

The new Byzantium for the Middle East: key to the intrigues over Lebanon

by Allen Douglas

With war once again on the horizon in the Middle East, David Kimche, secretary general of the Israeli Foreign Ministry, arrived in the United States on June 16. The nominal purpose of Kimche's discussions with U.S. State Department Middle East specialists Eagleburger, Veliotis, and Draper was to secure an Israeli pullback from the Chouf Mountains southeast of Beirut, where Israeli soldiers are being ambushed almost daily. In fact, what Kimche was arguing for was a deployment of U.S. troops to fill the gap, in conjunction with French and Italian forces, a proposal far broader than the question of Israeli withdrawal. Such a deployment would not only put U.S. soldiers into the deadly Chouf, but more important, would put American forces a hair's breadth away from the Soviets who are "advising" Syrian troops. Such a move is reportedly being resisted by forces in the Reagan administration who recognize it for what it is—a trap for a superpower confrontation.

There is one, and only one, way to understand the current rapidly shifting situation in the Middle East—from the standpoint of the new Russian Empire "Third Rome" ideology now guiding the Soviet Union and its Swiss and Greek Orthodox allies. For countless centuries, this area of the world has been ruled by empires of one name or another, Roman, Byzantine, or Ottoman. With the end of World War II, the enormous power and influence of the United States threatened to, directly and indirectly, re-order once and for all the affairs of an area brutalized under these various empires. The cornerstone of American foreign policy, in its best moments, has been to foster the development of sovereign, secular republics in the area.

Now a new empire is being planned, the Third and Final Roman Empire, with its capital in Moscow. The nations of the area are to be ripped apart on the imperial model of squabbling religious and ethnic entities. It is time the various players on the stage, including the patriotic individuals in the Reagan administration, understand the roles allotted to them in this scenario and who, exactly, the gamemasters are.

The cornerstone of Byzantine Empire control over this area was always the Greek Orthodox Church. More recently, over the past 100 years or so, most of the radical ideologies of the modern era—including the Arab National Movement, the Parti Populaire Syrien of Antoine Saadi, and the radical

wing of the PLO under George Habash and Nayef Hawatmeh—have been invented by Orthodox Christians. Many Arabs have noticed this, without, however, generally understanding the underlying purpose for their creation. *These social movements are deployments of the Orthodox Church and its oligarchical families for the purpose of maintaining an imperial model of political life.*

Historically, the "big brother" of the Greek, Antiochian, and other Orthodox churches in the area has been the Russian Orthodox Church. As one Greek Orthodox priest put it: "The Orthodox Church, especially in the Middle East, is very much aware of Holy Russia. There has always been a great deal of moral and financial support for these churches from the Russian Orthodox Church. If you go into an Orthodox church even today in the Middle East, they will take you over to some icons or something, and say, 'See, this is what the Czar gave us.' For instance, in my church in Beirut, there is a massive, solid gold altar, and people will say to you immediately, 'See what Czar Nicholas gave us.' And they will say 'Holy Russia' or something like that, not the 'Soviet Union.' This is particularly true in Syria." And, as another source well informed in these matters commented, "When the Patriarch of Moscow calls up the Patriarch of Beirut, he listens like a little puppy dog."

It is through this channel of existing influence that the integrated entity of the Russian Orthodox Church and the KGB is massively expanding in the wake of the diplomatic farce orchestrated by George Shultz.

The Byzantine families

There is an old saying in the intelligence community in the Middle East that the first thing KGB agents do when they come to Beirut is to stop at the Palais de Sursock, home of one of the oldest Greek Orthodox families of the Levant, to pay their respects. These old Greek and Slavic-origin families, including the Sursocks, Trads, and Boustroses, are a crucial mediating link between the Russian Orthodox Church and their own Greek Orthodox Church. These old Byzantine families convey the image that they are "above politics," operating through international banking networks and cultural organizations such as the Sursock Museum and the annual Baalbek Festival. In fact these are the families, owning pol-

iticians by the dozens, that are committed to the destruction of the nation state of Lebanon and to the establishment of the Moscow-centered Third Rome. These are the families who control such leading figures in Lebanese politics as Camille Chamoun (also on the board of the Moscow Narodny Bank, the KGB front), Charles Helou (former president of Lebanon, married to Nina Trad), and numerous other figures in the chamber of deputies, including vice-presidents of that body. "When they call the Greek Patriarch, they don't repeat their words twice," said one source.

Through the same church networks, these families also control the massive hashish production and sale in the Bekaa Valley as well as the terrorism aimed at American influence in the area. As Msgr. Hilarion Capucci, Orthodox-connected priest jailed by the Israelis for three years for running guns to the radical wing of the PLO, said recently: "We want a war, a quick, short war between Syria and Israel. . . . We want a war and a certain Russian presence in the Mideast. The United States is what we hate. It is the devil! The United States is an arrogant imperialist power and we want a Russian presence to counterbalance the United States."

The radical (Orthodox-controlled) wing of the PLO is a case study of how these families operate. George Habash and Nayef Hawatmeh, de facto leaders of the PLO in the wake of the rebellion against PLO chairman Yasir Arafat, are both agents of the Greek Orthodox Church. Their weapons are stored in churches and smuggled to them by priests like Capucci. "For anything they want in Syria or Lebanon, they call the Orthodox Church, and they get it," Middle Eastern sources say.

The operation against Arafat was run by a combination of these networks inside the PLO and Swiss-controlled radical Muslim Brotherhood elements, with the support and prodding of the Soviet Union. The rebellion from the outset was aided by the security forces of Soviet-trained Rifaat Assad of Syria, brother of President Hafez Assad, who turned over key munitions depots to the insurgents. The scale of the rebellion, given the massive Soviet presence in Syria, would not have been possible without such assistance. When Arafat sent his trusted number-two aide, Salah Khalef (Abu Iyad), to Moscow to shore up his position, Khalef was widely quoted talking about the "errors" of Chairman Arafat, giving the kiss of death to Arafat, who was willing to discuss the establishment of a Palestinian state. Under the control of the Orthodox-Soviet run radicals, Arafat will have the function of helping to hold the PLO together, but as a potentially mass terrorist force, to be unleashed whenever necessary to create a blowup between Syrian and Israeli forces, assassinate moderate Arab leaders, and so forth.

It is not accidental that the insurgency against Arafat started in the town of Baalbek in the Bekaa Valley, one of the most massive hashish growing areas in the world. This town is largely Greek Orthodox and a related denomination, Melchite (Greek Catholic, Byzantine Rite), where the leading drug pushers and drug growers, often Shiites such as the

Hamadi clan, are thinly veiled cutouts for the Surssocks. The head of the Hamadi clan, for years a leading member of parliament, was notorious for wanting an airport built in the hashish-growing regions, to smuggle out the drugs, but no roads, so police or army forces could not move in. The international distribution, in Turkey, Italy, and elsewhere, is organized through the international freemasonic connections of the old families. And it is at the annual Surssock family-run Baalbek Festival on the site of old Roman ruins, that the rich and famous from Europe used to come, until the recent fighting.

The other players

The Russian and Greek Orthodox manipulation of this area toward a possible superpower confrontation could not have worked without the help of George Shultz and leading Israelis. Shultz negotiated with the Lebanese and Israelis a so-called withdrawal plan which a five-year-old child could have predicted would not work. President Assad of Syria could not politically tolerate that level of open concessions to the Israelis, including the right to reinvade Lebanon anytime they wanted. At that point, Assad, who "always played with two cards, in his hand, the Soviets and the United States, all of a sudden, only had one," noted an Arab source. The post-Begin Israeli leadership of Defense Minister Moshe Arens, former Defense Minister Ezer Weizman, and Minister of Science and Technology Yuval Neeman plan to rule an independent (i.e., free of U.S. influence) "Spartan" Israel as a satrapy for the Third Rome. David Kimche, a member of an old Swiss banking family, having negotiated the withdrawal deal with Shultz, is now meeting with former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger's cronies in the State Department to consummate Third Rome policy.

The various divisions of the Third Rome are counting on the United States responding in a bullet-headed anti-communist fashion to the Orthodox Church coordinated rise in Soviet influence in the area, falling into exactly the superpower confrontation trap planned. The purpose of the brinkmanship would be to get President Reagan into emergency negotiations with Andropov, during the course of which he would be under great pressure to negotiate away his new strategic defense doctrine of space-based energy-beam weapons. This doctrine, one of the most important strategic moves by a U.S. President in this century, is the main stumbling block in the way of the new Holy Russian Empire.

Instead of the sole reliance on deploying additional aircraft carriers to the area and reactivating the strategic Memorandum of Understanding with Israel canceled by President Reagan in 1981—all of which would help lock the United States into a military showdown with the Soviet Union—a much more intelligent response by the administration would be to fire George Shultz. This would allow the United States to start afresh. At the same time, patriotic Lebanese should have a few scores to settle with the Trads, Boustroses, and Surssocks.