
Lebanon

From Saigon to Sidon: the death of a nation

by Thierry Lalevée

While the international news media felt it necessary to analyze at length the feelings of Americans and Europeans 10 years after the fall of Saigon, the fall of the Lebanese city of Sidon to Druze and Shi'ite militias fighting under Iranian banners and posters of Ayatollah Khomeini, rated third or fourth-order news items. This was not merely because massacres in Lebanon are not considered newsworthy by the cynics of the press; a coverup is under way of the East-West political deals which are conspiring to kill this 4,000-year-old nation.

There is more than a coincidence of dates between Vietnam and Lebanon. As Saigon fell in April 1975, the first shots of the Lebanese civil war were being fired, on April 13. And just as the United States was suffering a strategic blow in Southeast Asia thanks to the diplomatic initiatives of then Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, so the Lebanese conflict was ignited by Kissinger to rid the Middle East of American and Western influence—a 10-year project which is now coming to fruition.

The conspirators

At the root of the conspiracy against Lebanon was the deal made in late 1970 between Kissinger and Hafez al Assad, then Syria's defense minister. Assad's fake military intervention against Jordan during "Black September" was essential for Kissinger, then National Security Adviser, to discredit the peace plans of Secretary of State William Rogers. Kissinger was appointed Secretary of State, and Assad became President of Syria a few months later.

The Black September crisis, organized from top to bottom by Kissinger, contained within it the seeds of the Lebanese conflict, as hundreds of thousands of Palestinians expelled from Jordan fled to Lebanon. The process was favored by Assad, who allowed few refugees into his own country, knowing that this would bring closer the realization of Kissinger's promise: the creation of a Greater Syria encompassing a large chunk of Lebanon. Syrian policy in Lebanon since its intervention in 1976, shifting from one alliance to the other, has had no other aim than dividing the country and compromising its political leaders, to the point that Lebanese national reconciliation became impossible.

But whatever may be Hafez al Assad's dreams of empire,

this has little to do with his country's ability to swallow up Lebanon. He is being given Lebanon as part of an East-West deal, which includes wiping out what remains of the moderate leadership of the Palestine Liberation Organization, thereby dashing all prospects for a genuine Mideast peace. The deal was begun under Kissinger and ratified more recently during the talks held in the first weeks of February in Vienna, between U.S. Undersecretary of State Richard Murphy and Vladimir Polyakhov, the director of the Middle East department of the Soviet foreign ministry, the former Soviet ambassador to Cairo who set the stage for President Anwar Sadat's assassination in October 1981, just before the Russians were expelled.

While King Fahd of Saudi Arabia was in Washington, D.C. proposing to President Reagan a financial and political package for peace in the Middle East, Murphy and Polyakhov discussed the end of Lebanon, agreeing that neither superpower would directly interfere into the Middle East process. Soon after, amid renewed fighting in Lebanon, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak was slapped in the face in Washington and his peace proposals rejected. Moscow and Washington had agreed that Greater Syria and Greater Israel would rule the region, a decision confirmed by the growing rumors today that a summit meeting between Presidents Reagan and Assad is in the making. This could be a tragic replay of the 1977 summit between Carter and Assad, which renewed the pledges made earlier by Kissinger.

Israel's position is no less cynical. Assad's dreams could never have been fulfilled, but for his close cooperation with Kissinger's associate Ariel Sharon, who masterminded—in complicity with Syria—the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in June 1982. The Syrian-backed Abu Nidal terrorist organization launched an assassination attempt against Israeli Ambassador to London Shlomo Argov, providing Sharon with the pretext he needed to march into Lebanon.

Such cooperation has been witnessed at each crucial point over the years. Israel's war against the Palestinians reinforced Assad's ability to chip away the power of PLO leader Yasser Arafat. Israel's new Labor Party-led coalition government of Shimon Peres has shown itself either unwilling or unable to renounce such policies, which will give Israel a northern buffer zone of Christian refugees.

Ultimately, it is Ayatollah Khomeini who is emerging as the winner in this deadly game: Southern Lebanon will become, if not an Islamic republic on the Iranian model, at least an Islamic canton, bordered on the north by a Druze entity and on the east by a belt of Syrian troops in the Bekaa valley. Although Iran's revolution was first plotted near Sidon, at the Jebel Amal College of Imam Musa Sadr, the creation of an Islamic republic in southern Lebanon is the first actual expansion of the Iranian mullahs since 1979. It is a development which is good news to no one in the region. The history of the Middle East reminds us that the fall of Sidon and Tyre preceded, by only a few years, the fall of Jerusalem!