consequences: Andropov re-armed Syria intensively, bestowing upon it SAM-5 missiles, then the first country outside of the Eastern bloc to receive them and even before many of the popular democracies. The political discourse changed too: if in the summer of 1982 the USSR, like the US, pressed for the departure of all foreign forces from Lebanon, in the summer of 1983, with the weakening of Gemayyel and his Western protectors, Moscow would speak only of the unconditional withdrawal of Israeli, American, and all other Western forces, extending now an implicit acceptance of the Syrian presence in Lebanon.

Indeed, this Soviet change marked a new alignment on the Syrian position which had been, and with brilliance, the instrument by which the balance of power on the Lebanese scene turned around at the expense of the United States. Syria was even recompensated by the delivery of SAM-21s in September 1983, an indirect acceptance of her presence in Lebanon as was Moscow's awkward silence in the face of Damsacus' systematic campaign against loyalist PLO forces. In effect, Syria revealed itself to be much too precious for the Soviet plan of expelling all Western powers from Lebanon, then enabling Moscow to really quarrel with her over the PLO affair.[8] The Syrian-Soviet gains of the winter of 1983-1984 were such that Moscow permitted herself to oppose by veto a French proposition envisaging the replacement of Western forces by the "Blue Helmets". Moscow, as much as Damascus, wanted an unambiguous defeat of the West in Beirut. They would have it.

Since this turn of 1984, Soviet policy would follow the meandering of Gorbachevism. Syria, of course, remained an ally of Moscow, but the signs of a constant cooling down of the bilateral relations multiplied. The Lebanese Communist Party, after having seen several of its leaders assassinated, would hold its congress outside of the zone directly under Syrian control. The Maronite patriarch, who still had not been to Damascus, was invited to Moscow where he remained for about ten days. The embassy in Beirut re-established its contacts with all the Lebanese parties. The gist, however, was to be found in Gorbachev's speech when he received Asad in order to explain his support for a peaceful solution in the Middle East, as also in the reception speech for Arafat, where Gorbachev himself recognised as an anomaly the non-existence of diplomatic relations between the USSR and Israel.

These two gestures distanced Moscow somewhat from Damascus, and it does not seem that the two visits there by Foreign Minister Shevardnadze and Defence Minister Yazov have brought back the cordial entente of Andropov's days. Consequently, the Soviet position vis-à-vis Lebanon today seems transitory and Soviet commentary on the current crisis is often contradictory. There are those who preach for stable alliances, that is, a continued support for Syria in Lebanon; above all one finds them again and again in the international commission of the Central Committee. Others are critics of Syrian policy and partisans of a position of equi-distance in relation to the forces present; these would be a group at the Foreign Ministry. In this there is a net evolution, illustrated by a moderation of tone towards General Aoun

and by a constant support for the Arab League initiative which necessarily comprises a certain de-Syrianisation of the Lebanese conflict. This process is certainly contemplated in Moscow and Yevgeni Primakov, an old hand in Middle Eastern affairs and reportedly one close aide to Gorbachev, has told the *al-Hayat* daily published in London that peace would come back to Lebanon when it is freed from the weight of the various Arab regimes.

An historic player

I have no intention of discussing here whether or not France is a great power and consequently if it should be included in this analysis. France under Giscard d'Estaing (1974-1981) did very little for Lebanon, if only to test the idea of sending troops there, while Giscard was visiting the US. Nevertheless she did have the decency to participate in the UNIFIL forces, in which France lost many of her sons (later, the French role in UNIFIL shrinked in importance, as a result of Iranian-ispired attacks on the French troops). Under Mitterand, France participated two times in the evacuation of the PLO forces, once within the Multinational Forces from Beirut in 1982, and again, alone, from Tripoli in 1983; but these two initiatives had little impact on Lebanon itself. France attempted to put some dignity into the retreat of its contingent in the MNF from Beirut, in holding back there one month longer than the others in 1984 and in attempting a Security Council resolution, which revealed itself to be stillborn. The project put in January before the Council was meant to replace the MNF with UN forces in Beirut. France was next gripped by its hostages and by terrorism on its own soil, and it must be admitted that those who in this way wanted to tie up French diplomacy in the Middle East largely succeeded in their enterprise.

Free from the weight of the hostages in May 1988, France was in better terms to react to the institutional crisis and the ensuing constitutional vacuum of September 1988. Her voice was now a more audible, if not a more understood one. France's first objective was to permanently alert the international community on the dangers of an open-ended conflict in Lebanon, a useful role but one that had no echo until Lebanese blood once again began to flow in March 1989. I will pass on the humanitarian role, as others could have played it just as well, or even better if their flag were more neutral, as suggested by former French Foreign Minister Claude Cheysson. What remains is the actual political role, and there France has tried with no success to bring the issue before the UN Security Council. Faced with American and

Soviet reluctance, Paris has hesitated in going any further in speaking the language presently dominant in the Middle East: the language of force. Paris approached it a bit, only to quickly repudiate it, denying at all any intention to go to war.

Yet it does not just consist of this. The essence of the matter is that France's influence in the Middle East is in a bind, due to global polarisation, France's limited means and the superficial nature of its commercial implantation in a great part of Middle Eastern countries. Its influence, as much as its larger markets, France has acquired thanks to a relatively courageous political discourse. Without this courage, France in the Near East is no more than a Germany with fewer machines to sell. This East, then, is not Near enough and if France were definitely losing its influence there, one would not pose the question as to whether or not France is a great power. Everyone would know that she no longer is.

Arab alignment

From Kissingerian schemes to Soviet indifference, passing alongside humanitarian Europe, those Lebanese looking for an international counterweight to their mighty neighbours have had many opportunities to be completely disenchanted. They are not. It is that they know that their conflict, if it should cease to be open, would necessarily implicate the great powers. How can this be possible?

The internationalisation of regional conflicts is today the royal path to their termination, or at least to their cooling down. This was clearly shown in Afghanistan and in the Gulf War. In these two cases, the new détente played a pivotal role in the pull-out of Soviet forces here, the stopping of fighting there. As for Angola, Cambodia, and perhaps even the Palestinian question, the beginnings of international cooperation now have been established. Since their very first summit in Geneva in November 1985, the two superpowers have clearly included regional conflicts in their agenda. The foreign policy goals stated by President George Bush (notably the Texas University speech in May) indicate a willingness to give the settlement of regional conflicts a higher priority than under Reagan.

Lebanon is to a large extent (one could even say, is basically) a regional conflict before being a civil war or an international issue. Domestic

problems do exist in Lebanon, but power-sharing in the country, although limited, has an admirable record when compared to any other country in the Arab world. On the other hand, the future of religious minorities is definitely a regional issue, and the way it is going to be tackled in Lebanon is going to affect its treatment everywhere in the Middle East, and possibly in Central Asia too. Thus no superpower could dismiss the war in Lebanon as a domestic question, and its inclusion in the list of regional conflicts is inevitable from the moment these conflicts are tackled.

Hubert Vedrine, the diplomatic adviser to François Mitterand is thus justified in speaking of the "two major regional issues in the Middle East: Palestine and Lebanon". It is realistic to see this expression more and more widely accepted, not only because the regional nature of the conflict in Lebanon is now clearer, but because the conflict over Palestine has been recently taking a more domestic turn, having less and less effects on other issues in the area, such as the war in Lebanon, the conflict in the Gulf or inter-Arab rivalries. In the meantime, Arab leaders meeting in Casablanca took note of the extent to which the war in Lebanon has become the point of crystallisation of the Syrian-Iraqi feud, each of the two governments backing its local allies and clients. The Arab world is thus finding a new source of tension, and alignments on the Lebanese question are rapidly developing. Those who were on Iraq's side in its war with Iran are now backing it in Lebanon, while Iran is still on the side of Syria in Beirut. While a ceasefire has been reached in the Gulf, while the Arab-Israeli conflict is reverting to its very first feature as a communal conflict, Lebanon cannot remain the arena where all impossible regional wars are fought as bloody mockeries.

The internationalisation of the Lebanese conflict does not mean its de-Arabisation, even if the two terms are often opposed by some Lebanese Christians who are against any deal with the Arab world, or by Syria which basically wants an exclusive role for itself in Lebanon and is therefore trying to prevent an Arab-made as well as an international settlement to the war. Since February 1989, a complex process has begun where an Arab peace-making effort in Lebanon is going parallel to a higher level of international alert. The impression is actually one of an *internationalisation by proxy*, where the two superpowers are pushing the Arab League countries to take their responsibilities in Lebanon as Arab countries first, and as representatives of the international community, as well.

Hence the five messages sent to the Arab summit in Casablanca in May 1989 by Messrs. Bush, Gorbachev, Mitterand, Perez de Cuellar and by the Pope all called the Arab heads of state to move forward on the Lebanese issue. In parallel, the Arab League Council adopted a resolution asking the international community to make Israel respect UNSC Resolution 425, and letting it be known that the Arab countries would then be in a better position to call for a parallel Syrian withdrawal. There is here a step in the right direction for

Mahmoud-Bey, Ottoman Governor of Beyrouth.

cooperation between the two levels, regional and international, even if the Arab League hardly has the courage to formulate clearly this offer. There are, however, some Lebanese sceptics, who tend to think that this international insistence on the Arab League efforts is a way for the two superpowers to wash their hands from any direct involvment in Lebanon. Earlier precedents would prove them right. It seems, however, that a genuine interest in putting an end to the war is developing, even if a fifteen year war cannot be ended in weeks.

Labyrinthine choice

The great powers have already been useful for Lebanon, however indirectly. Their territorial conservatism has practically impeded it from being partitioned in an irreparable manner. The international system has maintained the territorial unity of Lebanon, in spite of some Lebanese groups' and some regional actors' wishes. The present international system is, in effect, quite conservative in territorial matters, as hostile to countries' partitions as it is to annexation of "sovereign" countries by their mightier neighbours. This passive resistance of the international community to separitist and/or expansionist policies should be transformed into a project for the active re-establishment of the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Lebanon. This policy could only be based on the idea that leaving Lebanon as it is, or, worse, partitioning it, is to open a pandora's box on a regional scale. Numerous are indeed the actors who are unhappy with their borders: expansionist ambitions are open and separatist groups are active. Who would be able to stop a process of border-redrawing that would begin in Lebanon and move eastward into the Asian hinterland, helping all kinds of ethnic, religious and sectarian loyalties in their unending struggle against modern states?

It is important to note the Soviet evolution towards a more neutral posture in Lebanon, which seems to offer a chance for a European-Soviet understanding on Lebanon. On the American side, it is still difficult to foresee the American policies. There are, however, several signs indicating that behind a screen of disinterest, the Bush administration shows a lively concern for Lebanon, and has prepared a revision of its policy in regard to Syria, which could be as profound as the one operated in 1982. Washington will have to choose rather quickly between the confirmation of the policy engaged by Kissinger in 1976 and a more constructive policy in Lebanon.

The chances might be good of seeing this administration—otherwise accused of bringing the Kissingerians back into its affairs—break with the policy engaged since 1976 to the benefit of a more specific Lebanese policy, a natural parallel to its renewed dialogue with the PLO. One cannot actually dismiss in such a blunt manner (Baker's speech before AIPAC on May, 22, 1989) the "unrealistic vision of a 'Greater' Israel" and be complacent with policies meant to create a "Greater" Syria. Add to that the fact that Lebanese Christians are now led by an army general and not by a militia leader, and that the brigades commanded by General Aoun have had a privileged relationship with

Washington. Finally, there are a number of clouds on the bilateral Syrian-American relationship, because of some suspicions already leaked to the press concerning the Lockerbie affair and also because of the consistent Syrian hostile policy toward American-led peace proposals in the Middle East.

Lebanon has no interest in a confrontation between Syria and the West over its territory. The equation is more subtle indeed. On the one hand, Lebanon cannot afford an anti-Syrian settlement in Lebanon, in the sense that a regime clearly opposed to Syria is not feasible in Lebanon for obvious geographical and military reasons. The present regime in Syria views Lebanon as a type of a domestic issue and has concluded for many years now that a defeat in Lebanon directly threatens the regime's future.

On the other hand, the exclusive Syrian role in Lebanon has proven to be ineffectual at best, and probably counter-productive. That is why Arab and Western countries now interested in Lebanon should work to impose the principle of a deal on the Syrians, and not to try a crusade against Syria out of Lebanon, which would make Syria's hand in Lebanon even heavier. The target should be to force Syria into accepting an end to the *status quo*, which Syria has come to consider as more favourable to her interests than a moderate, balanced settlement. Two options have so far been presented by Syria: a fragile *status quo* in a country deprived of her central authorities or a Lebanon brought under complete Syrian control. There certainly is a third way between these two extremes, a way realistic enough to recognise Syria's specific links with Lebanon without accepting a pure satellisation of this country.

Finally, it is important that Europe reinforces and politicises its approach to Lebanon, a Lebanon in itself and for itself, not only because of the geographical proximity and of the historical ties but also out of pure interest. Lebanon needs Europe, this is evident; but with a Lebanon left to destruction and occupation, Europe will clearly give a message of its impotence in its own backyard, of its submission before regional ambitious forces as well as before the two superpowers' schemes or complacency. Most important for Europe, is the threat of the loss of Lebanon as a country where Islam and Christianity live together within one political framework. With the millions of Muslims now living in Europe, this loss would have disastrous implications which would be (which indeed already are) used by the European far right in its crusade against the possible integration of migrant workers into the European polity.

References

1 - Jean d'Ormesson in *Le Figaro Magazine*, April 28, 1989.

2 - Resolution 425 was adopted in the aftermath of the first Israeli invasion of Lebanon, in Spring 1978. It calls for the Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon and the creation of UNIFIL, the UN interim force in southern Lebanon, which was unable to fully implement its mission, let alone prohibit a new massive invasion in June 1982. Resolutions 508 and 509 were adopted during this invasion; they called for a Lebanon freed of all foreign forces.

3 - It is generally understood how Israel made it clear that Syria could send troops into Lebanon as long as they did not deploy south of the Litani river, make use of Lebanon's territorial waters, enjoy air cover or be supplied with strategic weapons, such as missiles.

4 - The MNF was made of four contingents contributed by the US, France, Italy and Great Britain.

5 - On the whole episode, refer to our article "Liban: une année pour rien" in *Poltique étrangère*, Fall 1983.

6 - Moscow embarked after this 1982 invasion on the project of transforming the PLO into a small regular army in South Lebanon, giving to it light tanks and a large number of field artillery pieces.

7 - Since the Korean War, Moscow had been generally opposed to peace-keeping forces under the UN flag.

8 - While cooperating with Moscow and Tehran to expel Western forces from Lebanon, Syria in 1983-1984 was also pursuing a policy aiming at a split in the PLO, meant to weaken Arafat's leadership. In fact, in the fall of 1983, Syrian troops were simultaneously trying to expel the West from Beirut and the PLO from the second Lebanese city, Tripoli.