The Real Problem
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THE REAL PROBLEM

by Daniel Pipes

Since late summer 1982, when the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) was evacuated from Beirut, U.S. policy in Lebanon has concentrated on effecting a withdrawal of the rest of the foreign troops in the country as well. This policy rests on the assumption that the departure of Syrian, PLO, and Israeli soldiers will solve most of Lebanon's problems by bringing peace to the country, by making reunification possible, and by promoting economic reconstruction. The withdrawal of foreign troops, it is also thought, will serve U.S. regional interests in the Middle East by generating support for the Reagan initiative, by easing Syrian-Israeli tensions, and by reducing opportunities for Soviet mischief.

Two serious flaws, however, mar this reasoning: First, all foreign troops are not on the point of leaving, and second, even if they did leave, Lebanon's fundamental problems would remain unchanged.

All troops in Lebanon are not ready to withdraw for the simple reason that none of the local actors, foreign or Lebanese, considers a complete withdrawal in its interest. Syrian control of the Bekaa Valley and northern Lebanon guarantees Damascus continued influence in the country and allows the Syrian government to press claims to Lebanese territory. Occupation enhances Syria's influence over the PLO and adds to its clout in inter-Arab politics, while the trade in drugs from the Bekaa Valley is estimated to have brought the Syrians $1 billion. The PLO has everything to lose and nothing to gain by evacuating to remote parts of the Arab world, far from Israel, far from the bulk of the Palestinian refugees, and far from the news media.

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139.

Israel has the least to gain by staying in Lebanon. But barring heavy U.S. pressure that has its own costs, Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin's government will not withdraw its troops before it has created a security zone in southern Lebanon and has established a new relationship with Lebanese President Amin Gemayel's government. Israel needs tangible results to justify its "Operation Peace for Galilee" campaign: To settle for less would undermine the rationale for the entire Lebanon incursion.

Many of Lebanon's political and religious factions dread a quick withdrawal, for that would force them to take up arms against their rivals. The Phalange, Amal, Mourabitoun, Druse, and the other militias are ill-prepared to enter into another round of fighting; most of them would prefer to regroup their forces and prepare for the longer term. For related reasons, the Lebanese central authority also fears a withdrawal. The government currently controls only about one per cent of Lebanon—part of the city of Beirut. Were foreign troops suddenly to depart, warlords and local chiefs would take their place, not the weak and demoralized Lebanese army. The multinational forces could not fill the void in the absence of two highly unlikely changes: an increase in their numbers, and a change in their mission from keeping peace to enforcing peace. Thus, its statements to the contrary, the Lebanese government has been in no hurry for Syrians and Israelis to evacuate. It has been better off facing foreign armies, which international pressure will eventually compel to leave, than potentially uncontrollable local militias. Israel understands this and occasionally threatens to pull out without warning, leaving Lebanon in the lurch.

Even were the United States able to negotiate a total foreign troop pullout, peace would not be at hand. Not a gentle land before foreigners invaded in the 1970s, Lebanon will not become one upon their departure. Lebanon was a country torn by enmities among the native populations long

140.

before foreign troops arrived. In fact, the fighting among the Lebanese themselves created the opportunity for PLO, Syrian, and Israeli intervention. This internal hostility caused the civil war, produced the power vacuum that was filled by foreign forces, and continues to prevent reconciliation. This animosity would remain even if all foreign forces vanished completely.

Any U.S. policy designed to deal with the Lebanese crisis must address the country's domestic situation, particularly the deep antipathy that exists among the country's religious communities. The current preoccupation with the foreign military presence in Lebanon seeks to treat the symptoms of Lebanon's disintegration rather than its domestic causes. Until the political hatreds that prevail in Lebanon are confronted, the civil war will continue. This enmity, which dominates Lebanese life, must be understood and appreciated by anyone concerned with the future of the country.

The National Pact

While Westerners usually stress the ideological nature of the civil war in Lebanon—dubbing one side conservative, the other progressive—the Lebanese themselves see the war in more traditional terms as a struggle for power among religious communities. Saeb Salam, a prominent Lebanese politician for the past 55 years, recently summarized this view, writing: "All the [political] parties are nonsense to me. In Lebanon there are only Christians and Muslims." The conflict is over raw power, not ideology or religious ideals. The Christians have long struggled to stave off Moslem rule, and the Moslems, with equal persistence, have sought to subjugate them.

The problem dates to the early centuries of Islam, when Christians known as Maronites (the followers of Saint Maron, a 5th-century monk) fled the fertile plains of Syria where Moslems ruled and took refuge in the mountains. For hundreds of years, they fended off would-be Moslem conquerors and retained their autonomy. At the time of the Crusades in the 12th century,

141.

the Maronites recognized the pope as their spiritual leader and established close cultural relations with France. These links eventually brought many benefits, including Western education, trade, and the support of powerful patrons. In 1861, for example, French intervention helped the Maronites win control within the Ottoman Empire of the province of Mt. Lebanon, where the Christians comprised more than 80 per cent of the population.

As a small Christian enclave in a Middle East solidly dominated by Moslems, Mt. Lebanon received considerable European support throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries. After Mt. Lebanon and Syria fell under French control in 1918, the Maronites neatly manipulated their French patrons into doubling the size of their territory. The territorial changes of 1920, which created the borders of modern Lebanon, were intended to favor the Christians by giving them a larger and more viable state. But the addition of new regions actually reduced the Maronite component in Lebanon to a mere 30 per cent by 1932. The Christians did continue to enjoy a slim majority in the enlarged territory, with the Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholics, Armenian Christians, and Protestants making up 22 per cent of the population.

From Lebanon's inception as a country, Christians and Moslems differed over the desirability of its independence, its future rulers, and its national identity. At one extreme, the Maronites passionately wanted an independent Lebanon that they would rule and that would embody Maronite aspirations and culture. The other Christians supported this Maronite vision with varying degrees of enthusiasm. At the opposite extreme, the Sunni Moslems, who comprised 21 per cent of the population according to the 1932 census, resented being torn from the predominantly Moslem state of Syria and made part of a Christian Lebanon. Although ambivalent or hostile to Lebanon's existence, they wanted to dominate Lebanon if it did exist. Shiite Moslems, representing 18 per cent of the population,

142.

and the Druse, at 7 per cent, would be minorities in either Syria or Lebanon, and thus were less involved politically. Yet they too resisted incorporation in a state created by France for its Christian allies.

These disagreements took an ominous turn in the 1930s when the traditional organizations of each religious community were converted into political parties, and their forces became paramilitary wings. Among the best known of these was the Phalange founded by Pierre Gemayel. Conflict between these private armed forces appeared likely as the end of French rule approached, but civil strife was averted at the last moment in 1943 when Maronite and Sunni leaders reached a compromise. Their unwritten agreement, known as the National Pact, is the effective constitution of Lebanon.

The National Pact enshrines two principal points, the first governing foreign relations, the second regulating internal affairs. The Christians agreed to end their long-standing reliance on French protection and to align Lebanon with the Arab world both by joining the Arab League and by opposing the Jewish presence in Palestine. The Moslems, in return, accepted Lebanon's independence from Syria and promised to become loyal citizens. In effect, the Christians became Arab and the Moslems became Lebanese.

The Lebanese army ... needs 2–10 years' preparation before it can operate as an effective military force.

In the realm of domestic politics, the two sides agreed to use the 1932 census as the basis for a rigid distribution of power. The relative size of each of the country's 17 recognized religious communities determined its political standing and its role in the government. Thus six Christians sat in parliament for every five non-Christians because this was roughly the population

143.

ratio according to the census. The Pact required that the president of the country be a Maronite, the prime minister a Sunni, the speaker of the parliament a Shiite, the deputy prime minister-deputy speaker of the parliament a Greek Orthodox, and the minister of defense a Druse. Indeed, all positions in the parliament and the bureaucracy, from permanent cabinet secretaries to village postal clerks, were apportioned by religion as well.

The National Pact went into effect at the time of independence, and with it emerged a unique form of democracy. Each religious group elected a specified number of delegates to parliament and placed designated officials in the executive branch with almost no concern for ideology or other principles. Power and religious identity virtually decided all. Yet the paramilitary organizations did not disband. None of the communities trusted its long-time rivals enough to lay down its arms, nor did any of them believe the central government could guarantee security. Thus Maronite forces augmented the government troops to insure continued Christian predominance while Sunni and Druse forces armed to protect themselves from Maronite aggression.

After independence the Moslems' support for the existing order eroded. Their dissatisfaction was fueled by Nasserist and Baathist ideologies, among other leftist philosophies, that swept the Arab world in the 1950s and that spurred sharp criticism of Lebanon's conservative order, as well as by the government's refusal to permit a new national census that would have reflected the dramatic surge in the Moslem population. The old 6-to-5 ratio continued to govern the distribution of political power despite estimates that the Christians' share in the population had dropped from 53 per cent in 1932 to about 40 per cent in 1982, that the Sunni and Shiite percentage had increased from 39 to 50 per cent, and that the Druse had risen from 7 to 9 per cent. Moreover, an influx of Arab refugees from Palestine in the late 1940s added another 200,000 to the Moslem population, while the

144.

arrival of the PLO in 1970 after it was expelled from Jordan added to the Moslems' military potential.

Discontented Moslems took up arms against the status-quo-oriented Christians in the brief civil war of 1958, marking the first time that Moslem leaders resorted to force after having failed to achieve objectives by political means. They compelled the reigning president, Camille Chamoun, to abandon plans to seek re-election and to step aside in favor of Fuad Chehab, a Maronite general more concerned with meeting Moslem demands. The 1958 war left a mixed legacy in Lebanon: It legitimated the use of force to apply political pressure. But by leaving the political order essentially intact—under the slogan "no victor, no vanquished"—the war confirmed the inflexibility of the National Pact regardless of shifting power relations.

Palestinian use of Lebanon as a base for operations against Israel after 1967 brought these tensions to a second crisis in the mid-1970s. The Sunnis, at once sympathetic to the Palestinian cause and convinced that an anti-Zionist state would strengthen their relations with the Arab states, generally supported PLO use of Lebanon. Maronites, mostly indifferent to the conflict with Israel and unwilling to suffer Israeli retribution for Palestinian attacks, opposed this use. This disagreement galvanized the Moslems to action. Frustrated with the 6-to-5 formula, with the distribution of government positions by communal affiliation, with the self-serving attitude of the communal leaderships, and with the impossibility of advancing their position through legal means, Moslem forces joined with the Palestinians and withdrew from the National Pact in 1975. This move activated the communal militias, brought on civil war, and resulted in the virtual partition of Lebanon into Christian and Moslem regions.

The civil war precipitated a geographic split reminiscent of the pre-1920 period. The Maronites set up autonomous rule over a small area to the north of Beirut, a region that has appropriately been referred to as

145.

the Republic of Juniyah after its largest town. Most Sunnis found themselves under Syrian control. Ideologically, the two factions reverted to their pre-1943 positions. Christians distanced themselves from Arabism and sought an outside protector—this time Israel rather than France. Moslems again resisted Christian domination, although this time they sought to take over the Lebanese government. Observing the dismal political life of Syria during its 30 years of independence tempered their desire to become Syrian citizens.

Paths to Peace

If the Moslem revolt of 1975–1976 was intended to break the permanent logjam in Lebanese communal relations, it failed. The civil war resolved neither the dispute over controlling the country nor the nature of its identity. Instead, it only created a new stalemate, one even less satisfactory than the old one. After a year and one-half of fighting, Maronites controlled the Mt. Lebanon area, Syrians occupied the northern and eastern half of the country, and the PLO had carved out a large enclave in the south. In addition, the United Nations and Saad Haddad, an Israeli-sponsored former Maronite Lebanese army major, among others, took over other portions of the country. Beirut was divided into Moslem and Christian zones. This impasse persisted even after the civil war subsided in late 1976: The killing continued and the questions of power and identity remained unresolved.

It was not until summer 1982 that the stalemate finally was broken. The Israeli invasion of Lebanon and subsequent military successes created a new alignment of forces in Lebanon by eliminating the PLO as a major actor, by demonstrating Israel's complete military superiority over the Syrians, and by placing the southern third of the country under Israeli occupation. However destructive, Israel's incursion has made it possible to look beyond the current impasse and to reconsider those problems that have plagued Lebanon since its inception.

146.

Assuming that the endemic violence that characterized the period 1975–1982 cannot continue indefinitely, the Lebanese can move in one of three directions: They can divide the country along communal lines and create Maronite, Shiite, and Sunni ministates; they can attempt, as in the years before 1975, to foster enough cooperation between the communities to keep the peace; or they can transform the country into a normal 20th-century state in which the central authority monopolizes the use of force and governs all citizens as individuals, not as members of religious communities.

Of these three possibilities, the last is the least likely. A conventional state in Lebanon can be formed in only one of two ways: Either every community agrees to transfer power to the central government or one community defeats all the others and takes complete control of the government. After so many years of mistrust and war, a sudden consensus to strengthen the authority of Beirut seems inconceivable. At the same time, a long, inconclusive civil war demonstrates that no single community is strong enough to defeat all its rivals. Even if one community were to prevail or if it were granted control by a foreign power, it would be unable to maintain authority for long.

Efforts to build up the Lebanese army are therefore misdirected, for the government is in no position to establish military hegemony over the country. None of the Lebanese communities is willing to transfer its military strength to the central government. Not only are the Moslems unwilling to trust Maronite mercy, but the Maronites themselves are unwilling to disband their militias. In the words of the official spokesman for the Phalange militia: "We cannot take a chance on disbanding ... [for if we do] the country will go back into anarchy." Doubts about the government's ability to gain authority are so profound that even Pierre Gemayel, father of the current president, has withheld full support for his son by encouraging the Phalange to maintain an autonomous militia.

147.

In addition, the Lebanese army fell into such disarray during the civil war that Western experts estimate it needs 2–10 years' preparation before it can operate as an effective military force. The army must find recruits willing to give their first loyalty to the government rather than to the religious communities; it must rebuild military structures; and it must train a whole generation of officers.

Every party in the Middle East has reasons to fear a policy that could transform the politics of Lebanon.

In addition to these very real logistical problems, efforts to create a unitary state could have harmful psychological repercussions. By raising unrealistic political expectations and by diverting attention from feasible alternatives, calls for a unitary state could create tremendous political frustration and provoke new rounds of civil war.

If a conventional state is impossible, two alternatives remain: dividing the country or bringing Christians and Moslems back into a working relationship. Of these, division of the country is the more popular option among both Maronites and foreign analysts. The idea of Lebanon failed, their argument goes, because the leading communities never agreed upon viable premises for the establishment and operation of the state; since these communities disagree now more than ever, the time has come to try something else.

The most obvious alternative would be to divide the country into Maronite, Sunni, and Shiite regions along lines informally in place since 1975. The Maronite Republic of Juniyah would resurrect the province of Mt. Lebanon as it existed from 1860 to 1920; the Shiite and Druse communities in the south would make up a second unit; and the Sunnis of the north and east would either form an independent third region or reinstate links to Syria. A variety of smaller Lebanese groups would fill the interstices.

148.

The population of each of the three major regions would be approximately 1 million persons.

A variant of this alternative is a federation. Because formal partition would meet such intense opposition from several groups, especially the pan-Arabists, Lebanon could be divided into federal units or cantons rather than independent countries. This scheme would still disengage the religious communities from one another and would allow them to pursue divergent political routes: The Maronites presumably would follow pro-Western policies and make peace with Israel, the Shiites might also come to an accommodation with Israel, and the Sunnis would come under Syrian influence.

But regardless of its form, partition would have many drawbacks. First, conflicts would continue even after the Lebanese were divided into ethnically homogeneous regions. How would boundaries be determined given that the communities are not neatly separated geographically? Druse live among Maronites and Shiites, for example, and Shiites live among Sunnis. The city of Beirut would prove an especially difficult problem. Although no one is eager to reconstruct the barriers that divided the city from 1975 to 1982, maintaining Beirut as a single administrative unit requires compromise beyond what the Lebanese seem likely to achieve. Beirut could easily turn into a focus of contention comparable to Berlin or Jerusalem.

Second, the partition of Lebanon would almost certainly turn the ministates into clients of Syria and Israel, which would use them as proxies in the larger Arab-Israeli conflict. By making the Lebanese easy prey for neighboring powers, partition would promise only many more years of violence.

Third, the Lebanese would not accept the permanent division of their state. The creation of three autonomous regions would mark an extraordinary, perhaps even an unprecedented event—the renunciation of a nation state. Throughout modern times, state building has been achieved by bring-

149.

ing diverse people into larger units, not by dissolving those larger units into constituent parts. As in other divided countries— East and West Germany, North and South Korea, North and South Vietnam, North and South Yemen, and Communist and Nationalist China—efforts to reintegrate Lebanon's ministates would embroil them in chronically nettlesome relations. If partition were attempted, the ideal of Lebanon as a normal 20th-century nation state would haunt and disrupt Lebanese political life. Although possibly less dangerous than efforts to establish a unified government, partition, too, would undoubtedly keep Lebanon in a permanent state of flux by institutionalizing existing hostilities.

If a unitary government is unworkable and a fragmented state unstable, the only alternative is to work out an arrangement in which the Lebanese communities would live with one another in a reasonably peaceable manner as they did before 1975. This entails making changes in the National Pact, the constitution of Lebanon, to bring it into line with current realities.

A New National Pact

Despite its anachronism, the National Pact has survived all of Lebanon's crises and remains in effect today. The 6-to-5 rule holds in parliament and throughout the bureaucracy; every president is a Maronite, every prime minister a Sunni, and so forth throughout the cabinet. In addition, every Lebanese administration, even one dependent on Israel militarily, keeps its distance from Israel for fear that closer relations would destroy the last shred of political compromise in Lebanon. Demographic changes, Nasserist and Baathist movements, seven years of civil war, and the occupation of most of the country by foreign soldiers have altered political relationships but not the conceptual framework for political legitimacy and authority. The civil war marked Moslem rejection of Christian domination without producing an alternative to the National Pact. As passive, embattled, and weak as the central government of Lebanon

150.

is today, it remains vital to the country's future, for it alone can settle Lebanon's ethnic and religious strife by revising the constitution.

The inflexibility of the 1943 agreement makes a government of national consensus impossible because it excludes the Moslem Lebanese from their rightful share of power. In addition, by impeding contact with Israel, it complicates the normalization of relations and implicitly encourages an Israeli military presence on Lebanese soil or at least guarantees Israeli interventions long into the future.

To break out of this predicament and reinstate peaceful relations between the communities, the Lebanese government must grapple with both fundamental problems of the present system, namely, the exclusion of the Moslems from power and the restrictions against normalization of relations with Israel. To make partial changes in the National Pact, that is, to confront just one of the two problems, would only destroy what political structure does remain and provoke new rounds of fighting. Thus the solution lies in a simultaneous repudiation of both parts of the National Pact and the establishment of a new framework for foreign and domestic relations—a New National Pact. This means the Lebanese government must:

• Take a new census and use it as the basis for a redistribution of power in accordance with each religious community's share of the total population;

• Establish full and peaceful relations with Israel.

Both Moslems and Christians would gain precisely what they most want from a New National Pact: Moslems would gain fair representation and Christians would free themselves of the Arab political identity.

These changes would be least unpalatable if they were introduced in a slow and balanced manner. The redistribution of power, for example, could be accomplished by taking a new census, by appointing government officials based on its results, by redistributing parliamentary seats, and fi-

151.

nally, by holding national elections. The move toward relations with Israel also could be done gradually by establishing a negotiating framework, by agreeing on a timetable, by withdrawing troops, and finally, by signing a treaty. The process would require that concessions be tightly synchronized.

Once the Moslems and Christians had reached a compromise on these fundamental questions, they would be prepared to deal with other issues, the foremost of which would be the status of the Palestinians who have lived in legal limbo in Lebanon for as long as 35 years. Many Christian groups insist that the Palestinians must eventually leave Lebanon, to which the Moslems reply: Only if they go to Israel. Either this issue will continue to poison relations, or the Christians will have to reconcile themselves to the permanent settlement of the Palestinians in Lebanon. Several decades earlier, after all, the Christians did welcome Armenian refugees, who as Christians added to that side's strength.

Although this scheme calling for mutual compromise may appear reasonable to outsiders, the Lebanese and their neighbors would find it troublesome. Every party in the Middle East has reasons to fear a policy that could transform the politics of Lebanon. The Maronites would worry about domination by the Moslems and the loss of control over the sources of their wealth. The Moslems in Lebanon would fear that recognizing Israel would jeopardize relations with the Arab states. All Lebanese would worry about both the loss of economic aid from the Arab oil states and the harm done to Beirut's chances of re-emerging as a financial and cultural center. The Syrians would oppose a New National Pact, for it would reduce their influence within Lebanon and weaken their military position with regard to Israel. Even the Israelis might have objections, for however much they long for full recognition by a second Arab state, the Begin government may prefer that Lebanon remain consumed in

152.

internal conflicts and thus inactive in inter-
national politics.

As great as these obstacles would be, even
more compelling factors argue in favor of
such a bold step. Only by repudiating the
old National Pact and embracing a New
National Pact would the Lebanese have any
hope of peacefully escaping the quagmire of
communal hostility and foreign interven-
tion. As of spring 1983 uniformed soldiers
from 15 states—Fiji, Finland, France, Gha-
na, Great Britain, Iran, Ireland, Israel, Italy,
the Netherlands, Norway, Senegal, Syria,
Sweden, and the United States—were sta-
tioned in Lebanon, as were soldiers from
the PLO and at least 12 significant armed
Lebanese factions. For the Lebanese to
ignore the need for decisive action may well
condemn them to many more years of
feuding and occupation.

Moreover, Lebanese Moslems, Israelis,
and Egyptians would clearly gain the most
from this scheme; the Maronites would give
up power in the short run but also would
gain in the end. Syria alone would lose.

**The Maronite dilemma resembles
that of the whites in South Africa.**

It is also in the interest of the Lebanese
Moslems to permit their government to
break with the Arab world on the question
of relations with Israel, provided they are
rewarded with power commensurate to
their numbers. Accepting a New National
Pact would mean abandoning the Moslem
goal of unilaterally taking control of the
country, but so long as Israel backs the
Maronites, the Moslems have no real chance
of taking power in Lebanon in any case.

For Israel, full normalization of ties with
Lebanon would offer the second major
breakthrough in its long effort to win
recognition by its Arab neighbors. Al-
though the Begin government has made it
clear that recognition by Arab states is not
its most important foreign-policy objective,
acceptance by their neighbors still remains

a critical concern to almost all Israelis. The opportunity to sign a peace treaty with Lebanon may not arouse the outpouring of emotions that greeted the late Egyptian President Anwar el-Sadat when he visited Jerusalem—years of experience with Egypt have made Israelis much more sober—but it would nonetheless have a strong impact on Israeli opinion. This was very much apparent during the welcome the Lebanese representative received in December 1982 when he arrived for negotiations in the Israeli town of Qiryat Shemona. Resolving problems with Lebanon might also improve the atmosphere for discussions about the West Bank.

Peace between Lebanon and Israel would benefit Egypt, too, bringing to an end its anomalous position as the only Arab state that recognizes Israel and moving the balance of power within the Arab world closer to the Egyptian position.

For the Maronites, the prospect of a New National Pact raises an acute dilemma. Allowing the Moslems to assume their rightful share of power would mean giving up Maronite hegemony over the government. But clearly, the Christians cannot rule the country in the future as they have in the past; at best, they can dominate the Republic of Juniyah and a few other parts of the country. In addition, the Maronites would be better off with less power in a larger and peaceful Lebanon than with complete control of the Mt. Lebanon area and surrounded by hostile Moslem states. The Maronites face an agonizing choice: Hold on and hope for the best or give up some power and salvage a much better deal than will be possible years hence.

The Maronite dilemma resembles that of the whites in South Africa: Both groups have a distinctive, centuries-old identity, both pride themselves on cultural ties to the West, and both wish to keep a majority of the population politically subjugated. Although each of these dominant groups can maintain its position at present, both face an eventual explosion. Outsiders clearly see the need to make concessions, but partici-

154.

pants find it extremely difficult to follow their advice. To make compromise possible, these dominant groups need assurances; just as the whites in South Africa need something better than the prospect of one man, one vote, so the Maronites need special political and military safeguards.

The United States should concentrate less on the Lebanese military morass ... and more on the political problems.

Several features of the old National Pact could be retained to safeguard Maronite interests in a Lebanese state recognizing the Moslem majority. The requirement that the president be a Maronite, the prime minister a Sunni, and the speaker a Shiite, for example, might be kept, while disregarding religious affiliation in all lesser government posts. Similarly, the Christian militias could be allowed to become part of a government constabulary. Other compromises could be worked out through negotiations.

Establishing official relations with Israel would help soothe Maronite worries, for the two parties have forged military and political bonds during the past decade. Israel was the only country to come to the Christians' aid in their hour of greatest need—even France and the Vatican shied away—and Israel's stated policy not to permit the annihilation of Christians in Lebanon was a key factor enabling the Maronites to stand up to their enemies. So long as Israel, the most powerful state in the Middle East, maintains this posture, it gives the Maronites critical leverage in their relations with both the Arab states and the Moslem Lebanese. A peace treaty would solidify Israeli backing and thus enhance Maronite security; it would also psychologically boost the Christians.

Alliance with Israel, however, would not come without cost. The Arab states would undoubtedly threaten a vulnerable Lebanon with economic sanctions for recognizing

155.

Israel. The Maronites, who control much of Lebanon's business, would be especially susceptible to this pressure. With an economy based on commerce, finance, and foreign trade, an Arab boycott would jeopardize Lebanon's very livelihood.

But it is difficult to imagine that the Arab states would do much to harm Lebanon precisely when they are improving relations with Egypt, when they seemed ready to accept the possibility of Jordan's entering negotiations with Israel, and when even Iraq has been making moderate sounds. In the era of the siege of Beirut, of the Arab League's resolutions at the Fez, Morocco, summit meeting, and of declining oil revenues, obduracy on the question of Israel has lost some of its old attraction. An Egyptian analyst, writing in the Egyptian newspaper *Akhbar al-Yawm* in January 1983, noted all that the Arab states had not done:

> [W]hat happened to Egypt did not happen to Lebanon. The sisterly Arab states did not convene a summit in order to penalize Lebanon for the stab in the back it dealt to the Arab nation. The rejectionist Arab regimes did not hasten to break diplomatic, economic, cultural, tourist, and fraternal relations with Lebanon. The media and propaganda trumpets of Arab regimes were not ordered to launch violent campaigns against the Lebanese government and people. . . .
> On the contrary, the Arab regimes were completely silent. They supported and accepted what President Gemayel is doing in order to convince Israel to withdraw its forces from Lebanon, even if he takes the same path that Egypt took before, thus achieving what Lebanon is now trying to achieve.

Although the Syrian government offered proposals to reform the Lebanese political system in February 1976, it is now in a position to be the party most directly harmed by a rehabilitation of Lebanese politics. Thus the Syrians would be expected vigorously to resist a New National Pact. A Lebanon at peace with Israel and enjoying internal tranquility would deprive Syria of options against Israel and of a valuable power base. The government of

156.

Syrian President Hafez al-Assad has repeatedly proven its ruthlessness. One must therefore assume that it would do everything in its means to hinder a reordering of Lebanese politics, including murder and sabotage, strengthening its forces in Lebanon, inciting Lebanese Moslems to reject anything less than total rule of the country, and closing the Syrian-Lebanese border, which would cut off the Lebanese from most of their Arab markets.

Yet Syrian opposition, though a serious problem, need not create a decisive obstacle to Lebanese reforms. Closing the border could be countered by using sea routes to trade with the Persian Gulf countries. If the Maronites demonstrated a willingness to make concessions to their Sunni co-nationalists, Syrian efforts to undermine Lebanese-Israeli negotiations would most likely fail. And if Lebanese leaders, supported by Israel's military might, called for a withdrawal of Syrian troops, Assad would have little choice but to accede. Fady Frem, commander of the Phalange militia, said in the Lebanese weekly *Monday Morning* that normal relations with Israel would prevent Syria from closing the border and stopping Lebanese transit trade.

All these factors make the current moment especially propitious for a radical step by the leaders in Beirut. Israel's elimination of the PLO and Syria's military humiliation offer the Lebanese room to maneuver. Meanwhile, wide backing for Amin Gemayel as president—in dramatic contrast to his late brother Bashir—provides hope for unified Lebanese action.

The American Role

President Gemayel's inclination to look to Washington for help in solving his country's problems gives the United States a special responsibility to help with the reconstruction of Lebanon's political life. Keeping in mind that the current loss of life stems primarily from the hostility among Lebanese citizens, the United States can most help by working for a disengagement

157.

of forces and encouraging the Lebanese government to adopt a New National Pact.

Rather than focus on withdrawal, the United States can help most by reducing the immediate prospects of war in Lebanon; this means working on a separation of forces. Useful steps would include: delineating geographic spheres of influence, securing assurances of mutual restraint from all parties, establishing demilitarized zones between the spheres of influence, and encouraging Syrian and Israeli restraint along the international Lebanese boundaries.

Separation of forces increases the risk of making the status quo more bearable and thus facilitating the permanent partition of Lebanon. But this risk must be run in order to stop the fighting and to lay the groundwork for a larger peace. Separation also has the drawback of making the U.S. government appear in Arab eyes acquiescent to Israeli occupation of the country. To this the United States must respond that so long as negotiations are under way for the withdrawal of foreign troops from Lebanon, it is improper for America to pressure Israel.

The United States should concentrate less on the Lebanese military morass—about which it can do very little—and more on the political problems. Even if the Lebanese government cannot assert military control over the whole country, it does enjoy a legitimacy that is universally recognized: For all its weakness, it alone can alter the old National Pact and create a new one. Toward this end, what the Lebanese leadership needs most from the United States is encouragement to tackle the country's fundamental problem.

This is not to argue that the United States should impose its own vision on the Lebanese but rather that it has a unique opportunity to help the Lebanese find ways to end the carnage. A New National Pact as outlined here certainly is not the only way to redistribute power, but it does offer a starting point and a framework for the Lebanese themselves to negotiate. Outsiders cannot determine the shape of Lebanon's future settlement, but they can prod the

158.

government into action through direct pressure and by helping to win the support of other states.

Part of the pressure on Beirut can be connected to U.S. aid. Help with the reconstruction of the Lebanese economy can be linked to movement toward repudiating the old Pact. In the language of diplomats, the State Department can suggest that aid will be forthcoming once the Lebanese authorities take positive steps toward establishing firm foundations for internal stability and toward building peaceful relations with their neighbors.

Less tangible, but possibly even more important, Washington must make clear its moral and political support for negotiating a New National Pact. Amin Gemayel and his aides are looking to Washington for help. With strong and consistent prodding, they might find the strength to adopt a New National Pact that would benefit all Lebanese, almost the entire Middle East, and the West.

In addition, Washington can help by putting pressure on the Arab states not to punish Lebanon for signing a peace treaty with Israel. Although earlier efforts on Egypt's behalf indicate that the U.S. ability to influence Arab policy is very limited, these efforts would certainly help discourage Arab leaders from provoking a crisis over Lebanon's actions. The United States could urge other aid donors to take a similar position.

The current U.S. policy of concentrating on the withdrawal of foreign forces does not address the critical problem in Lebanon, the need to end a festering civil war. Whether the United States urges the Lebanese to divide the country or negotiate a new constitution is of secondary importance. More important is to recognize that current American policies do not adequately address the critical problem in Lebanon. To help genuinely, the United States must get involved in overhauling the constitution. Anything less will have no lasting value.

159.