

SYRIA AND THE 1975 – 76 CIVIL WAR IN LEBANON*

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After 1970 the PLO, driven out of Jordan, made Lebanon its operational base. It did not want to enter the civil war, but it sided with any group that espoused Arab nationalism and wanted to liberate Palestine. It was a Maronite militia's attacks on the Palestinians that sparked the fighting in April 1975, committing the PLO to the Arab nationalist side. The Lebanese conflict was also a struggle between a privileged class of landowners and merchants trying to preserve the status quo and a large mass of poor people (mainly Muslim) striving for more equality. The two main Lebanese parties to the conflict were the Phalanges, a largely Maronite force, and the Lebanese National Movement which was mainly Muslim. The Muslim side won the support of the PLO. One puzzling aspect of this civil war was Syria's 1976 policy shift. President Ḥāfiẓ al-Asad first backed the rebels both morally and materially. He managed to get the Christians to accept a cease-fire, but the Muslim Lebanese, abetted by the PLO, rejected his proposed compromise. This rejection made Ḥāfiẓ al-Asad change sides and his forces battered the Muslims and the PLO into submission by the autumn of 1976.

Key words: the Lebanese civil war, Christian militias, the Lebanese National Movement, the shift in Syria's policy

Despite Arab support for the PLO and the international attention it was able to generate, the PLO would not have been able to operate as an autonomous movement in the absence of the sanctuary it found in Lebanon.¹ In the years following the Six-Day War, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict intruded on Lebanese political life. This development together with demographic and political changes taking place inside Lebanon itself upset the country's fragile sectarian balance and plunged it into a destructive civil war. The civil war was not an exclusively Lebanese affair; it was precipitated by the Palestinian presence in the country and soon attracted external intervention by Syria and

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¹ El-KHAZEN, Farid. *The Breakdown of the State in Lebanon 1967 – 1976*, p. 188.

Israel, thus bringing to an end the attempts of Lebanon's political leaders to insulate their country from the wider regional conflict.

Following the events of "Black September" (1970), the Palestinian commando organizations moved their base of operations to Lebanon, where they joined 300,000 Palestinian refugees who were already present in the country. The majority of them lived in camps in southern Lebanon, and it was in and around the camps that the bulk of the guerrilla groups settled. The period between May and October 1969 witnessed violent clashes between the Lebanese army and the Palestinian militias in various parts of the country, particularly in the areas adjacent to Israel and Syria, where the Palestinian commando movement had been establishing its bases.² As the clashes between the Lebanese army and the Palestinian militias continued, the radical Arab regimes rose to the support of the Palestinian commando cause, and openly condemned the efforts of the Lebanese army to liquidate the Palestinian command movement in Lebanon. The line adopted by Egypt rested on the necessity of safeguarding the Palestinian resistance while avoiding a collision between the legitimate authorities in both Lebanon and Jordan and the Palestinians. Consequently, when in 1969 the confrontations between the resistance and the Lebanese authorities threatened to have dire consequences, the two parties asked Egypt for mediation whereupon both Yāsir ʿArafāt, chairman of the PLO and General Imīl (Émile) Bustānī, Commander of the Lebanese army, were invited to Cairo for talks to solve the problem.³ The meeting took place on 3 November 1969 and the two representatives in the presence of Egypt's minister of defence, General Muḥammad Fawzī, signed the Cairo Agreement, in which the Lebanese government turned over the supervision of the refugee camps to the PLO in exchange for the PLO's pledge to obtain the government's consent for any armed incursion it might make.⁴ This agreement continued to be operative for the following 4 years.

The restrictions for Palestinians stipulated in the Cairo Agreement went largely unheeded, and from 1970 onward, the cycle of their raids into Israel and Israeli retaliation by force repeated itself countless times. The Israeli bombing attacks affected not only the Palestinians but also the mainly Shiʿī villagers of southern Lebanon, thousands of whom abandoned their homes and migrated to the squatter suburbs of Beirut, embittered at a government that was unable to protect them from either Palestinians or Israelis. The relative ease with which Israeli forces were able to execute commando raids of their own, exemplified by

² SALIBI, Kamal S. *Crossroads to Civil War. Lebanon 1958 – 1976*, p. 41.

³ RIYĀD, Maḥmūd. *Mudhakkirāt Maḥmūd Riyād, 1948 – 1978* [The Memoirs of Maḥmūd Riyād], p. 293.

⁴ KHALIDI, W. *Conflict and Violence in Lebanon: Confrontation in the Middle East*, p. 69.

a strike against Beirut International Airport in 1968,⁵ and the assassination of three Palestinian leaders in Beirut in 1973, caused an outcry against the government from Arab nationalists and radical reformers.⁶ They accused the authorities of failing to deploy the Lebanese army against Israel and of using it instead to frustrate the activities of the Palestinian commandos. This accusation served to identify the crux of the issue facing the people of Lebanon: were the Palestinian commandos to be allowed unrestricted freedom to conduct raids against Israel with the inevitable Israeli armed response, or should the Lebanese state attempt to retain control of the commandos' activities? The country was deeply divided on the matter.

During the two years which followed the October War, "the development of Syria's policy in Lebanon was integrated into the broader framework that was then afforded by the more systematic formulation of the Syrian regime's regional and international policies."⁷ The regime's first objective was to bring Syria out of its regional isolation and heavy dependence on the USSR in the international arena. Then Syria sought to develop an independent power position from which to conduct her policies in an autonomous fashion. Syria was certain to acquire a decisive say in inter-Arab affairs and a better position in its future dealings with the superpowers.⁸

An irredentist claim to all, or part of, Lebanon's territory has been a permanent feature of the Syrian state's attitude to its western neighbour since the 1920s. The maximalist claim to the whole of Lebanon was inspired by nationalist ideologies, Syrian or Arab, which viewed the Syrian and the Lebanese states as part of a broader entity centred in Damascus. The minimalist claim was based on the belief that the detachment of territory from Syria in 1920 to create Greater Lebanon was an unjust and unlawful act which ought to be rectified.⁹ When the Syrians struggled for independence, the French forced them to accept Lebanon's existence in its 1920 boundaries. Thus Syrian governments normally refrained from making explicit demands on Lebanon's territory. Still, Syria maintained an implicit claim to a special relationship with Lebanon. The underlying assumption was that it would be unnatural for two parts of the same entity to conduct their relations through diplomatic channels.¹⁰

⁵ Israeli commandos arriving by helicopter from the direction of sea, landed at the airport at night, and blew up thirteen Lebanese civilian airliners which they found on the runways. In SALIBI, Kamal S. *Crossroads to Civil War. Lebanon 1958 – 1976*, p. 38.

⁶ ODEH, B. J. *Lebanon: Dynamics of Conflict*, p. 117.

⁷ RABINOVICH, I. *The Lebanese War and the Middle East. The Limits of Military Power: Syria's Role*. In HALEY, E. P., SNIDER, L. W. (eds.) *Lebanon in Crisis*, p. 58.

⁸ SNIDER, L. W. *Inter-Arab Relations*. In HALEY, E. P., SNIDER, L. W. (eds.) *Lebanon in Crisis*, p. 183.

⁹ DEVLIN, J. F. *Syria. Modern State in an Ancient Land*, p. 40.

¹⁰ HOURANI, A. H. *Syria and Lebanon. A Political Essay*, p. 270.

Lebanon was a natural centre for political exiles and refugees from Syria, and over the years several coups against Syria were planned in and launched from Lebanon. Syrian regimes displayed a keen interest in Lebanon's political climate when some parties and independent press, which on different occasions succeeded in stirring trouble in Syria by publishing provocative reports. The first decade of Lebanese independence passed relatively peacefully. Indeed, the increasing polarisation in the Arab world during the 1950s between the "Arab nationalist" and "pro-Western" forces began to affect the attitudes of Lebanon's communities.¹¹ Since the late 1960s two fresh aspects have been added to Syria's political interest in Lebanon: (1) the Palestinian organisations inside Lebanon and (2) the large but marginalised Lebanese Shī'ī community, who endorsed the ʿAlawī community as a part of them. Consequently, the Syrian regime developed a close relationship with that community which could draw comfort from the political standing of the ʿAlawī members of the Syrian political and military elite, who encountered great difficulties in making themselves acceptable to the majority Muslim Sunnī population in Syria.¹²

In attempting to achieve military parity with Israel, Ḥāfiẓ al-Asad was also planning to make Syria the most powerful state in the Arab world. He had, in effect, launched a bid for regional hegemony that would enable Syria to control the Arabs' response to the presence of Israel. It was an expensive policy, but not a reckless one. It fit into the president's calculating nature. His goal was to dominate the states that fell naturally within Syria's orbit, Lebanon and Jordan, as well as the PLO.¹³ Syria, through its military power would intimidate these states and prevent them from making peace with Israel as Egypt had done. Syria would also attempt to restrain them, especially the PLO, from engaging in activities that would give Israel an excuse to attack Syria before its arms build-up was completed.¹⁴ For Syria Lebanon's territory was of great importance as its line of defence could be outflanked by an Israeli force coming through Lebanon and attacking Syria from the west. In offensive terms Syrian troops stationed in Lebanon could activate a dormant front, and force the Israelis to allocate troops to the Lebanese border.¹⁵ In any case, Syria sought to develop an independent power position from which to conduct its regional and international policies in an autonomous fashion: to have a decisive word in inter-Arab affairs and to become a more significant actor in the Arab-Israeli conflict. The pursuit of that policy became evident in 1975.

¹¹ DAWISHA, A. *Syria and the Lebanese Crisis*, p. 19.

¹² RABINOVICH, I. *The Lebanese War and the Middle East. The Limits of Military Power: Syria's Role*. In HALEY, E. P., SNIDER, L. W. (eds.) *Lebanon in Crisis*, p. 57.

¹³ MANSFIELD, P. *The Arabs*, p. 388.

¹⁴ DEVLIN, J. F. *Syria. Modern State in an Ancient Land*, pp. 106 – 107.

¹⁵ RABINOVICH, I. *The War for Lebanon, 1970 – 1983*, pp. 36 – 37.

The civil war in Lebanon was the result of several highly interconnected internal and external conditions that had been in the making for a long time. The social and economic grievances of Muslims were compounded by the sectarian arrangements that favoured the country's Christians. Long before the crisis of the 1970s, Lebanon's political leaders recognised that Muslims outnumbered Christians and that the largest single religious community in the country was the Shī'ī Muslim community.¹⁶ Largely ignored in the distribution of confessional powers during the mandate years, the Shī'ī Muslims in the 1970s asserted their sectarian majority and demanded their fair share of the political and economic power. According to Halim Barakat a distinction had to be made between causal and contributing forces: the former were directly connected with the civil war and inherently rooted in the existing social and political structures of the country, while the latter aggravated the internal conflicts and set the process of confrontation into motion, triggering a set of events already in the making that awaited only the proper time and place.¹⁷

The Christians were not inclined to give the Muslims anything, insisting that the interwar agreement that set a parliamentary ratio of 6 Christian deputies for every 5 Muslim deputies remain in effect.¹⁸ The underprivileged and underrepresented Muslims, both Shī'ī and Sunnī, reacted to the Christian leaders' intransigence by identifying with the Palestinians, a community that was also opposed to the *status quo*. The causal forces of the war were: (1) the mosaic social structure of Lebanon composed of fragmented, hierarchically arranged communities, (2) a pyramidal social class structure characterized by great gaps between the privileged and the deprived, (3) a weak, inefficient, and corrupt central government, (4) a rigid, sectarian political system unable to transform or even modify itself, and (5) a prevailing condition of social unrest generated by the dynamics of Lebanon's *laissez faire* economic system. The contributing forces included: (1) the armed presence of the Palestinian resistance movement, (2) the Israeli raids, and (3) the urgent search for a peaceful solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict.¹⁹

With the alteration of its demographic balance and the new pressures placed upon it to assume a role in the regional Arab-Israeli conflict, the situation in the country had changed. The political leader who most clearly recognized these changes was Kamāl Junbulāt, the leader of the Druze community and chairman of the Progressive Socialist Party (al-Ḥizb at-taqaddumī al-ishtirākī). In 1969 he

¹⁶ SALIBI, Kamal S. *A House of Many Mansions. The History of Lebanon Reconsidered*, p. 186.

¹⁷ BARAKAT, H. *The Lebanese War and the Middle East. The Social Context*. In HALEY, E. P., SNIDER, L. W. (eds.) *Lebanon in Crisis*, p. 3.

¹⁸ GORDON, D. C. *The Republic of Lebanon. Nation in Jeopardy*, p. 81.

¹⁹ BARAKAT, H. *The Lebanese War and the Middle East. The Social Context*. In HALEY, E. P., SNIDER, L. W. (eds.) *Lebanon in Crisis*, pp. 3 – 4.

forged a loose coalition of discontented Muslims into a front known as the Lebanese National Movement.²⁰ Becoming deeply rooted among the masses, committed to administrative reform, the abolition of the confessional basis of politics, and freedom of action for the Resistance (the Palestinian commandos), the LNM was to be a major factor in the civil war.

Ideologically, in direct contrast and frequent confrontation with the LNM of Kamāl Junbulāṭ was Pierre Jumayyil, the founder and leader of the mainly Maronite Phalangist party (al-Katā'ib al-lubnānīya). This party was established in 1936 on the model of some European fascist groups of the period, in reaction to the Pan-Syrian Syrian National Social Party (al-Ḥizb as-sūrī al-qawmī al-ijtimā'ī) of Anṭūn Sa'āda, which was considered a danger to Lebanese sovereignty and to the demands of some Muslim leaders that parts of Greater Lebanon be reincorporated into Syria.²¹ The Phalangists goal was to organise and train resistance to any threat to the integrity and special personality of Lebanon. In the 1970s it may have had a membership of 65,000 and it boasted a well-disciplined militia of some 10,000 combatants.²²

Another of the most uncompromising Maronite leaders was the former Lebanese President Kamāl Sham'ūn (Camille Chamoun), chairman of the Party of Liberal Nationalists (Ḥizb al-waṭaniyīn al-aḥrār), which was ideologically very close to the Phalangists. He had also his own private militia, the Tigers (an-Numūr).²³ When it became evident to these politicians that the government and the army were incapable of taking decisive action against the Palestinians, they resolved to take it themselves. Different in orientation was Raymond Iddah (Eddé) and his own party the National Bloc (al-Kutla al-waṭaniya). They stood for a much greater openness to the Arab world and a greater willingness to come to terms with the Palestinians. The three Maronite groupings formed a Tripartite Alliance (al-Ḥilf ath-thulāthī).²⁴

The approaching 1976 presidential elections prompted the formation of the Alliance (Taḥāluf) between the Maronite Raymond Iddah and the Sunnī leaders Ṣā'ib Salām and Rashīd Karāmī. It was a desperate attempt on the part of a sector of the Lebanese bourgeoisie to save the system. The Alliance (Taḥāluf) presented itself as an alternative to both the regime and the Lebanese National Movement. Raymond Iddah, the most vocal opponent to Sulaymān Franjīya, sought to neutralize the president as well as any candidate he might support for the presidency. He also attacked the LNM, the Phalangists and Kamāl Sham'ūn,

²⁰ FARĪD, Faṭīn Aḥmad. *Ḥurūb Lubnān. Dirāsa taḥlīlīya* [Lebanon's Wars. An Analytical Study], p. 55.

²¹ FARĪD, Faṭīn Aḥmad. *Ḥurūb Lubnān. Dirāsa taḥlīlīya*, pp. 35 – 36.

²² GORDON, D. C. *The Republic of Lebanon. Nation in Jeopardy*, pp. 85 – 86.

²³ SALIBI, Kamal S. *Crossroads to Civil War. Lebanon 1958 – 1976*, p. 128.

²⁴ ENTELIS, J. P. *Pluralism and Party Transformation in Lebanon: Al-Kata'ib, 1936 – 1970*, pp. 161 – 162.

charging them with corruption. The Alliance also blamed the regime for the chaos in Lebanon.²⁵ For Rashīd Karāmī and Ṣā'ib Salām the two leading Sunnī politicians, Kamāl Junbulāṭ and the left ideologically constituted a serious political threat. Kamāl Junbulāṭ made significant political headway within all communities, and in 1975 he was in a much stronger position than before to shape Lebanese politics. After the cabinet of Rashīd aṣ-Ṣulḥ resigned on 15 May and the President appointed a military cabinet, the various Muslim groups quickly buried their differences in a concerted effort to oppose the new cabinet. Kamāl Junbulāṭ joined forces with Rashīd Karāmī and Ṣā'ib Salām in denouncing the presidential move.²⁶ As for the left, the system was rigid and provided limited access. But even with the existing system, leftist parties were able to expand rapidly within all communities and were becoming increasingly assertive. They would have probably been better off with a different electoral law and a non-confessional system.

If the radical parties in Lebanon were to make any headway, their best chances appeared to be among the Shī'ī Muslims, who were already reckoned to be the largest of the Lebanese religious communities, and whose social, economic and political grievances were the most pronounced. In 1969, a Shī'ī *Muslim Higher Council* had been legally established to manage the religious and other affairs of the community.²⁷ The man elected to head this Council was the imām Mūsā aṣ-Ṣadr a Persian of Lebanese origin who had returned to his homeland. A man of intelligence and great personal charm, still in his thirties, immediately found his way into the Lebanese establishment and became leader of his community.²⁸ At a time when Israel was beginning to undertake regular raids against the Lebanese south in retaliation against the Palestinian commando operations, imām Mūsā aṣ-Ṣadr demanded adequate military protection for the mainly Shī'ī villages. With this demand he placed himself ahead of the radical parties which were active in south Lebanon.

As Israel with the support of the USA, stood by its refusal to grant any recognition to the PLO, the chances of recovering even a small portion of territory to set up a PLO state seemed remote. Therefore the PLO concentrated on building up its shadow state in Lebanon.²⁹ The situation in the country was rapidly deteriorating and the Palestinian presence was far from being the only reason for this. The deprived Shī'ī Muslims who were the majority of the population in Southern Lebanon suffered most from Israel's reprisal raids against the Palestinian guerrillas, and some fled their homes to the relative

²⁵ ODEH, B. J. *Lebanon: Dynamics of Conflict*, p. 120.

²⁶ DAWISHA, A. *Syria and the Lebanese Crisis*, p. 86.

²⁷ EL-KHAZEN, Farid. *The Breakdown of the State in Lebanon 1967 – 1976*, p. 246.

²⁸ SALIBI, Kamal S. *Crossroads to Civil War. Lebanon 1958 – 1976*, p. 63.

²⁹ MANSFIELD, P. *A History of the Middle East*, p. 308.

safety of the suburbs of south Beirut.³⁰ The social and economic disparities in Lebanon, always dangerously strong, were increased by the effects of the great Middle East oil boom, which brought added prosperity to the country's affluent business classes. The armed militias representing the country's many sects and political trends acted with increasing independence in open defiance of the inadequate Lebanese armed forces.

In preparation for their confrontation with the Palestinians, the Christian militias embarked on a large-scale programme of arms procurement. The PLO and the leftist organisations did the same, and by spring 1975 all factions within Lebanon were armed to the teeth.³¹ The spark that ignited this explosive situation came on 13 April, when a bus with mostly Palestinian, as well as some Lebanese, passengers was ambushed by a group of armed Phalangists in a suburb of Beirut. 27 passengers were killed and 20 others were wounded.³² This set off a round of fighting between the PLO and the Maronite militias. In May, heavy clashes erupted around the Tall az-Za^ctar camp between PLO guerrillas and Phalangists. One of the Palestinian leaders, Hānī Ḥasan commented on the situation saying: "The Lebanese Christians are trying to confine us to the refugee camps to prevent us making an alliance with the LNM forces – the Muslims and Druzes. It was never our intention to take sides in the civil war that was obviously coming to the Lebanon. And we faced a very big dilemma. In the end we decided to reject the idea that we should confine ourselves to the camps. We feared that we would be crushed by the Christians and the Israelis if we allowed ourselves to be confined and neutralized in such a way. So that's why there was a confrontation between us and the Lebanese army in May".³³ As fighting intensified, attempts were made to defuse conflict. Nevertheless, the bloody clashes lasted until the end of June 1975, at which point the main PLO forces accepted a cease-fire and withdrew from the fighting for the remainder of the year.

When the civil war in 1975 broke out in Lebanon, Syria had to formulate its policy toward it. The war and the course it took confronted the Syrian government with a difficult dilemma. Syria, a power seeking to establish its hegemony over Lebanon and the PLO, could view the civil war as a welcome development. A hated political system was being successfully challenged by a revisionist coalition. Most of groups composing the anti-regime coalition in Lebanon, leftist, Muslim and Palestinian elements were allied with Syria. Gains made by this coalition could well increase Syria's influence in and over

³⁰ MANSFIELD, P. *A History of the Middle East*, p. 308.

³¹ ODEH, B. J. *Lebanon: Dynamics of Conflict*, p. 133.

³² EL-KHAZEN, Farid. *The Breakdown of the State in Lebanon 1967 – 1976*, p. 286; DEEB, M. *The Lebanese Civil War*, p. 1.

³³ HART, A. *Arafat. Terrorist or Peacemaker?*, p. 363.

Lebanon and consequently over the PLO.³⁴ However, there were other powerful considerations as the situation in Lebanon could worsen. A victory by the Christian coalition and a defeat of the LNM and Palestinian forces could create a strong pressure on Syria to intervene on their behalf and could lead to a premature and disadvantageous collision with Israel. Conversely, a decisive success of the LNM and Palestinian forces could create pressures on the USA and Israel to intervene on behalf of the Christian coalition.³⁵ In short, Syria realised the complexity of the situation in Lebanon and the political risks of intimate involvement in such a situation. The policy which Syria formulated and pursued between April and December 1976 rested on the endeavour to bring an end to the conflict by mediating between the two fighting coalitions and by seeking to devise a compromise formula.

As the security conflict continued to deteriorate President Sulaymān Franjīya resorted to a drastic action and on 23 May formed a military cabinet but the move ended in utter failure as only one day after the formation, the cabinet was forced to resign.³⁶ The collapse of the military cabinet was a political blow to the president and he found himself obliged to accept the premiership of Rashīd Karāmī. After a few weeks of talks and consultations behind the scenes, while armed confrontations escalated, a six-member cabinet was formed on 1 July 1975 in which the premier also assumed the post of defence minister.³⁷ With such a powerful mandate the premier seemed in a position to establish a working relationship with Sulaymān Franjīya but their relations were severely strained, so that a truce of sorts held only a short time. With the security situation deteriorating daily, the most pressing issue was whether or not to use the army to maintain law and order. The security and reform issues became interlocked. “No reform before security,” the Maronites maintained, with which they meant the curtailment through army action of Palestinian transgressions in support of the LNM as a preliminary to the subjugation of the latter. “No security before reform,” maintained the LNM, referring to the use of the Palestinians as leverage to secure a revolutionary change in the *status quo*.³⁸

At first it was mainly a conflict between the right-wing Christian militia and the leftist alliance under the leadership of the Druze politician Kamāl Junbulāt.

³⁴ RABINOVICH, I. *The Lebanese War and the Middle East. The Limits of Military Power: Syria's Role*. In HALEY, E. P., SNIDER, L. W. (eds.) *Lebanon in Crisis*, p. 59.

³⁵ KHOURI, Fred J. *The Arab-Israeli Conflict*. In HALEY, E. P., SNIDER, L. W. (eds.) *Lebanon in Crisis*, p. 165.

³⁶ MAṬAR, Fu'ād. *Suqūṭ al-imbarāḩūrīya al-lubnānīya* [The Fall of the Lebanese Empire], p. 86.

³⁷ RIZQ, Rizq. *Rashīd Karāmī as-siyāsī wa rajul ad-dawla* [Rashīd Karāmī Politician and Statesman], pp. 134 – 135.

³⁸ KHALIDI, W. *Conflict and Violence in Lebanon: Confrontation in the Middle East*, p. 48.

However, the disengagement of the PLO did not resolve the differences between the Lebanese themselves, and in August 1975 fighting broke out between Muslim and Christian militias, which developed into full-scale civil war and the country plunged into merciless killing. Random abductions of civilians on the basis of their sectarian denominations were practiced by the warring factions. The Muslim groups in general supported the Lebanese National Movement of Kamāl Junbulāt; the Christian forces were spearheaded by the Maronite Phalange. From their fortified positions in Beirut's high-rise office towers and luxury hotels, the opposing sides engaged in artillery duels that transformed the core of the cosmopolitan city into a war zone and reduced it to ruins.³⁹ In December the conflict took an even more ominous turn as the Phalange and its allies began expelling Muslims who resided within those areas of Beirut controlled by the Maronite forces. This action intensified the sectarian divisions within the city and made the possibility of a return to confessional cooperation still more remote.⁴⁰

Whenever the conflict passed through a critical stage, Syria intervened to mediate. After the relative calm of the hot summer months, fighting flared up in early September 1975, immediately after the signing of the Second Sinai Agreement between the Israelis and the Egyptians. The intensity of the fighting reached such a level that the Lebanese asked Syrian President Ḥāfīz al-Asad to come to the aid of Lebanon. °Abdalḥalīm Khaddām the Syrian foreign minister, was sent to Lebanon on 19 September and met with all relevant political leaders. At this meeting, Sulaymān Franjīya accused the Syrian-backed parties in Lebanon of starting the fighting. He also implied that Syria was trying to take advantage of the situation to conclude political and military agreements with the Lebanese and threatened to resort to the Arab League or to some other major Arab countries for assistance.⁴¹ The "Arabisation" of the conflict was unwelcome to Syria. Therefore °Abdalḥalīm Khaddām made determined effort to find a solution to the crisis and negotiated a cease-fire as well as the formation of the National Dialogue Committee to propose reforms and lead the various groups and parties to a national reconciliation.⁴²

In the summer of 1975 the military balance in the country was largely in favour of the LNM. The conflict was fuelled from outside by the supply of arms and money from various quarters, including Israel, some Arab states and very

³⁹ GORDON, D. C. *The Republic of Lebanon. Nation in Jeopardy*, p. 110; ODEH, B. J. *Lebanon: Dynamics of Conflict*, p. 147.

⁴⁰ EL-KHAZEN, Farid. *The Breakdown of the State in Lebanon 1967 – 1976*, p. 324.

⁴¹ KHUWAYRĪ, Anṭuwān. *Ḥawādith Lubnān 1975* [Lebanon's Events of 1975], pp. 219 – 222.

⁴² RIZQ, Rizq. *Rashīd Karāmī as-siyāsī wa rajul ad-dawla* [Rashīd Karāmī Politician and Statesman], p. 139.

probably the CIA.⁴³ The fighting continued in September in different places. The right wing pressured Rashīd Karāmī to use the army in the conflict, and in fact he called upon the army to intervene on 3 September. Kamāl Junbulāt, who had already called for the resignation of the cabinet because it was unable to keep the peace, intensified his attacks against the state for its use of the army. To appease the LNM, the president dismissed Army Commander General Iskandar Ghānim on 10 September, and appointed Brigadier Ḥannā Saʿīd in his place.⁴⁴

The Syrian government backed Rashīd Karāmī in his attempt at national reconciliation and at avoiding expansion of the conflict by finding a political solution that would include some of the reforms demanded by the LNM and the traditional Muslim leaders.⁴⁵ The Syrian Foreign Minister ʿAbdalḥalīm Khaddām was in Lebanon again for seven days (19 – 25 September). It was largely by his efforts that a National Dialogue Committee NDC (Hayʿat al-ḥiwār al-waṭanī) was formed in which Kamāl Junbulāt, agreed to sit with Pierre al-Jumayyil and other Christian and Muslim representatives, both radical and conservatives, altogether 20 members. The formation of the NDC was accompanied by another cease-fire agreement, which it was hoped this time would hold. The NDC met 9 times to discuss the conflicting political positions in the hope of finding a way out of the crisis. The deliberations of the NDC, however, did not take long to reach a complete deadlock, as Kamāl Junbulāt and his supporters insisted on the discussion on the question of a political reform plan, while the Christian side refused any discussions, and the violence continued.⁴⁶ Israel warned against Syrian intervention in Lebanon, and Kamāl Junbulāt declared the Maronite objective to be the creation of a “second Israel” in Lebanon.⁴⁷

Syria continued to object to the involvement of any other Arab power in the conflict. When an extraordinary meeting of the Arab foreign ministers of the Arab League was held in Cairo on 15 October 1975, both Syria and PLO boycotted it with the explanation that no Arab country had “the right to discuss the security and stability of Lebanon except Syria”.⁴⁸ The Lebanese cabinet was

⁴³ Kamāl Junbulāt was allegedly convicted that “the CIA had poured \$ 200 million into Lebanon to destabilize the nation and bring the PLO to heel.” Cit. in GORDON, D. C. *The Republic of Lebanon. Nation in Jeopardy*, p. 91.

⁴⁴ EL-KHAZEN, Farid. *The Breakdown of the State in Lebanon 1967 – 1976*, p. 314; RIZQ, Rizq. *Rashīd Karāmī as-siyāsī wa rajul ad-dawla* [Rashīd Karāmī Politician and Statesman], p. 137.

⁴⁵ KHUWAYRĪ, Anṭuwān. *Ḥawādith Lubnān 1975*, pp. 291 – 292.

⁴⁶ ODEH, B. J. *Lebanon: Dynamics of Conflict*, p. 147.

⁴⁷ KHALIDI, W. *Conflict and Violence in Lebanon: Confrontation in the Middle East*, p. 49.

⁴⁸ KHUWAYRĪ, Anṭuwān. *Ḥawādith Lubnān 1975*, p. 304.

publicly blamed for the plight of the country, and the president seemed bent on forcing the premier to resign. However, Rashīd Karāmī publicly announced that he would not relinquish his duties before the situation in Lebanon returned to normal. After the collapse of the NDC a new round of fighting began, therefore and the premier established contact with leaders of the various factions. On 29 October a delegation of Palestinians headed by Yāsir ʿArafāt arrived to offer their assistance, while ʿAbdalḥalīm Khaddām called from Damascus by telephone to declare that Syria stood ready to help Lebanon out of its difficulties in every possible way.⁴⁹

By 3 November, a committee of representatives of these factions, in which the army and security forces were also represented, was formed with the purpose of bringing the civil war under control. This Higher Co-ordination Committee (Lajnat at-tansīq al-ʿulyā) was empowered to investigate all breaches of the officially announced cease-fire. Needless to say, that the civil war did not come to a halt.⁵⁰ On 12 November, the political-reform subcommittee of the NDC agreed to abolish confessionalism in the civil service, the judiciary and the armed forces. In addition, confessionalism was to be abolished in the electoral laws. It was further agreed that reference should not be made to the higher offices (the presidency, the premiership, the house speaker) since the constitution did not include statements that indicated the confession of the people who could fill these offices.⁵¹ In fact only the National Pact (1943) specified that the president must be Maronite and the premier Sunnī Muslim.

During the last two months of 1975 neither the will nor the imagination needed to restore the integrity of the Lebanese state seemed to be at hand. The proper settlement of the Lebanese conflict at a purely internal level could not be achieved unless the political structure of the country was changed in certain fundamental respects. The ruling establishment in the country, in both its Christian and Muslim sectors, was unwilling to consider any proposals for a radical change. The Maronite leadership was prepared to refuse any suggestions for the effective reorganisation or reform of the Lebanese system, and refused to make political concessions even to the moderate demands put forth by the traditional Sunnī leadership.⁵²

From July 1975 the OOP tried to keep out of the civil war but was dragged in remorselessly, until by January 1976 they were fully engaged on the side of the leftist *Lebanese National Movement*. After initial successes, the leftist-Palestinian alliance gained control of some 80 % of the country. At this point

⁴⁹ SALIBI, Kamal S. *Crossroads to Civil War. Lebanon 1958 – 1976*, p. 134.

⁵⁰ DEEB, M. *The Lebanese Civil War*, p. 80; ODEH, B. J. *Lebanon: Dynamics of Conflict*, p. 148.

⁵¹ ODEH, B. J. *Lebanon: Dynamics of Conflict*, p. 148.

⁵² SALIBI, Kamal S. *Crossroads to Civil War. Lebanon 1958 – 1976*, p. 140.

Syria began to seriously consider military intervention fearing that Lebanon would be partitioned into a tiny Christian state, which would be in alliance with Israel, and a remainder in the hands of Lebanese Muslims and Palestinians outside Syria's control.⁵³ President Ḥāfiẓ al-Asad, like any Syrian leader, regarded Lebanon as a vital Syrian interest. He was now convinced that should the "rightists" be finally defeated and the Left and the Palestinians acquire predominance in Lebanon, Syria might lose control over the timing of any confrontation with Israel and would be open to an attack through Lebanon. He was also increasingly disturbed lest ripples from a radicalized Lebanon, possibly linked to Iraq, cross over into his country. While publicly in support of the Palestinians, he held them under firm control in Syria and wished to do so in Lebanon as well.⁵⁴ He also saw the Palestinian cause as the responsibility of all the Arabs, and especially of Syria, as the leading state on the front-line with Israel. He did not believe the PLO should act independently, and his personal relations with Yāsir ʿArafāt were characterised by deep mutual distrust.

The period of 8 – 13 December witnessed heavy fighting throughout Lebanon with the LNM keeping up its offensive until a cease fire was negotiated and took hold on 14 December. On 16 December 1975 Sulaymān Franjīya, bitterly denouncing the Palestinians, decided to turn in earnest to Damascus. This was a fateful decision, inasmuch as the earlier Syrian interventions had been initiated by Damascus. Now the Lebanese president was calculatingly inviting Syria into Lebanon to redress the balance in favour of the Maronites.⁵⁵

The Syrian government naturally perceived the evolving situation in Lebanon with increasing concern. Particularly worrying to the Syrians was the possibility of Israeli involvement in the continuing Lebanese conflict which would drag Syria into a precipitant battle with Israel for which it was not prepared. Yet at the same time the Syrians were beginning to realise that all their concerted diplomatic efforts and political pressures were not producing the desired results. In mid-December President Ḥāfiẓ al-Asad met the Christian Phalange leader Pierre Jumayyil in Damascus and assured him of Syria's opposition to any change in Lebanon's existing constitutional system.⁵⁶ A week later the Syrian President met Rashīd Karāmī in Damascus to impress upon the hard-pressed Lebanese premier the necessity to maintain the delicate balance and avert the disintegration of the country, a prospect which had at that time assumed a greater urgency for the Syrian government. The essence of this strategy seemed to be to concede the principle of reforming the *status quo* and to prevail on

⁵³ MANSFIELD, P. *A History of the Middle East*, p. 309.

⁵⁴ GORDON, D. C. *The Republic of Lebanon. Nation in Jeopardy*, p. 107.

⁵⁵ KHALIDI, W. *Conflict and Violence in Lebanon: Confrontation in the Middle East*, p. 50.

⁵⁶ BULLOCH, J. *Death of a Country: The Civil War in Lebanon*, p. 88.

Syria to contain the LNM and the OOP. Early in January 1976 a major Maronite offensive was launched with the siege of the Tall az-Za^ctar Palestinian refugee camp and other camps near Beirut.⁵⁷ The Palestinian and Muslim Lebanese death toll from these operations was very high.

On 4 January 1976, the two Palestinian refugee camps of Tall az-Za^ctar and Jisr al-Bāshā which were situated north of the Beirut River in the heart of the Christian enclave were besieged by Maronite forces. The siege was a practical manifestation of the increasing Christian demands to clear “foreigners and alien elements from the homeland”.⁵⁸ There was no doubt that the operation signalled the beginning of a *de facto* division of the country. The siege of the two camps also marked, for the first time since the initial clashes of April 1975, the full entry of the PLO into the Lebanese conflict. The Christian offensive heightened the perception of threat among the Syrian leaders, who began to talk about the probability of military involvement. Fearful of a serious attempt at partition by the right wing, ʿAbdalḥalīm Khaddām announced that “Lebanon was a part of Syria and we will get it back in any partition attempt”.⁵⁹ Israel issued several statements in which it warned that it could not remain on the sidelines and watch “Muslim power” grow or any outsider intervene in Lebanon. On 10 January Israel’s Prime Minister Jitzhak Rabin issued a similar warning.⁶⁰

In an effort to ease the Christian military pressure, in the second half of January the Combined Forces (the LNM and the Palestinian resistance led by Kamāl Junbulāt) attacked on many fronts mainly in Beirut and the south. On 18 January the left wing was strengthened by the Yarmouk Brigade of the Syrian-controlled Palestinian Liberation Army. With the help of these forces and in spite of Lebanese air force strikes that on 20 January the leftists were able to advance against rightist positions, and were beginning to gain the upper hand in the civil war. The use of the Lebanese air force triggered the first overt signs of sectarian mutiny in the army. Many army units that despised the complicity of the army command with the right wing, began to form the Lebanese Arab Army under the command of the Sunnī First Lieutenant Aḥmad Khaṭīb with its headquarters in the Biqā^c Valley.⁶¹ The victorious advance of the Combined Forces convinced the right wing that it would better to negotiate with its opponents.

As the war was reaching its new climax, on 21 January 1976 a high-powered

⁵⁷ DEEB, M. *The Lebanese Civil War*, p. 83.

⁵⁸ BULLOCH, J. *Death of a Country: The Civil War in Lebanon*, p. 101.

⁵⁹ *Harb Lubnān* [Lebanon’s War], p. 176.

⁶⁰ *Harb Lubnān* [Lebanon’s War], p. 228.

⁶¹ KHALIDI, W. *Conflict and Violence in Lebanon: Confrontation in the Middle East*, p. 51.

Syrian delegation composed of Foreign Minister °Abdalḥalīm Khaddām, Chief of Staff General Ḥikmat ash-Shihābī and Air Force Commander General Nājī Jamīl, arrived in Beirut to help impose an effective cease-fire. At the internal level, all the Maronite leaders except Kamīl Sham°ūn appeared prepared to accept the Syrian mediation, as were all the Muslim and radical Lebanese leaders and Palestinians. On the following day a cease-fire had been arranged, and a presidential communiqué issued. It announced agreement on the outlines of an overall solution and a formation of a Joint Higher Military Committee (al-Lajna al-°askarīya al-°ulyā al-mushtaraka) to enforce the cease-fire. Meanwhile, though Israel continued to warn against Syrian military intervention in Lebanon, official statements from Jerusalem did not describe the limited movement of Palestinian troops from Syria as an intervention. It was generally accepted that the Israeli position on this question was prompted by Washington.⁶² At this point a fortuitous community of interest developed between Syria and the USA, both of which were alarmed, though for different reasons, at the prospect of a future radical leftist government transforming the balance of power in Lebanon.⁶³

On 30 January a meeting of Muslim leaders was held, which was attended by Rashīd Karāmī, Ṣā'ib Salām, Kamāl Junbulāt, Mūsā aṣ-Ṣadr and °Abdalḥalīm Khaddām. The Syrian minister described the outlines of a reform program to be shortly endorsed in public by Sulaymān Franjīya. This was to include: (1) an equal ratio (5:5) in Christian-Muslim representation in Parliament, (2) the election of the prime minister in parliament (instead of his appointment by the president), (3) the three highest posts to remain, according to custom, respectively in the hands of the Maronites (president), Sunnīs (prime minister) and Shi°īs (speaker of the parliament), (4) a new special High Court with the powers to try the president, prime minister and other ministers, (5) the formation of a new High Economic Council, (6) naturalisation for those eligible (mostly old Muslim residents of Lebanon hitherto denied Lebanese citizenship), and (7) equal division between Christians and Muslims of the top-category civil service posts, with the lesser posts including military appointments, to be based exclusively on merit.⁶⁴

Ultimately, a settlement was to be worked out which envisaged the re-establishment of the Lebanese State in full sovereignty and integrity on the basis of a revised constitution and a new and written "National Charter". To regulate relations between the Lebanese and the Palestinians, the terms of the Cairo Agreement were to be revived and strictly applied under a Syrian

⁶² SALIBI, Kamal S. *Crossroads to Civil War. Lebanon 1958 – 1976*, p. 158.

⁶³ DAWISHA, A. *Syria and the Lebanese Crisis*, p. 148.

⁶⁴ RABINOVICH, I. *The War for Lebanon, 1970 – 1983*, pp. 76 – 77; KHALIDI, W. *Conflict and Violence in Lebanon: Confrontation in the Middle East*, p. 52.

guarantee.⁶⁵ On 7 February Sulaymān Franjīya visited Damascus and during this visit the Syrians officially guaranteed that the Palestinians would strictly implement “in letter and spirit” the 1969 Cairo Agreement. This seemed to have been a precondition for the announcement of the reforms. On 14 February President Sulaymān Franjīya announced in Beirut a 17-point reform programme, known as the Constitutional Document. A bonus for the Muslims was the declaration that Lebanon was “a sovereign Arab state”.⁶⁶ Among the Lebanese themselves, the Christians and the Muslims differed radically from one another in the interpretation of the country’s Arab role. Among the Christians, and more particularly among the Maronites who were the leading Christian Lebanese community, the Arabism of Lebanon was poorly appreciated. To many of them, Lebanon was essentially a sovereign national homeland of a basically Christian character which had more in common with the Christian West than with the Muslim Arab world.⁶⁷ The majority of Christians failed to realise that the international significance of Lebanon and the prosperity that went with it, were the natural by-products of the fact that the country was also an integral part of the Arab world.

The Constitutional Document redressed the potential structural imbalance in the political system of Lebanon. It was therefore welcomed, on the whole, by the Sunnī establishment. The attitude of the LNM toward the *Constitutional Document* was mixed. In an official memorandum issued by the Progressive Socialist Party of Kamāl Junbulāṭ on 24 February it accepted 5 articles, rejected 7 and partially rejected the remaining 5 articles. The major thrust of the memorandum was directed against the powers of the president. It found the reforms insufficient and wanted to strengthen Parliament and the position of the prime minister in relation to the president. After the declaration of the Constitutional Document, the Syrians had in mind to further improve the Lebanese situation. The first task was to establish security by means of the Joint Higher Military Committee composed of Syrian, Lebanese and Palestinian officers. The Army commander General Ḥannā Sa‘īd called for soldiers and officers of the Lebanese Arab Army to return to the official Lebanese army and promised a general amnesty. However, the president rejected the offer.⁶⁸

The differences of the LNM with Syria came into the open in late March 1976, when Kamāl Junbulāṭ mounted a successful military campaign in Mount Lebanon. Syria’s pressure on him to stop the fighting produced no results.

⁶⁵ SALIBI, Kamal S. *Crossroads to Civil War. Lebanon 1958 – 1976*, p. 159.

⁶⁶ Lebanese President Suleiman Franjīeh’s Message to the Lebanese People. Beirut, 14 February 1976. The Constitutional Document (Excerpts). In KHALIDI, W. *Conflict and Violence in Lebanon: Confrontation in the Middle East*, Appendices II, pp. 189 – 191.

⁶⁷ DEEB, M. *The Lebanese Civil War*, p. 85.

⁶⁸ KHUWAYRĪ, Anṭuwān. *Ḥarb fī Lubnān 1976* [The War in Lebanon], p. 278.

Kamāl Junbulāṭ tried to convince President Ḥāfīz al-Asad to let the LNM defeat the right wing militarily, but without success. In the first half of April 1976, Syrian troops entered into eastern Lebanon at the request of Prime Minister Rashīd Karāmī and with the support of some traditional Muslim leaders. Kamāl Junbulāṭ strongly criticised this military intervention and demanded from the secretary general of the Arab League to take some action against “the occupation of Lebanon” by the Syrian forces.⁶⁹

The fragile truce was extended by the warring parties to the end of April to allow for the election of a new president. The two main contenders for the presidency were: Raymond Iddah, the LNM choice, and Ilyās Sarkīs, who was supported by Syria, the prime minister and the right wing. Kamāl Junbulāṭ was trying to gain time in an effort to increase support for his candidate, who had been a frequent and outspoken critic of the Christian political establishment.⁷⁰ To the Syrians Raymond Iddah was unacceptable because of his consistent opposition to any foreign intervention, including Syria’s. The LNM announced that its participation in the election of the president depended upon the candidate’s acceptance of its programme. It argued that this was a realistic demand since the LNM represented 75 % of the Lebanese and controlled 80 % of the country.⁷¹ On 8 May 1976, Ilyās Sarkīs was eventually elected, after tremendous Syrian pressure had been exerted on his behalf. At first the LNM objected, but then accepted the election results, and began to establish contacts with the president-elect.

There was a brief Syrian-Iraqi rapprochement after the Camp David accords were signed, but Moscow was sceptical and surprisingly unenthusiastic about it. One reason may have been that the Soviets were unable to gain Syrian agreement to what was apparently a Soviet attempt to exploit the rapprochement for greater control over the two countries’ policies.⁷² There were signs of Soviet annoyance with Syria’s intermittent interventions in Lebanon between January and June 1976, but the real rift came over the massive intervention which began on 31 May – 1 June, just as Soviet Premier Alexei Kosygin was en route from Iraq to Damascus as part of a Middle Eastern tour. Kosygin’s comments before departing Baghdad suggested Soviet opposition to any outside intervention in Lebanon and there were some claims that his trip was designed to stop a move by Ḥāfīz al-Asad.⁷³ The Syrians had probably timed their move to prevent

⁶⁹ DEEB, M. *The Lebanese Civil War*, p. 91.

⁷⁰ DAWISHA, A. *Syria and the Lebanese Crisis*, p. 133.

⁷¹ ODEH, B. J. *Lebanon: Dynamics of Conflict*, p. 168.

⁷² DAWISHA, A. *Syria and the Lebanese Crisis*, p. 136.

⁷³ GOLAN, G. *Soviet Policies in the Middle East. From World War II to Gorbachev*, p. 151.

Soviet pressure, but Alexei Kosygin was reportedly angered by having been confronted with a *fait accompli* which left Moscow few alternatives for reacting.

Syria's decision to intervene directly and overtly in the Lebanese civil war, taken in January 1976, may be analyzed from two vantage points: as the culmination of the building up of Syria's position in Lebanon, which began in the early 1970s, and as the product of the particular circumstances which the outbreak and the development of the war created in the latter part of 1975. In both cases Syria's long-standing claims and interests in Lebanon constituted the essential background.⁷⁴ In these years of superpower confrontation the USA was particularly concerned about Soviet influence in Lebanon increasing if the LNM and the PLO were to succeed. It was thus intimated to Syria that neither the USA nor Israel would oppose Syrian intervention. Thus reassured, on 1 June 1976 Syria sent a detachment of its own army reinforced by 250 tanks and troops from *aṣ-Ṣā'iqā* (thunderbolt),⁷⁵ into Lebanon at the invitation of the Maronite Christian leadership then in control of the political institutions

Syria's overt involvement in Lebanon's internal affairs was a direct continuation of its active participation in this arena, which had begun in the early 1970s and intensified after the outbreak of civil war in Lebanon in 1975. Syria's intervention manifested its determination to play an active if not pivotal role in the regional and inter-Arab arena, and its desire to reap the benefits of its relatively stable internal politics.⁷⁶ This intervention was crucial in turning the tide against the PLO and its Lebanese allies. Most immediately, it enabled Maronite forces to attack Palestinian and LNM areas in east Beirut, with fearful consequences, notably at Tall az-Za'tar camp, where some 3,000 civilians were massacred.⁷⁷

Moscow opposed this move for a number of reasons and in connection with the Syrian invasion of Lebanon in June 1976, serious Soviet-Syrian differences occurred. The Soviets perceived it as an act of Syrian aggrandisement which would augment Ḥāfiẓ al-Asad's independence. Although it could be argued conversely that the invasion upset certain forces inside Syria, weakening the president's own power base. On the other hand, it overextended Syrian armed forces, and isolated Syria in the Arab world, at least among the more radical states.⁷⁸ Anyhow, the Syrian move was viewed in Moscow as a sample of Ḥāfiẓ

⁷⁴ Al-^cAQQĀD, Ṣalāḥ. *Al-mashriq al-^carabī al-mu^cāṣir* [The Contemporary Arab East], p. 171.

⁷⁵ The Syrian-financed and trained Palestinian militia (commandos).

⁷⁶ ZISSER, E. *Asad's Legacy. Syria in Transition*, p. 10.

⁷⁷ JOUMLATT, K. *I Speak for Lebanon*, p. 70.

⁷⁸ GOLAN, G. *Soviet Policies in the Middle East. From World War II to Gorbachev*, p. 151.

al-Asad's aspirations or perhaps pretensions for the expansion of Syrian power.

Syria's intervention led to a bizarre alliance with the right-wing Lebanese Christians which, although short lived, was sufficient to turn the tide against the leftist-Palestinian coalition. The Arab states reluctantly endorsed the presence of Syrian troops in Lebanon as the main body of an Arab peace-keeping force. The civil war died down, leaving some 50,000 dead and many more injured, while about one million Lebanese were driven from their homes. As in all such wars, atrocious acts of massacre, kidnapping and murder were committed by both sides.

The regional policy of Ḥāfiẓ al-Asad was popular within Syria and helped to solidify his domestic position during the early years of his rule, and within the Arab world at large, he was seen as a possible successor to Jamāl ʿAbdunnāṣir in the drive for pan-Arab unity. However, Ḥāfiẓ al-Asad's embroilment in the Lebanese civil war undermined his reputation and brought his leadership into question both at home and in the wider Arab world. Syria intervened in Lebanon in 1976 on the side of the Maronite Christians against the leftist Muslim-PLO alliance. Ḥāfiẓ al-Asad played on being able to determine the outcome of the civil strife, but instead Syrian forces had become bogged down in a costly and indecisive military occupation.⁷⁹ By sending his army against the PLO, he, the supposed champion of the Palestinians, raised doubts about the sincerity of his commitment to their cause.

With their usual vigour the Lebanese set about restoring their economy. Trade and banking revived; the Lebanese currency remained strong and it seemed that Lebanon could not easily lose its commercial pre-eminence in the region. But it was soon apparent that the civil war had subsided rather than ended. The fears and hatreds which had been intensified by the war remained, and the Syrian forces were incapable of disarming the sectarian militias and pacifying the whole country. The Lebanese Christians, who had welcomed them in 1976, soon came to detest the presence of Syrian troops and demand their withdrawal. But Syrian domination was opposed by some in the opposite camp too. The continuing presence of the Palestinian quasi-state in Lebanon meant that Israel always found cause to intervene. The alliance between Israel and various branches of the Christian militia, which had begun during the civil war, continued to develop.⁸⁰

Among the external factors in the Lebanese civil war of 1975 – 1976, it was Syria which played the most prominent, intricate and, for many observers, controversial role. The prominence of Syria's role was displayed in an ironic fashion by the fact that as a result of the war it could afterwards hardly been

⁷⁹ RABINOVICH, I. *The War for Lebanon, 1970 – 1983*, pp. 99 – 101.

⁸⁰ MANSFIELD, P. *A History of the Middle East*, p. 310.

regarded as an external factor in Lebanese politics. The intricacy of Syria's policy in Lebanon, evidenced by the several shifts it underwent, was shaped by the importance of Syria's direct interests in Lebanon and by the interplay between that policy and the Syrian regime's domestic, regional, and international policies.

Since Israel's earliest days, its leaders had seen the advantages of promoting Christian separatism in Lebanon and creation of a Maronite-dominated Christian state which would be in alliance with Israel. In southern Lebanon the Israelis had an opportunity to make a start by helping to establish a friendly border enclave controlled by a Christian officer (Major Sa'd Ḥaddād) who had their full support. With the Israeli-Syrian mutual agreement, mediated through the Americans, Syrian forces kept a substantial distance from the Israeli frontier. Lebanese southerners then crossed the "open border" into Israel for refuge or medical treatment. Many of them were Shi'ī Muslims. The situation became more dangerous with the advent to power in Israel in May 1977 of a right wing government headed by Menachem Begin. The virtual certainty was that Israel need no longer be concerned about war with Egypt and was free to concentrate on its northern front.

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