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## Beirut Again

On February 7, 1985, I heard Professor Kainal Salibi, the American University of Beirut historian, speaking on the divergent views of Lebanon's recent history as seen from the two sides of Beirut. It was a fascinating comparison of the myths from both sides, often contradictory but strangely complementary in the sense that the conspiracy theories and accusations of bad faith both revolved around assertions of support for the concept of a free and independent Lebanon in which all Lebanese could live in peace. According to Salibi, the gap between them could be bridged by a rather small leap, which would have to be made by the Christians. The essential step in his view was small—reform of the army, so that the Druze and Muslims could trust it, which they still did not.

Reform of the army had, of course, been a major issue for some time. I had thought that progress in that regard had been registered with passage of the Army Law some years back, but the army's performance in bombarding Ras Beirut, including Salibi's house, apparently erased that forward movement. Druze suspicions of the army's intentions in south Lebanon were blocking deployment there, and the Druze position looked negative and destructive—understandable in the Lebanese context but suicidal in the long term. The Syrians reportedly tried to pressure the Druze and other groups having militias to relax their opposition to the army's entry into the area, but there was no indication whether their efforts were having any effect.

[Twenty years later, all of this had been overtaken and outdated by the move of the Syrian-Iranian-sponsored Hezbollah militia into the south, facing Israel on the border. The resulting complexities are beyond the scope of this book.]

Reform of the army, however, is only part of what has to be done. There are deep-seated socioeconomic and political problems that must also be dealt with, and the leadership of Lebanon has yet to show that it is up to the task. Nor was President Elias Sarkis and his team, or Suleiman Frangieh or Charles Helu. Indeed, the drama of Lebanon over the past twenty years has been one of incompetent leadership, whether those leaders have tried to continue the Chehabian system of minimal activity, as in the case of Helu and Sarkis, or the tribal politics of Frangieh and Amin Gemayel. It has reached the point that people look back on President Fuad Chehab's era with nostalgia as a golden age, and yet Chehab was not widely loved, at least by the Christians, as Salibi noted, and his disdain for political institutions, such as they were, was one reason these did not take on more substance. He at least had the merit of controlling the country effectively, however, and had the good sense to repair relations with Nasser and, to a lesser extent, the Syrians, who broke away from Nasser in 1961 and were therefore suspicious of Chehab because he stayed on good terms with him.

As I listened to Salibi talk, I thought back on the catalogue of errors that led us to the debacle of February 8, 1984. Taking 1958 and the Murphy mission as a clean break with the ill-conceived Eisenhower doctrine and CIA shenanigans in Lebanon, we had something of a tabula rasa in the early 1960s. All systems were go, and Lebanon was headed for an era of prosperity and economic expansion based on its banking system and genial anarchy.

Our first mistake was in giving the nod to Charles Helu as Chehab's successor. That is perhaps an overstatement of what we did, but that was how the Lebanese perceived it. All the presidential candidates were swarming around us in the summer of 1964—Fuad Ammoun, Charles Helu, Suleiman Frangieh, Yusuf Hitti, Raymond Edde, Jawad Boulos, Abdul Aziz Chehab, Manuel Yunis, and others whose names I forget. Raymond Edde was the most attractive of them all, but he was disliked by Chehab and not taken as seriously as he should have been by the Americans, including Armin Meyer,

who was then our ambassador (I was political officer at the time). One night Armin had a big dinner party at Yarze to which he invited a number of the would-be candidates. I remember that everyone knew he was being looked over and that the air was electric with double entendres and jokes about foreign political interference of the sort so dear to the Lebanese.

The next morning Armin and I talked over the candidates, and Armin said he rather liked Charles Helu. So did I. He was intelligent, eloquent, and had a sense of humor. I left soon after to go to Princeton for a year, but understood that Armin, in a conversation with Chehab some days after my departure, gave him to understand that we would not support a bid by him for a second term (for which Chehab was angling) and that we had no objection to Charles Helu.

Helu was a weak man. He had no political base at all, and he was saved only by his native wit. He managed to govern from weakness with considerable skill, but he negotiated the Cairo agreement in 1969, which allowed the armed Palestinians to operate freely, or almost so, from Lebanon, and that was the principal seed that sprouted into the civil war. In Helu's defense, he had no support from the other Arabs, all of whom conspired to dump on Lebanon the refuse from their own camps. Had he made a spirited resistance, he might have won, but perhaps not. Muslim loyalties to Lebanon, as opposed to Arab nationalism, were questionable at that point. Helu himself openly said "mea culpa," but it is far from obvious to me that he had any real choice.

Suleiman Frangieh was elected in 1970 with the idea that, as a *qabaday*, or political thug, he would be tough on the Palestinians and other troublemakers, but he proved to be a disappointment. Thrown into prominence by the sudden incapacity from a stroke of his more intelligent brother, Hamid, Suleiman became leader of the clan in spite of an unpromising past. He was no worse than his predecessor, perhaps, but he was no better, and corruption involving members of his family was an open scandal, which seriously marred the regime's image and its ability to deal with trouble when it came. In Frangieh's defense, he had inherited the Cairo agreement and the results of Black September in Jordan, and it is doubtful that any Lebanese president would have been able to deal effectively

with the resultant problems. Frangieh was at least courageous and direct, and the collapse might have come sooner under Helu. The inherent weaknesses of the Lebanese system made it incapable of standing up to the pressures brought to bear from both inside and out.

I was not involved with Lebanon from 1964 to 1977, and the details of our errors and miscalculations during that period are largely unknown to me. The greater problem of our policy on the Arab-Israel question was a factor in the Lebanese collapse. Our failure to move more energetically to implement Resolution 242, or to press for Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories and our unwillingness to talk to the PLO except via General Walters and the CIA, all contributed to the continuing crisis in Lebanon; but these were errors and omissions on a broader scale and not strictly Lebanese in scope.

On the Lebanese scene we made, or almost made, a couple of errors that perhaps gave rise to problems of perception and communications but which did not affect the basic strength of our position. Ambassador Dwight Porter reportedly urged that we arm the Kata'ib, or Phalanges, and apparently his attraction to that organization gave rise to some misconceptions about American sentiments and intentions. But these, while still bothersome by the time I came along, were something that could be countered. Perhaps more serious was the sniffing dog incident, in which an overzealous narcotics agent used a dog to inspect the luggage of President Frangieh and his suite when they arrived in New York on a visit to the United Nations. Frangieh was mortally offended and did not receive our ambassador, Mac Godley, for some time. In retrospect, Godley should have been withdrawn, because the lack of communications at the top was a serious handicap to our ability to deal with the crisis when it came. There were many ins and outs to that story, however, and I have no right to second guess.

My *amour propre* was also piqued at the thought of being selected for the difficult and dangerous task of ambassador to Lebanon, and by the thought that perhaps I could do something to help Lebanon out of its difficulties. I thought I knew the country as well, or better, than anyone in the service and I had a deep love for it. I could not say that about any other place I had served. As a cardiac

patient, however, I was worried about the stress I would encounter and about my vulnerability in the event I was wounded, because I was taking a blood thinner. I adopted a fatalistic approach to this, however, and decided it was better to die while active and in full flower rather than to decay in old age, which I am now doing.

On arrival in Beirut we were met by a crowd of correspondents, and thus began twenty months of constant publicity and press coverage. I made a prepared statement to the effect that it was time to bind up the wounds and start the process of reconstruction; we were then whisked off in our armored cavalcade and a new life began. We were taken to the old DCM apartment in the Duraffourd building, a hundred yards down the corniche from the Embassy, to be briefed by our DCM, George Lane, and his wife Betsy, on the new rules. I would normally travel in an armored limousine with a guard car in front and in back. My personal bodyguard, David Marshal, whom we had picked up in Rome, would sit in the front seat; Bob O'Brien, the regional security officer, would ride in one of the other cars part of the time. Everyone was armed. Our total party, when fully staffed, was thirteen people. (We moved up to the residence at Yarze, near the presidential palace, late in the spring, glad to get out of the Duraffourd, which was confining and depressing.)

I called on Foreign Minister Fuad Boutros the following day and presented my credentials to President Sarkis on the 15th, which must be a speed record. Vance arrived on the 17th and was taken up to the presidential palace for a meeting and lunch. During lunch I was roundly berated by Phil Habib, in a most graceless way, for not insisting on being present when Vance and Sarkis met for a tête-à-tête, in which case it would not have been a tête-à-tête.

The essence of the message Vance was bearing was that we supported the independence and integrity of Lebanon, that we were prepared to support the central government politically and materially to this end, and that we also hoped to do something about the overall Palestine problem. Sarkis and Boutros were gratified, and Vance went off in a cloud of goodwill and optimism. Then the grind began.

Two problems in particular were posed at that point, and were

still posed when I left and are still posed today: disarming the militias and the South. The most pressing of these on my arrival had been disarming the militias. The Syrians, who dominated the Arab Deterrent Forces, were poised to enter the Sabra and Shatilla camps on February 14 or 15 to start collecting arms from the PLO. Their tanks were moving into position, and a fierce struggle loomed. We and the Lebanese government very much wanted the Syrians to grasp this nettle, but we did not want it to ruin Vance's visit, so we asked them to postpone it a week. Meanwhile Arafat and others were urging that it be postponed indefinitely or canceled. The Syrians agreed to postpone it, and then lost momentum. As a result, arms were never collected. There was a farcical voluntary surrender of arms by all the militias some months later in which they got rid of some old equipment, but their real strength remained untouched. There undoubtedly would have been carnage had the Syrians proceeded into Sabra and Shatilla as scheduled that February, but it might have prevented a great deal more carnage five years later.

The other problem, the South, proved to be just as intractable, and it exposed the basic hollowness of our assurances of support to Lebanon—those assurances were valueless when they crossed purposes with Israel.

The story begins with Syrian efforts to move into south Lebanon to bring the Palestinians there under control in December 1976 (or January 1977). When they reached the village of Aishiya eight kilometers north of Nabatiyah, the Israelis sent word that they should move no further or the Israelis would react militarily; they had reached the Red Line. (There is a good deal of mythology about the so-called Red Line; Israeli writers in particular write as though it were in fact a line drawn on a map. I have never seen that map and do not know anyone who has.)

The negotiations over Israeli acquiescence in Syrian entry into Lebanon in 1976 were carried out through Kissinger. He and his sidekick, Peter Rodman, and some confidential clerks at CIA, should know what the agreement actually was; but as of 1985, Kissinger could not recall its terms and the State Department was unable to find a piece of paper setting them forth. My understanding of it at the time was that there were no lines on maps, that the Israe-



lis had agreed to let the Syrians come into Lebanon provided they did not get too close to Israel or threaten Israeli access to Lebanese air space. The Syrians and Lebanese thought the Litani was the line. Nabatiyah is just north of that river and the Syrians had no hope of controlling the Palestinians if they did not control Nabatiyah. Prime Minister Yitzakh Rabin, commenting in an article by Naomi Weinberger in the Summer 1983 *Middle East Journal*, explained Israeli policy as follows:

I believed that Syrian military presence along the Lebanese-Israeli border was much more dangerous to Israel in the long run than the presence of the PLO, which I did not consider as a military threat to the very existence of Israel....I will not deny [that], as a result of our limitations [of] the Syrians going beyond the "red line," practically we gave an umbrella to the PLO to run away from the Syrians to the southern part of the country.

Rabin's decision was understandable. It made sense in Israeli military terms, but it spelled death for Lebanon, because the Palestinian presence in the South led eventually to the Israeli invasion of 1982. This would not have happened had there been disciplined Syrian troops along the border, or even controlling the Litani.

Although the embassy in Beirut remonstrated with the department, and I believe officers in the department supported the same view, the Israeli action came on the cusp between the Ford and Carter administrations, at a moment of maximum disorganization. Kissinger was packing his bags, and Vance was not yet on board. Had Kissinger been staying, he might have had the strength to face down the Israelis, but I doubt that Vance would have even after he was firmly in the saddle. He was not a combative man, and what the Israelis really needed at that point was a swat on the head with a two-by-four.

So the South was left a no man's land, and two limping devices were seized upon to limit the resulting damage. The Israelis built up the forces of Saad Haddad, the renegade Lebanese major, and began efforts to form a *cordon sanitaire* along the border. Meanwhile the U.S. government began to concentrate on building up the Lebanese

army with the hope that eventually it would be able to move into the area and police it. We also urged the Lebanese to send internal security forces, the gendarmerie, into the area, but that was baffled by the weakness of that organization, a weakness compounded by our inability to help it with so much as a single cartridge, thanks to the so-called State of Siege Law against our helping foreign police forces. Our efforts led eventually to the Kawkaba fiasco, discussed below.

Meanwhile, the South remained a festering problem. The Maronite militias, and particularly the Chamounists in the spring of 1977, were sending men down to the South via Israel to help Haddad and mounting attacks on Shia villages along the border in an effort to create a *cordon sanitaire*. They risked provoking a major outbreak of fighting, particularly after taking Taybeh, ancestral seat of the Asads, a leading Shia family of the South. One of my first efforts was to intercede with Camille Chamoun to get him to pull off his men before they provoked major hostilities. He reluctantly agreed, but as it transpired, regular Fath troops were brought up to help the Shia and evicted the Chamounists, with heavy losses. A little while later I tried to convince Bashir Gemayel of the dangers posed by his military cooperation with the Israelis and Haddad in defiance of his own government. He reported my remarks to Menachem Begin, who then complained to Sam Lewis, our ambassador in Tel Aviv. The working level of the department tried to support me in these efforts, but it was clear that there was no inclination at upper levels of our government to challenge Israeli assertion of a right of eminent domain in South Lebanon. Among my souvenirs is a newspaper cartoon showing me with South Lebanon hung around my neck. This was early in my tour, but it proved prophetic.

As sporadic fighting between Maronites and Palestinians continued in the South and Palestinian incursions occurred across the border, the Israelis retaliated from time to time with air strikes and limited military actions, with heavy civilian casualties when they struck at refugee camps. When this happened, frightened Shia, caught in the middle, would stream up to Beirut, exacerbating the already severe socioeconomic and security problems of that city and paving the way for eventual Shia dominance in west Beirut. Shia notables would plead that something be done to permit them

to return to normal life, but nothing was. The PLO consolidated its position, and increasingly the area south of Beirut became its surrogate homeland—the only space the Palestinians really controlled, and neither Syrians nor Lebanese could gainsay them. Their only effective enemies were the Israelis and their puppet, Saad Haddad. He was effective only to the extent that he could call on Israeli firepower, but that threat gave him potential well in excess of his real strength.

Progress was being made on other fronts, however. It was spasmodic, and slow, but as Sarkis said, we were moving two or three steps forward for every one backwards. AID had moved expeditiously to erect some prefabricated steel warehouses in the port area at Beirut, while the Beirutis had cannily sold the scrap of the old, destroyed warehouses to the Romanians at a profit. A reconstruction council had been formed under Muhammad Atallah and was deeply engaged in planning. We had some housing experts out and were concerting with the World Bank on an offer to finance low-cost housing. Meanwhile various charitable agencies were operating reconstruction programs in rural areas, and economic life was gradually returning to normal. Property owners were repairing their buildings, airline flights were resuming, and a willingness to start anew reflected the perpetual optimism of the Lebanese. Unfortunately, progress was too slow.

In particular, the reconstruction council spent all its time planning and talking, with no evidence that anything was happening. The center of Beirut, which should have been a priority area for immediate work, was untouched, not for any lack of funds but for lack of agreement on what should be done. The Beirut property owners generally put their own interests before those of the community. When I called on Ahmad Daouk, for instance, in his capacity as a former prime minister, he explained that he opposed the proposed plans to rebuild downtown Beirut because they would have eliminated many of the market stalls his family owned in the suq. I said he presumably would be compensated for that, but he replied that the compensation would not be adequate. Besides, no one could really compensate you for real estate, which was the best investment. As he said this, his shops were in ruins and totally useless to him.

I don't think his attitude was any worse than that of his peers.

It was rare to find a Beirut, or other Lebanese, for that matter, who had a thought for the commonweal before thinking of himself and his family. Few would clean up the refuse in front of their neighbor's place even though it might be polluting their own environment. I felt that Lebanon would be on the way out of its hole when I would see Beirutis caring for their neighbors' property. I never saw it. Aside from a few truly brave people in the public service and medical sectors, there was little evidence of public spirit, except where it was forced upon people at gunpoint, as happened in the areas controlled by the Kata'ib. That perhaps is the only way. Lebanese individualism is a hardy plant.

What was needed in 1977 was a charismatic leader—a man who was a natural politician, who would come on the television every night and tell his people what was going to happen, and who would be able to knock their heads together if need be. Sarkis was not that sort of person. He was shy and reticent and did not like public speaking. He was intelligent and honest, and I found him very likeable, but I also felt sorry for him. He was the wrong man in the job. I think the best comment on him was in Karim Pakradouni's book, where Sarkis, reflecting on his six years in office, says that he might not have done everything he should have, but at least he didn't do anything he should not have. That is the essence of the Chehabist philosophy, and while Sarkis's prudence was understandable in the circumstances, a more dynamic approach might have made Lebanon work. It was clear to me by 1978 in any event that the Sarkis approach would not work.

One day in 1978 Dany Chamoun called me at home in Yarze to tell me I must go to the presidential palace immediately. Sarkis had just resigned, and I must talk him out of it. If he left office there would be chaos. Although I did not take orders from Dany, or anyone else in Lebanon, I agreed with him that, whatever his faults, Sarkis would have to stay in office. I immediately walked over to the palace, which was about 300 yards away, and found the president upstairs in his living quarters. He was refusing to go to the first floor office and was receiving visitors at home as a sign that he had quit. Fuad Boutros was with him, and various other political figures were drifting in and out. His presidential aides were standing around with embarrassed smiles on their faces.

Sarkis had been brought to this pass by his inability to prevent Syrian bombardment of Beirut. How hard he had tried is not clear to me, but he had been in a blue funk about it for some time. He was also tired of the constant sniping and lack of cooperation from right-wing Maronites, and particularly the Gemayel family, whose Phalanges were the proximate cause of the trouble. The Chamounists were responsible, too, but to a lesser extent. At least one got sensible answers from Camille Chamoun. The Gemayels were beyond reason.

I sympathized with Sarkis and said I understood how he felt, but told him he could not leave or there would be chaos. Boutros said, "You see? Chaos!" Sarkis nevertheless said his mind was made up. He was tired, and he was leaving. I went back home and dictated a flash telegram (or did I telephone?) to the department, requesting an urgent message from the president or the secretary urging Sarkis to stay on. A message from Vance to Sarkis arrived a few hours later, and I delivered it in person. Meanwhile, every other ambassador of the Big Four had called in similar fashion, and so had most of the *aqtab*, or political leaders, of the country. By evening Sarkis had relented and announced his intention to stay on.

The whole affair was reminiscent of a similar abortive resignation by Fuad Chehab when he was president, and one by Henry Kissinger when he threw a tantrum in Vienna. There was inevitably a good deal of speculation that Sarkis was staging the resignation in an effort to gain support and silence his critics. If that was the purpose, it worked briefly, but his respite was soon over. I was never able to read Sarkis's mind and do not know for certain what he had intended; but I do know that he was tired and disgusted with the job and that if an impressive effort had not been made to dissuade him, he would have gone through with it. It was not a cynical political ploy.

In the summer of 1978 an IBRD (World Bank) mission under Maurice Bart came to propose a low-cost housing scheme for Beirut. This was something both we and the bank thought was vital to the future of Lebanon. While there was plenty of housing for the wealthy, the government's housing programs, which relied essentially on impersonal market forces rather than on any regulated effort to ensure social justice, were providing loans to people who could already afford housing. Nothing was being done, however,

for the poor, whose concentration in Beirut provided much of the fuel for the civil war.

Housing experts from AID and the World Bank had worked out a modest building program to start the ball rolling, and the bank was proposing to finance a major part of it. We were also prepared to contribute. Maurice and his companions called on Sarkis in the morning, and I was to call on him in the afternoon. We met for lunch at the Residence in between to see how we were doing. We found Sarkis's approach surprising but, on reflection, purely Chehabian and therefore to have been expected. He said he wanted nothing to do with such housing, because he would have to decide who got it, and that would inevitably cause all sorts of problems. Whatever he decided, those who did not get chosen would attack him. In the Lebanese scheme of things, it has always seemed easier to let the market make the decisions, and that is one of the problems.

In spite of Sarkis's problems, we were making progress throughout 1977 and early 1978, until the incident at Fayadiyah in February 1978. The full truth of Fayadiyah will never be known. The following is my account. Others will differ, and I make no claim to have all the facts. On the other hand, I have no axes to grind.

For some time the Maronites had been complaining about the excesses of the Syrian occupation, about the behavior of Syrian officers, who were systematically stealing everything they could, about the rudeness and insolence of Syrian army personnel at road blocks, and about an attitude implying that the Syrians were planning to occupy Lebanon permanently. Our contacts at all levels of the Phalanges, including Bashir Gemayel, revealed the prevalence of very unrealistic ideas about Christian vs. Syrian military capabilities. The Phalangists in particular, but other Christians as well, were boasting of their ability to take on the Syrians and expel them from Lebanon. They were counting on Israeli and, to a lesser extent, American support, in this enterprise. Their illusions about the Americans were fed by Charles Malik. He had been received by Vance and reportedly returned saying that, Parker's preaching to the contrary notwithstanding, the American administration understood the Maronites' position and would support them against the Syrians. Whether this was in fact what Malik reported I do not

know, but that was what one Christian contact (Karim Pakradouni) told us.

In December 1977 Bashir Gemayel had called on me one evening to say he was planning to take over the government. He was going to seize the presidential palace and institute a new order. I told him not to be foolish and that we would oppose any such attempt on his part. I did not tell Sarkis or Boutros of this conversation until it became clear, in a matter of hours, that Bashir had been talking in this fashion all over town and that Johnny Abdo, the G-2 intelligence man, had already told Sarkis. The president summoned Bashir and his father to the palace and asked what was going on. Bashir denied vehemently that he had ever had such ideas. I happened to be waiting in the president's outer office when Bashir and Pierre came out, Pierre looking grim as usual and Bashir looking his normal, smiling self. He was a consummate liar and dissembler. The truth was not in him.

Roughly two months later, on February 7, 1978, as we were puttering around the garden one weekend morning, we heard the sound of gunfire coming from the direction of Fayadiyah, the military academy just over the Hazmieh ridge. Our Lebanese guards quickly discovered that there was a firefight between Lebanese and Syrians on the Aley road, and several of them rushed off to do their part, shooting at God knows what. One of them returned to announce triumphantly that he had gotten three Syrians, and Ed Badalato, my defense attaché, reported that there was euphoria among the officers at Lebanese army headquarters up the hill. The Lebanese had given the Syrians a lesson they would not forget.

The incident reportedly was sparked by a dispute at a roadblock set up by the Syrians just below the academy. The Syrians, so the story went, had insulted some Lebanese soldiers, whose companions had thereupon come out of the academy and shot up a Syrian convoy coming down the hill, killing a large number of Syrian soldiers. The Lebanese operation had been under the direction of Colonel Barakat, commander of the academy, who was subsequently sent as military attaché to Washington and promoted to general. He was a notorious hardliner and his assignment to Fayadiyah, a sensitive post, showed very poor judgment on someone's part.

The Fayadiyah incident signaled a generalized campaign of



Maronite sniping and ambushing of Syrians. The Phalanges were the most prominent, but a notorious Chamounist thug, known as Hanash, or Snake, who dominated the Ain al-Rummaneh district, was reportedly responsible for some of the worst excesses, including the ambushing and burning of another convoy.

Though the Syrians were perhaps prepared to swallow the Fay-adiyah incident, since there may indeed have been some reason for the Lebanese outburst, they wanted the perpetrators of the other incidents punished. Their way of exerting pressure to this end was to bombard east Beirut. We could stand on our terrace and watch the Katyusha rockets taking off from a launching site in Sin al-Fil. They made a tremendous noise. Damage was limited, but the psychological impact was severe. The Lebanese announced the formation of a mixed (Syrian and Lebanese) tribunal to try the perpetrators of the most flagrant of the ambushes. These occurred in Furn ash-Shubbak and involved known Phalangist gunmen, who had killed the occupants of a Syrian jeep in front of many witnesses. At Fuad Boutros's request, I went to see Pierre Gemayel to urge him to surrender the perpetrators to the tribunal. He gave me a long harangue about his inability to control the action of all the "cons" who were claiming to be in the Phalanges, and he did nothing. The tribunal never came to anything, the bombardment continued, and Lebanon went downhill most of the time thereafter.

Ghassan Tuani later told me there was evidence that the Fay-adiyah incident, which we were certain at the time was a deliberate Phalangist provocation, was done in coordination with the Israelis. Given the general irresponsibility and stupidity of Israeli actions in Lebanon, I could easily believe it, but have seen no hard evidence and there is no need to invoke Israeli complicity to explain what happened. I suspect it was a purely Lebanese initiative, based on miscalculations regarding U.S. and Israeli support.

The spring of 1978 was violent. Brief periods of calm and hope would be broken without warning, usually by the Maronites but occasionally by the Syrians, who seemed to have only one reaction to provocation—bombardment. The Syrians also used kidnapping and assassination, but this seemed the work of dark and twisted minds with no coordinated plan for what they were doing. Sarkis, putative commander of the Arab Force, at one point tried to order



the Syrians to stop, but they ignored him. I went to see him the day that happened and found him practically in tears, as shells fell on the city down below and around us from time to time. Syrian intentions were never clear, and probably never will be. As someone has pointed out, Hafez al-Assad belonged to a *batni*, or esoteric sect, and *batnis* are inclined to deserve their name. The destruction of Hama and Beirut are but two aspects of the same brutish mentality.

At one point, at the urging of Fuad Boutros, I managed to persuade a number of the *aqtab* to agree on a resolution to discuss the militias, the details of which have faded from my mind. My only record at the moment is a cartoon showing Pierre Gemayel, Saeb Salam, Camille Chamoun, and Kamel al-Asad disporting themselves bashfully on a stage while an unlabeled hand sticks a Parker pen through the curtain in the background. This was a considerable accomplishment, but it fell apart a couple of days later as someone started taking potshots at someone else, or was it the Israeli invasion?

In early May, Jeanne and I left for consultation in Washington. Heavy fighting had broken out a day or two before our planned departure, and it was not at all clear we would be able to make it to the airport. We managed to do so during a lull, however, and boarded the aircraft without incident. I was tired and nervous and depressed by the security precautions thought necessary to assure our safety, particularly because we had just learned that the group we thought had killed Ambassador Meloy had said it was going to get us. I counted thirty men armed with automatic weapons guarding the approaches to the plane. Settled in my seat, I was given a copy of that morning's *Herald Tribune*, which carried a front-page statement by President Carter saying Israel's security was our primary concern in the Middle East. It was the normal fatuous declaration one comes to expect from all administrations in Washington, and I should have ignored it, but it particularly irked me at that moment and I brooded over it all the way home. My first priority was our own safety, and that of other Americans, not the Israelis. They had shown scant concern for my safety or that of anyone other than themselves, and I really did not feel like sacrificing myself for them, or for a president who did not know better than to make statements

like that.

On agreeing to go to Beirut in 1977 I had posed two conditions: that I be allowed to take Jeanne with me, even though dependents had not been allowed back, and that I would be allowed to leave after eighteen months if I had had enough. I had about decided to take up this option by the time we arrived in Washington. My resolve was strengthened by conversations I had with Mike Sterner, Hal Saunders, and Bill Crawford at the department. They made it clear to me that we had opted to go for a separate peace between Egypt and Israel, and that we were moving in a cynical way in that direction. I told the gentlemen in question I did not want to face the bloodshed that would result. I was quite angry.

When Sadat went to Jerusalem in 1977, he was talking in terms of a comprehensive as opposed to a bilateral settlement—of peace between Israel and the other Arab states as well as Egypt. The Israelis, however, were already talking in terms of a bilateral settlement as the only reasonable possibility. About a month later we received a circular telegram from the department asking for frank views as to whether we would be better off with a separate peace than none. The answer had to be “yes,” because removing Egypt from the contest would lessen the chances for a major Arab-Israeli war and for great power confrontation in the area. It was clear to me, however, that the price for this would be paid in Lebanon, and I so wrote to Morris Draper.

Subsequently, there was a small chiefs-of-mission conference in Amman. Hermann Eilts refused to go, which was unfortunate. He sent Art Lowry in his place. Dick Murphy was there from Damascus, John West from Jidda, Sam Lewis from Tel Aviv, Mike Newlin from Jerusalem, and Atherton and Saunders from Washington. There was a lot of discussion about what sort of fig leaf Sadat would need to protect him in the event he concluded a separate peace, but we were still talking in terms of progress on the overall problem. The argument advanced by Atherton and Saunders then and subsequently, as I recall it, was that once the peace process started, it would create a “dynamic for peace” that would bring others along. This was based on assumptions about Israeli interest in wider agreements, assumptions that overlooked the essentially bloody-minded character of Begin and his associates. It might have

been realistic to think in those terms with a group of enlightened labor Zionists in power, but not with a group of ex-terrorists in control. Furthermore, the argument assumed a willingness on the part of the United States to exert pressure on Israel, a willingness that faded rapidly, if it ever existed, as the 1980 election approached.

That circular telegram about separate peace, which I assumed was drafted by Mike Sterner, marked the beginning of the failure of the Sadat mission to affect an overall peace. Most of my colleagues in the field gave the usual cautious replies, and none of them, except Art Lowry, who was too junior to be effective, spoke out at Amman. The die had been cast, I feared, and if I had had any doubts, these were removed by the conversations I had in May.

Although I had been standing up well to the physical and mental stress of Beirut, thanks in part to venting my spleen frequently in telegrams to the department, there were limits to my supply of energy and stamina. I was getting tired and saw no hope for the future. I was prepared to die for my country, but not for a policy in which I did not believe. There were more peaceful places one could go, and I had had my share of danger, from World War II to Amman in 1955, to Yemen and Egypt in 1967, and to eighteen months in Beirut. I decided to bail out and accordingly went to Harry Barnes, the director general of the Foreign Service, and told him I wanted to leave Beirut in the next six months or so. He asked if I was serious, and I said I was. Thus began the process that took me out of Beirut on October 1, after I was appointed and confirmed as ambassador to Rabat.

I went back to DACOR Bacon House, where we were staying, and told Jeanne what I had done. She berated me roundly and said I would regret it. She was right, but I don't think she understood just how depressed I felt.

We returned to Beirut via a brief stopover at our Italian farmhouse and plunged back into the arena. I did not tell anyone except George Lane, who was about to go off to Yemen as ambassador, that I would be leaving.

In 1977, during the era when things were looking up, we had staged a very successful Fourth of July reception. It had been the first such occasion since 1975 to which people from all sectors of the city came. Every politician of any importance was there. Camille

Chamoun wore his white suit, which, as Halim Maamari pointed out to me, was a good sign, because he only did so on very special occasions. We had a large awning set up over the terrace outside the living room, lots of champagne and good hors d'oeuvres and everyone seemed to have a good time. It was widely heralded as a return to normal.

We resolved to repeat the performance in 1978, even though the atmosphere was tense and we had difficulty getting the men up the hill to fix the awning. We invited everybody. Heavy firing started a day or two before the Fourth, however, and we eventually decided we would have to cancel, which we did with newspaper and radio announcements on the morning of the Fourth. By then the situation was so bad there was not a car on the road. My staff and I were there and dressed, just in case someone came. We had one visitor, Antoine Jabre, the Maronite businessman (beer), who hadn't heard the word and who had driven over from the Matn. He stayed for a glass of champagne and reported that his ride had been very spooky. No one else had been on the road. He was unaware of the shooting going on all sides.

We managed to lead a fairly pleasant life for a while that summer. Firing would start every afternoon after about 2:30, when we could no longer stay out in the garden. We rarely went out at night, but the daytime was a time of feverish activity when the shooting stopped. The Israeli invasion had come and gone and provoked the creation of UNIFIL, the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, which was supposed to take the Israelis' place as they retreated but which was frustrated by the Israelis' interposition of Haddad and their refusal to let UNIFIL come to the border. We were all hopeful that UNIFIL would lead to peace in Lebanon, but it had become evident by June that this was unlikely and that the South was going to continue to be a problem.

### **Kawkaba**

From the beginning of my tour in Lebanon, if not before, we had been urging the Lebanese to send their own troops south. Habib had made a particular effort to persuade them of this during the UN session in the fall of 1977; but Boutros, who was minister of defense

as well as foreign affairs, and his Army commander, General Victor Khoury, were unwilling to do so because the army was so weak. Both men were innately cautious and prudent, and they had no illusions about how well the various sectarian elements would hang together if called upon to shoot at other Lebanese, as they would have to do if they ran up against Major Haddad and his men, which they were sure to do unless something could be worked out.

In the summer of 1978, we began to work out such an arrangement, ignoring to the extent we could the impractical suggestions coming from our UN mission in this respect and concentrating on the facts on the ground. In July, I was talked into letting Jim Leonard from USUN and Nat Howell from ARN/State come out to Lebanon and go to the South under UN auspices. At this point, or soon after, we had reached agreement with the Israelis that they would not object to the Lebanese army moving into certain positions in the South. Jim Leonard made a strong demarche to Boutros about the workability of this arrangement and the need for the Lebanese to grasp the nettle.

Meanwhile, the Lebanese had been working on another approach. They were trying to bribe Haddad to leave the South. They had sent a young officer from the Marjayoun area down to see Haddad and offer him a large sum of money, a passport to go anywhere he wanted, and guarantees that he would not be pursued or prosecuted as long as he did not return to Beirut. My recollection is that the amount to be offered was \$25,000. When Boutros and G-2 Johnny Abdo told me this, I expressed surprise that Haddad would settle for such a piddling sum. Abdo, never one to lack confidence, assured me he would grab it and run.

In anticipation of the success of this effort, and of Israeli cooperation, the Lebanese were assembling a handpicked force in the Beqaa to march south along the eastern flank of Mount Lebanon. They were insisting on this route because they did not want to move under Palestinian sufferance along the coastal plain. There was a delicate task of coordination between Beirut, Damascus, and Tel Aviv. To facilitate things at the Beirut end, Johnny Abdo gave me a scrambler telephone to use for talking to him at any hour of the day or night. Almost as soon as it was installed in my office someone called to warn us that there were other people listening

on that telephone and not to use it. I therefore confined myself to banalities most of the time, or sent a messenger.

By this time we were living in the Embassy downtown. The situation up at Yarze had become so bad that our security officer had convinced me I should vacate the Residence if for no other reason than that my personnel should not be exposed to the dangerous transit up the hill. This transpired the day after Jim Leonard and Nat Howell had come back from their ill-considered trip to the South. Jim and I were sitting beside the pool having a drink at sunset, and Jim had remarked on how pleasant it all was and how difficult it was to believe that, as the people in the department were saying, Parker was working under great stress.

That night we were awakened by shells dropping in the Residence grounds. One of the Marines had entered in his flak jacket and helmet and told us we must move down to the shelter, which was the pantry on the ground floor. We got up and dressed, I took a Golden Molson from the refrigerator, and we went into the pantry for an hour or two, where I reminded Leonard of his words. Our tension was heightened by the fact that one of my American bodyguards had almost been killed by a stray bullet at the entrance to our sleeping quarters. The round had parted his hair before lodging in the doorframe. When last I saw him he was wearing it on a gold chain around his neck.

Knowing that we were going to be moving in a few months anyway, I decided to pull out of the Residence entirely and move into the little pied-a-terre we had already fixed up in the Chancery. Jeanne was quite depressed by this, and so was I, but it seemed the wise thing to do at the time, and it was useful to be there during the Kawkaba operation, because communications were a good deal easier.

Thus, in the middle of the night before the troops were scheduled to move south from Shtaura towards Kawkaba in the southern Beqaa, we received an urgent message from Tel Aviv that there was no deal as far as the Israelis were concerned. They gave some disingenuous explanation about the troops in question being under Syrian influence. I called both Boutros and Abdo to inform them of this, and there was dismay on the other end of the line. They decided, however, that the operation was too far advanced to be

halted. They had already announced it and would have to take their chances.

A day or two before this, it had become clear that the effort to bribe Haddad had not worked. The young officer from Marjayoun had been summoned by Bengal or Eitan on the Israeli side and given a terrible dressing down and sent home. Haddad's attitude was ambiguous. He had indicated an interest privately but had scornfully rejected the offer in front of the Israelis. He subsequently told a group of reporters that I personally had offered him \$250,000, which he had refused. Like others in this affair, Haddad did not have great regard for truth.

The troops got as far as Kawkaba, where Haddad's men began lobbing shells at them. The column stopped promptly and eventually withdrew. The Israelis later offered to let the column be transported by helicopter to certain agreed locations, but this was unacceptable to the Lebanese both as to location and access. They rejected the offer as an insult.

#### **"Parker's Panic"**

When we moved back into town from our residence in the summer of 1978, I was alarmed by the number of heavily armed men to be seen on the streets of the Ain Mreisseh quarter at night. At the same time, CIA reports we thought reliable indicated that Bashir Gemayel was getting ready for an offensive in Beirut. For some time the department's security people had been making noises about the desirability of sending dependents out of Lebanon, where the situation had deteriorated well below the level at which we had let them return the year before. The number of people involved was small, about twelve, and I had discretion to order their departure whenever I felt the situation required.

After a full discussion of the problem with my staff, I decided to order the dependents home. In retrospect, it was unnecessary. We had overreacted to the intelligence reports, which proved wrong. Given the number of people involved, this would not have been a matter of public concern had we shipped them out quietly, as most other embassies had already done. Unfortunately, my officers had prevailed on me to advise the American community of what we



were doing, otherwise we would be accused of sneaking out when we knew danger was coming. We ordered the Marines to begin telephoning people to tell them we were sending dependents home and advising all people who did not have a real reason for being in Lebanon to leave as well (we did not imagine there were many in that category but felt we must give advice to those who might be). By the time this had worked its way through the Marines and the telephone system, it began to sound like a rout, and there was a good deal of excitement within the community and among the Lebanese. I half-hoped that this would deter the Phalanges from doing something stupid, and perhaps it did, but I certainly would not claim it.

There was a good deal of snickering by other embassies, which, as indicated, had already sent their dependents home with no one outside being the wiser. My British colleague, Peter Wakefield, unkindly referred to it as "Parker's panic," and I'm sure that many people who resented my prominence on the Lebanese scene took pleasure in my discomfort. (More will be heard about this later.)

We left Lebanon on October 1, arriving in Paris to learn that almost as soon as we left, Syrian shelling of the city had started in earnest and that it had been the worst day since the civil war began in terms of casualties. In my farewell speeches to Lebanese friends I had said that it was always my luck to do the groundwork and have someone else reap the product, and I was sure my successor would find a better Lebanon than I did. In fact, he did, but it took a while, and he had his problems too. I went back in 1983 and my friends all told me I had been there during the worst period other than the civil war, but they were premature. Lebanon continued to deteriorate, with no end in sight.

### **Postscript**

January 31, 1986: I spent the day in the department reading my telegrams from Beirut. I was impressed by the number of them—perhaps eight hours' worth of reading. What leaps out at me when going through them is how often I saw the foreign minister, Fuad Boutros, and President Sarkis, how tenuous the situation was from the beginning, how often we urged the Lebanese to send troops



to the South, and how cautious Sarkis and Boutros were about responding. In retrospect they were right. We couldn't get the Israelis to cooperate with UNIFIL, so in time we tried to throw the Lebanese into the breach, and it didn't work. We had a lot of blood on our hands before it was over.