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COVER PHOTO Lebanese boy jumps over a former Syrian position in the Bekaa Valley in eastern Lebanon, April 11, 2005. (Sharif Karim/Reuters/Landov)

COVER DESIGN Geoff Hartman
FROM THE EDITOR

Mere months ago, devotees of President George W. Bush’s Iraq adventure were positively giddy. Not only were they convinced that Iraq was on the fast track to peace, prosperity and perpetual friendliness with Washington, they believed that countries across the Greater Middle East were following close behind. Neo-conservative pundits openly awarded Bush credit for the “Arab spring” that bloomed in Lebanon and Egypt shortly after thousands of Iraqi voters and scores of Congressional Republicans waved purple fingers at the cameras. “Three cheers for the Bush doctrine,” Charles Krauthammer titled his column in Time on March 14. He continued: “It was not people power that set this in motion. It was American power. People power followed.”

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice experienced an “emotional high” of her own while speaking at the American University in Cairo on June 20. Invoking the abolitionist and civil rights struggles in the US, she declared that, in Egypt and across the Middle East, “the fear of free choices can no longer justify the denial of liberty.”

“It was important for an American official to give that speech in the heart of the Arab world,” Rice beamed at interviewers later. Autocratic leaders and long-suffering peoples alike needed to know that henceforth the US would stand with the latter against the former, Saddam Hussein being the case in point.

So disciples of the Bush doctrine must have found it jarring to open the August 14, 2005 Washington Post and read a “senior official involved in policy since the 2003 invasion” quoted as saying: “What we expected to achieve was never realistic given the timetable or what unfolded on the ground. We are in a process of absorbing the factors of the situation we’re in and shedding the unreality that dominated at the beginning.”

Thus did the official explain to the Post why, in the oft-quoted words of the headline writers, the United States has “lowered [its] sights on what can be achieved in Iraq.” Historians may date the retreat of the formerly ebullient Bush administration into what one of its spokesmen once disparaged as “the reality-based community” to the publication of this article. Therein unnamed officials acknowledge, among other things long understood by the reality-based among us, that no constitution written by the US-backed transitional government will resemble the document of the neo-conservatives’ dreams and that no milestone for the US-sponsored political transition will mark the end of the Iraqi insurgency. Surely the administration will not want to tout such an Iraq as a model for the region.

What gives with all this absorbing of factors and shedding of unreality? How did the soaring cadences of June lapse into the plodding bureaucratese of August? In some right-wing circles, there is grumbling about a slide from unadulterated neo-conservatism into the “practical idealism” attributed to Rice. Did the true believers vote for Bush and get John Kerry’s foreign policy?

A simpler explanation would be that the conflagration in Iraq, its cost in lives and currency ever greater and ever harder to justify to a querulous public, has dictated the seemingly ideological shift. As the war drags on, rather than pointing Arab nations to the beacon of Iraq, the US is likely to treat Iraq as it has traditionally treated its other Arab allies. To wit, the trappings of democracy are more important than the content, responsibility for “reform” is entrusted to those in power and support for democracy is subordinate to US strategic goals.
If that is “practical idealism,” then Rice’s speech at AUC was a prime example. She began by insisting that, contrary to popular belief in the region, the US does not want to “impose” a particular form of government when it speaks of spreading democracy. Each country will choose its own form of democracy, she said, but at a minimum democracy means the rights to speak and associate freely and “freedom from the midnight knock of the secret police.” The Egyptian regime did not escape criticism. “We are all concerned,” she said, “when peaceful supporters of democracy face violence”—a reference to the beatings visited upon protesters outside polling stations on the day of the referendum on President Husni Mubarak’s amendment to the constitution allowing for a multi-party presidential election.

Two months later, a pall of disappointment hangs over Egypt, not because the regime has ignored Rice’s words, but rather because it has heeded them well enough to satisfy Washington. Opposition forces can speak, write and associate with relative freedom—except the outlawed Muslim Brothers, about whom Rice said nothing. Mubarak took the rap on the knuckles for the referendum-day thuggery, but surely smiled when Rice said nothing about why the “supporters of democracy” were protesting. The constitutional amendment placed enough restrictions on who can run that the ruling party’s man is assured of victory, even if, as the secretary of state stipulated, voting occurs “without violence or intimidation.” Though the protesters do not accept the rules of the contest that the regime has devised, Rice admonished them that they “must peacefully accept the results.” Little wonder, then, that Mubarak feels entirely safe running for a fifth term as president.

With the connivance of Egyptian intelligence, a similar scenario unfolded in Palestine, another Arab country hailed as a shining example of democratization by the Bush administration. In late May, Bush introduced President Mahmoud Abbas to the White House press corps as a man whose campaign slogan could have been: “Vote for me—I’m for peace, and I believe in democracy.” But there were no remonstrations from Washington when the Palestinian Authority postponed legislative elections planned for July for fear that Hamas might perform too well. Nor did the State Department object when Abbas put off the general congress of his Fatah party until after the parliamentary polls now rescheduled for January 2006. Fatah reformers might have overthrown the “old guard” in party councils, imperiling the PA’s decision to cooperate with Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon’s ongoing “disengagement” from the Gaza Strip, despite the comment of a Sharon adviser that this unilateral maneuver is intended to apply the “formaldehyde that is necessary so there will not be a political process with the Palestinians.” The Bush administration, having nodded vigorously for three years whenever Sharon placed the onus for peace on Palestinian “reform,” has never been interested in how Palestinians define the concept.

It was a State Department official, Paula Dobriansky, who coined the term “Cedar Revolution” for the Arab spring’s most dramatic and consequential events. But the US had little to do with what the Lebanese called the Independence Intifada—the campaign of popular pressure that brought down a government and compelled the hasty departure of an occupying army. The protesters who came out for weeks in downtown Beirut’s Martyrs’ Square harbored fervent hopes of extracting “the truth” about who killed ex-Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri—hinting at grander aspirations for a new politics of transparency and accountability. Both the anti-Syrian demonstrations and the Hizballah counter-demonstrations espoused a symbolism of national unity. But here, as well, the hopes of the spring wilted in the summer doldrums.

By the time of Lebanon’s May-June parliamentary elections, an old type of politics was back. The campaign was driven by horse trading among the self-appointed representatives of the country’s 18 confessional communities, not by the comprehensive visions for Lebanon’s future for which demonstrators and counter-demonstrators alike were searching. The anti-Syrian opposition fractured, allowing an unpopular electoral law drafted under Syrian tutelage to stand and eventually allowing Emile Lahoud to remain in the presidential office where Syrian intervention had installed him. One of the first acts of the new government was to pardon former Phalangist warlord Samir Geagea, a reminder of how much of “the truth” about the 1975-1990 civil war remains buried under willful forgetfulness. With the June assassinations of journalist Samir Kassir and former Communist Party head Georges Hawi also still unsolved, Lebanon is not free from fear. Not that anyone consuming American news would know, since Lebanon has lost its media-ready narrative of good guys and bad guys, and, at least for the time being, the US cannot use events there as a club to beat Syria.

The Baathist clique in Damascus, which had more to fear from the Bush doctrine than any other regime, cannot be dismissed to watch Iraq revert to being a place where opponents of the government sometimes hear the midnight knock of the secret police. Elections in Iraq have not ushered in a representative democracy, but rather have emboldened the victors to press maximalist demands in the constitution drafting process. The Kurds have extended the borders of their desired mega-province southward, and the Shi’i religious parties insist that Islam should be the basis of Iraqi law. The coercion, US and Iraqi, that has so far been required to contain the country’s centrifugal forces is hardly nurturing a state culture of respect for rule of law and civil rights. Rather than trumpeting its envisioned model democracy, the Bush administration could soon be cultivating ties with an Iraqi quasi-autocracy willing to host a US base or two.

“For 60 years,” Rice intoned in the AUC auditorium, “my country, the United States, pursued stability at the expense of democracy in this region here in the Middle East—and we achieved neither.” This sentence, since repeated like a mantra by more junior officials, implies that the Bush administration believes democracy is worth a little instability. In the real world, the administration’s policies promote neither democracy nor stability—and achieve neither as well.
We mourn the passing of Samih Farsoun on June 9, 2005 and offer our heartfelt condolences to his partner Katha Kissman, his daughter Rudi, and his other family and friends. A long-time professor of sociology at American University in Washington, DC, Samih was one of the earliest members of the Middle East Research and Information Project (MERIP) collective. He brought his formidable skills as a thinker and teacher to the meetings convened to produce this magazine, then titled *MERIP Reports*.

MERIP's agenda, to challenge the prevailing analyses of Middle East politics and offer views of the region that prioritized the perspectives and concerns of people living there, was a natural fit for Samih. Then and always, Samih was a committed critic of power, privilege and their human toll. His first article for *MERIP Reports*, “Student Protest and the Coming Crisis in Lebanon,” published in August 1973, was an uncannily prescient analysis of the troubles that soon tore apart that country. But Samih didn’t limit himself to intellectual work; he would roll up his sleeves during late-night sessions, typesetting the magazine and sticking the address labels on the covers for mailing.

Like many of his generation of Palestinian intellectuals, Samih Farsoun’s critical perspective was forged from firsthand experiences of displacement, exile, discrimination and deep frustration with Palestinian factional infighting that stymied effective redress of historical injustices. Born in Haifa, Samih was one of the over 700,000 exiled from Palestine in 1948. He spent his youth in Lebanon, keenly aware of the suffering of Palestinian refugees and other disenfranchised communities in the Middle East.

Samih played an integral role in a number of institutions, including the Association of Arab-American University Graduates and the Jerusalem Fund, which were created to educate the public and support Arab and Palestinian communities. He also was a member of the Palestinian National Council, unaffiliated with any faction but sympathetic to leftist secular Palestinian politics and devoted to the goals of collective governance. He resigned from the PNC to convey his opposition to Yasser Arafat’s increasingly authoritarian leadership and to the 1993 Oslo accords, on the grounds that they would not lead to Palestinian self-determination or improve the lives of those living under occupation in the West Bank and Gaza.

Samih helped to make the sociology department at AU an intellectually exciting environment that encouraged young scholars to ask hard questions and challenge the accepted rationales of Western political hegemony, nationalism (Arab and other), and political as well as communal sectarianism. Samih was an unabashed politically engaged intellectual; his students learned from his example as, on a regular basis, he stripped the ivory off the tower. During the 1970s and 1980s, the heyday of both progressive and conservative revolutionary politics and a time of massive turmoil in the Middle East, Latin America, Africa and Asia, US-born and foreign students from all over the world came to AU to learn about and debate the paradigms of political economy and social theory. Samih encouraged his students to understand the real world without foregoing the obligation to master the canons of the discipline.

In recent years, Samih lent his skills to building academic institutions in the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait: He served as a founding dean at the American University of Sharjah from 1997–1999 and subsequently as a founding dean at the American University of Kuwait from 2004 until his death.

Samih’s keen intelligence and social conscience enriched our lives immensely. He is irreplaceable and we miss him very much.

—Joe Stork and Lisa Hajjar
Syria’s Curious Dilemma
Bassam Haddad

In the wake of Syria’s abrupt withdrawal from Lebanon, and even as its international isolation intensifies, the regime in Damascus has consolidated itself. The transition from Asad senior to Asad junior that began in 2000 is now complete. Can the awkward, yet maturing leadership manage Syria’s domestic, regional and international predicaments all at the same time?

Seasoned observers of Syria have learned not to make much of apparent political changes in the country. This lesson holds true today, but with a twist.

Five years after the death of Hafiz al-Asad, who ruled Syria for 30 years, a series of “springs” have come and gone without substantially opening up the political system. The country’s political institutions are stable, but stagnant, including the governing Baath Party, which continues to rule by periodically reshuffling elites. Syria’s economy continues to sputter, its small oil reserves continue to dwindle and its workforce continues to lag behind in acquiring the skills needed in today’s global economy. Perhaps the most troubling part of Syria’s predicament is an invisible but rising wave of poverty unprecedented in recent history.

For Syria’s political elite, this precarious state of affairs is not unusual. Nor is it beyond the wherewithal of the awkward, yet maturing new leadership around President Bashar al-Asad to deal with adversity. What has changed rather decisively is the world around Syria’s cocoon. Coupled with domestic woes, this change does challenge the abilities of the regime. Violent regime change in Iraq, the humiliating loss of Syrian control in Lebanon and a strident Israel emboldened by a duplicitous “war on terror” have combined to isolate Syria and to diminish its regional influence. The results of negotiations with the European Union to bring Syria into a “partnership agreement,” as part of the EU’s “Barcelona process” of Euro-Mediterranean economic integration, have been disappointing. To make things worse, the Bush administration, backed by Congress, persists in pursuing an unprincipled anti-Syria campaign whose endgame remains difficult to divine.

In 2005, Syria finds itself bereft of foreign policy tools whose advantages it enjoyed for over 30 years. Between 1970 and 1990, the Syrian regime benefited from the superpower competition of the Cold War. With the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1990, Damascus relied on playing a regional role, beginning with its participation in the US-led coalition to expel the Iraqi army from Kuwait in 1990. Now, the international and regional fronts are both closed, and the Syrian regime is left with a lone front on which to fight for its viability: at home. The domestic front is where the regime has historically been most vulnerable.

Barring unforeseen developments, the Syrian regime faces what, by its lights, is a curious dilemma: either it acquiesces to the demands of external forces in order to preserve itself or it compromises its domestic position by allowing the diffusion and decentralization of power. Does the Syrian regime have the skill and the willpower to escape from this hornet’s nest? Can the regime manage today’s domestic, regional and international crises all at the same time? Judging by the outcome of the Baath Party’s recent Tenth Regional Conference, one should not hold one’s breath.

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Back to Basics

The Tenth Regional Conference, held in early June 2005, was a bit of housekeeping in preparation for an entrenchment. It saw the apparent consolidation of Bashar al-Asad’s rule at a time when significant external and internal tensions and threats are coinciding for the first time since the 1960s. According to Ibrahim Hamidi, perhaps the most informed and incisive journalist in Syria today, “The message that the Regional Baath Conference wanted to send at the end of the conference to public opinion, the opposition and foreign actors—especially America—is that the Baath Party will remain the ruling party in Syria.”

Very little was said at the conference about foreign policy, beyond affirmation that peace will remain Syria’s “strategic choice” and that the regime will work to enhance its bargaining position vis-à-vis Israel. Indicating the regime’s domestic focus, Bashar emphasized that “any decisions or recommendations made during the conference should express our internal needs only, in isolation from any other considerations aimed at pulling us in directions that contradict our national interest or threaten our stability.”

The conference was not without positive developments, though these were hardly far-reaching reforms. Expanding space for political participation was a recurring theme. For the first time, there were serious recommendations that the state should review the Emergency Law in place since 1963, with an eye toward “narrowing the scope of state security matters.” A new “political parties law” is likely to take effect soon, though Article 8 of the constitution, designating the Baath Party as the “leader of state and society,” will remain untouched. Reiterating a stock line, a high-level official told the pan-Arab daily *al-Hayat* that modification of Article 8 is an “external request” made by non-Syrian interests. This statement is related to various proclamations during the conference regarding the need to “lay bare” the intentions of the expatriate opposition, particularly the Muslim Brotherhood leadership in exile in Paris, on the grounds that they are not true “nationalists” and are being supported by actors hostile to Syria. Another likely subject of this denunciation is the Reform Party of Syria led by Washington-area dentist Farid Ghadry, a would-be Syrian Ahmad Chalabi who is being promoted by the neo-conservative think tank, the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies.

In various interactions, formal and otherwise, Bashar emphasized that “the party does not own the state.” It is necessary, he said, “to redefine the relationship of the party to political power, and not to be enmeshed in daily politics, and to move away from office work and focus on interacting with the masses.” Henceforth, the Baath’s share of cabinet posts will be limited to ten. Nonetheless, it was stipulated toward the end of the conference that the prime minister and the speaker of parliament must be members of the Baath’s ruling body, the Regional Command, creating an obvious contradiction.
between proclamations and practice, and eliminating the possibility that a high-level executive such as the prime minister may be an independent.

It was also suggested that the Regional Command of the party be dissolved and replaced by the “Party Command.” Hence, President al-Asad would become the secretary-general of the Baath Party, not the regional secretary. This move would facilitate the dissolution of the National Command of the party in the near future. Although the party did not act on this suggestion at the conference, it is likely to do so in the future. In any event, the number of members in the Regional Command was dropped from 21 to 14. It is also significant that there were forces calling for replacing the slogan “unity, freedom, socialism” with “democracy and social justice,” and the name Arab Socialist Baath Party with simply the Baath Party, thereby toning down the socialist identity of the party and introducing the magic word “democracy.”

These changes did not occur, but talk of them provides clues to the regime’s longer-term thinking.

Aleppo from above.

The Nitty Gritty

It is no secret that Syria’s real strongmen sit at the helms of General Security, Military Security and the Republican Guard. Changes and replacements at that level tell a more direct story about the regime’s internal power dynamics than hundreds of pages of party declarations and memoranda. One week after the conference, Bashar’s brother-in-law Asef Shawkat was confirmed as the head of military intelligence, perhaps one of the most sensitive and powerful positions in Syria today. Manaf Tlass, son of former Defense Minister Mustafa Tlass, and Bashar’s brother Mahir are the effective heads of the Republican Guard, perhaps the most potent fighting force in Syria. The implications here might appear clearer than they are, for family ties to Bashar do not guarantee loyalty, as the history of struggle for power in Syria instructs.

More important is the evident “clearing of the way” that has taken place within the predominant institutions of coer-
cion in the country since Hafiz al-Asad’s death. Over the past five years, strongmen who are either opposed to Bashar or are not part of his “team” have been gradually either replaced or “retired.” They include former Chief of Staff ‘Ali Aslan and his deputies ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Sayyad, Faruq Ibrahim ‘Isa, Ibrahim al-Safi, Shafiq Fayyad and Ahmad ‘Abd al-Nabi, the head of the political security branch of General Security, ‘Adnan Badr Hasan, and Hasan al-Khalil, Shawkat’s predecessor as head of military intelligence.

Perhaps the most visible development at the Regional Baath Conference was the replacement within the Regional Command of what remains of the “old guard” that surrounded Bashar’s father with a “new” team.11 A charter member of the old guard, ‘Abd al-Halim Khaddam, “resigned” as vice president and as a member of the Regional and National Command Councils after sensing the isolation of the “older” Baathists. As Khaddam is perhaps the second most visible icon of the Baath regime after Hafiz al-Asad, the nature of his exit—which was not “honorable”—be-speaks the end of an era. The circumstances surrounding his exit lend credence to the little-discussed story that Khaddam and others among the old guard formed an informal alliance aimed at “saving” the regime from what they perceive to be the current leadership’s blunders in Iraq and Lebanon.12

Khaddam’s departure completes the process of paving the way for Bashar that started in June 2000. The new team is made up of both older and younger Baathists who are distinguished by their proximity to the current leadership, and not necessarily by their skill or experience. It is said that this team is important not for what it will do for Syria, but for what it will not do: obstruct decisions made by the top leadership. For the regime, the new team is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, its unquestioning loyalty will make for a less erratic policy. On the other hand, the new Command leadership lacks vision and, many say, competence. It remains to be seen which edge of the sword will strike. If the new team is a short-term fix to rid the leadership of troublemakers, then it could enable a smoother and surer decision-making process in the future. However, if the desired end is to surround the leadership with complacent figures in perpetuity, then it is probable that Syria will return to square one, with the leadership approaching a stifling absolutism of sorts. In any event, Syria’s principal dilemma leaves little room for the long-term sustainability of such a formula.

Institutionally speaking, Bashar and his closest allies have played a delicate game to consolidate their control. On the one hand, they needed to preserve the structure of executive...
authority by strengthening the party and government institutions; on the other hand, they had to manipulate the same authority structure and institutions that would allow them to limit the personal power of potential adversaries in the long run. This was not a choice of one strategy among many on offer: Bashar needed, and needs, the Baath Party. Since he lacks his father’s charisma, and with the multiplication of power centers around certain personalities within the regime, selective reinvigoration of the roles of the party was the only rational choice.

Another change is increasing reliance on the security services, as indicated by the shifting membership in the Regional Command. Historically, the Command included the chief of staff and the defense minister. After the June conference, two members of the security services took the spots of these officials in the Command. It is unmistakable that the security services are continuing to gain authority in circles that they began to infiltrate in the early 1970s. Finally, the institutional clout has been eroded, particularly after the pullout from Lebanon.

**The Balance Sheet**

The transition of regime from Assad senior to Assad junior that began in 2000 (and perhaps earlier) is now complete. Though the new regime is not impregnable, the intra-party tension and the rocky decision-making processes that characterized Bashar’s first five years in power are unlikely to reappear for some time. The evident winners are Bashar and his team, including the Assad family and their innermost circle. The evident losers are the old guard, or those who opposed Bashar’s ascendancy, beginning with formerly powerful Chief of Staff Hikmat Shihabi, who “retired” in 1998 after he made public his distaste for the prospect of Bashar ruling Syria, and ending with Khaddam—with a flurry of others in between.

Digging a little deeper, one finds that the decisive break was made not only with the old guard, but with the regime of Hafiz al-Asad, a development that cannot be translated publicly into words in Syria’s political climate today. Bashar was indeed his father’s choice of successor, following the death of his oldest son Basil in a 1994 car crash, but it is questionable whether Assad senior wanted Bashar to change the regime itself. This is not an academic point, for with the changes to the regime came changes in the regime’s style and approach whose contours are still emerging.

In its handling of the US invasion of Iraq and the aftermath, the “Lebanon file” after the May 2000 Israeli withdrawal and the US “war on terror” that linked Syria with “terrorist” groups within Syria and in Lebanon, the current Syrian regime has contributed to its own isolation. This isolation is exacerbated by the Bush administration’s hostile posture. Hafiz al-Asad’s regime boxed itself in domestically, but was always able to compensate for problems caused by its centralization of domestic political power by adopting an uncompromising stance on regional issues—particularly the Arab-Israeli conflict. Bashar’s regime has been steadily losing this ability. In the past, Palestinian and Lebanese resistance movements were used from a distance to prop up the legitimacy of the Syrian regime. Today, the regime has absorbed these tools as part and parcel of its legitimacy, thereby compromising its independence and allowing itself to be more liable for the Palestinians and Lebanese groups’ possible missteps. In the post-September 11 international climate, where the US, Europe and Israel require no hard evidence to condemn Syria for any number of alleged infractions, such a loss of autonomy could subject Syria to many unneeded blows. One should caution against accepting the common view in Syria that Assad senior would never have brought the country to such a point. The Syrian regime has been, and still is, willing to pay nearly any price to maintain its own security, and the dead end was always in

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**Syria’s real strongmen sit at the helms of the security services and the Republican Guard.**

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**The Palestine Center Annual Conference 2005**

**Palestine and the Middle East In a Global Context**

Friday, 18 November 2005

9:00 am–5:30 pm Washington, D.C.

Recent political developments in Palestine, including the passing of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat and the election of President Mahmoud Abbas, have shifted the course of politics in Palestine and the Middle East, as have other local, regional, and global factors. On 18 November 2005, experts from around the world will come together at The Palestine Center to analyze the current political climate in Palestine from a variety of perspectives.

This conference will examine salient developments in the region and how the policies of the new rising powers in Africa, Asia and Latin America affect the political and economic future of Palestine and the Middle East. Experts will also address developments in Lebanon and Syria, efforts by U.S. President George W. Bush to “spread democracy” to the Middle East and worldwide, the so-called “opportunity” created by Arafat’s absence from the Palestinian leadership, and the extent to which Abbas’ administration has influenced prospects for a political settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

This event is free, however pre-registration is required. Visit www.thejerusalemfund.org for more information on how to register, conference details, and the work of The Palestine Center, an educational program of the Jerusalem Fund for Education and Community Development.

The Palestine Center 2425 Virginia Avenue, N.W. Washington, D.C. 20037 USA
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sight. Asad senior was likely, however, to have delayed the inevitable a little longer.

The breathing space that the regime afforded itself by clearing the way for a less conflict-ridden decision-making process is an opportunity to embark on irreversible domestic decentralization that would herald an era of putting development ahead of both regime security and external demands. Independent, opposition and regime-friendly observers in Syria will not bet on this scenario. In view of the Bush administration’s aggressive political orientation, the smart money is on a strategy of gradual submission to external demands that may hurt the wellbeing of the Syrian people, but will keep the regime’s security intact. The same scenarios unfold in the case of the country’s political economy.

**State of the Economy**

The state of the Syrian economy remains dismal. It is unclear whether the deliberations at the recent Baath Regional Command Conference reflect the sophistication that is required to deal with the crisis. Optimists continue to debate whether this or that liberalization measure is likely to improve the economy as though the missing link is a “good plan.” The announcement by the chief of the State Planning Commission in 2004 that Syria will adopt the principles of a market economy by 2010 brought relief to optimists. So did the announcement at the Baath Regional Conference that Syria will adopt a “social market economy.” But what about the elephants in the room?

Syria’s economy stagnated between 1996 and 2004, with an estimated average growth rate of 2.4 percent. Meanwhile, the population is growing at a rate of 2.7 percent, spelling disaster for development. Economic growth reached 3.4 percent in 2003, but that unusually high rate reflected the sale of Iraqi oil through Syria and then the rise of oil prices as a result of the Iraq war. In 2004, economic growth dropped to 1.7 percent, showing the danger of depending on oil rents. Oil production reached 591,000 barrels per day (bpd) in 1995 but declined to 450,000 bpd in 2005. According to one estimate, Syria will become a net importer of oil for the first time in 30 years by 2012. The good news for the Syrian regime is that the rise in natural gas production is likely to compensate for a substantial part of the decrease in oil production. Gas reserves are estimated at 2.40 billion cubic meters. Much depends on the transit revenues that Syria will receive from the Arab Gas Pipeline linking Egypt with Turkey and eastern Europe. Ultimately, rent income from oil or gas will only buy time. Meanwhile, unemployment, poverty, investment and dilapidated public-sector firms require immediate attention.

Syrians are suffering from an alarming decrease in their standard of living. In 2003–2004, 5.1 million people (or 30.1 percent of the population) were living below the poverty line, with 2 million Syrians unable to meet their basic needs. By most estimates, there is 20 percent unemployment in the country, with at least 300,000 new workers entering the job market each year. According to former State Planning Commission chief and current Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs ‘Abdallah al-Dardari, an average annual growth rate of 7 percent will be necessary to provide employment for job seekers. Where will this growth come from?

With oil income tapering off, Syria’s public and private sectors must do the heavy lifting. To generate growth in those sectors, the regime appears to be counting on the trade benefits of a partnership agreement with the EU. After some hesitation, and presumably to break the Syrian isolation imposed by the US, in 2004 Bashar created a new team to speed up the signing of an agreement. As a precondition, the EU pressed for a rapid transition from a public- to a private-sector economy, and, according to former Industry Minister ‘Isam al-Za’im, the regime soon found itself moving faster and conceding more than it wanted to. By the end of 2004, the EU had added new preconditions, including a call upon Syria to lead the way in eliminating weapons of mass destruction from the region. Nevertheless, the Syrian team included “services” in the list of sectors to be liberalized, and at a faster pace, as a way to hasten the signing. This concession was not made public. In the end, after the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri, the EU withdrew its promises of an expedited agreement.

Should the negotiations restart, the public sector would have to be overhauled, a political nightmare for a regime such as Syria’s, where that sector takes on a number of necessary political and social functions. Privatization according to a plan of eliminating failing public-sector firms and refurbishing struggling ones might work only if the top leadership is willing to compromise the non-economic functions that the sector serves. More importantly, the plan would fail to pieces in the absence of a private sector capable of employing at least half of the new job seekers each year (150,000–200,000 people), a figure that is well beyond the capacity of Syria’s mostly small private firms.

The growth of the private sector in Syria was erratic in the 1990s. Since 2000, private investment grew slightly only because of the dramatic drop in such investment between 1996 and 2000. The most recent figures place the private sector’s contribution to capital accumulation

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**The regime has historically been willing to pay any price to ensure that it remains in power.**

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For the time being, the idea that a partnership agreement within which they are accustomed to work. One might already existing private businessmen and the public-private networks to which they belong are expanding at a steady pace as they are faced with little or no competition from potential entrants who lack financing. These big business groups worry not about liberalization or lack thereof at this point; they are mostly concerned to keep the formula within which they are accustomed to work. One might have to wait for a vigorous economy until these individuals and networks discover a contradiction between further capital accumulation and the existing formula. For the time being, the idea that a partnership agreement with the EU can provide the cure for Syria's economic ills is incommensurate with the political and institutional requirements of such an agreement.

**Moment of Decision**

According to Nabil Sukkar, a seasoned economist and business consultant, "There is a need for a 'Great Leap Forward,' not an incremental progression." Syria's economy remains captive to the country's brand of centralized politics. Economic rationality remains severely fettered by a political logic that prevents the very idea of a comprehensive reform plan, without which incremental measures are ineffective at worst and reversible at best. Problems of low investment, an inhospitable environment, a weak judiciary and idiosyncratic state intervention are not economic, but political through and through. According to Za'im, these problems have existed since 1991 when Syria embarked on "economic pluralism." Beyond the lack of political will needed to overhaul the Syrian economy, there are three equally large obstacles: the network of state officials, military officers, their offspring and relatives, and powerful businessmen who benefit from the current arrangements; a decrepit administrative and bureaucratic system; and an insufficiently skilled labor force. Only 10 percent of Syrian workers have a college degree, for instance. It is impossible to treat these problems in isolation, requiring once again the kind of political will that would put Syria's development before regime security.

For better or for worse, and unless Baathist infighting resurfaces, the Syrian regime is left to its own devices on the domestic front as it attempts to resolve its curious dilemma. The official line is that Syria is prevented from taking certain reform measures because they correspond to external demands. This is a false binary opposition. It is true that Syria is facing a hostile international environment and an unprincipled political campaign against it, but that has been the case since the early twentieth century. The hostility is unlikely to subside, whatever the stance of the United States. Proper development for state and society in Syria does conflict with warding off external enemies. On the contrary, it is the most efficient weapon against them.

Proper development does conflict with the guaranteed security of the Syrian regime as it stands today. The Syrian regime is quickly approaching the point where it will have to choose between compromising with the outside forces it cautions against, thereby preserving itself in its
current form, or compromising with the Syrian people, thereby voluntarily reducing its own power. Much anti-Zionist and anti-imperialist rhetoric notwithstanding, this choice is not in the end such a big puzzle.

Endnotes
1 Al-Hayat, June 19, 2005.
2 Al-Hayat, June 7, 2005.
5 Al-Hayat, June 10, 2005.
6 Ibid.
8 Al-Hayat, June 8, 2005.
9 Al-Hayat, June 7, 2005.
10 Interview with a mid-level party functionary who participates in “ideational discussions” at various party headquarters, Damascus, August 2, 2005.
11 The most important such personalities are Vice Presidents Abd al-Halim Khaddam and Muhammad Zuhayr Masharqa, former Defense Minister Mustafa Tlass (who is not at odds with Bashar), Assistant Secretary General of the Baath Party Abdallah al-Almaz, Assistant Regional Secretary of the Baath Party Suleyman Qaddah, former Speaker of Parliament Abd al-Qadir Qaddura and the notorious former Prime Minister Muhammad Mustafa Mito. It is notable that even members who joined during the Ninth Regional Command Conference in 2000—nominally, Bashar loyalists—were removed, reflecting the drop in membership from 21 to 14 and/or their replacement by a more tightly knit Command. Among the apparent Bashar loyalists are Majid Shadoul, Ghiyab Barakat and Wadad al-Bouz. Regional Command members can only serve two terms, a rule that is intended to prevent certain figures from rejoining.
12 The new team includes some new faces, but also seasoned actors like former Baath National Security Council head Muhammad Said Bakhtian, who is now deputy secretary-general of the Baath Party, and former head of General Security Hisham Ikhtiyar, who now has Bakhtian’s old job. An odd development was the removal of Bahaat Sulyman, Bashar’s confident and mentor, from his post as head of the internal branch of General Security, Sulyman is by no means part of the “old guard,” and his sidelining is an indication of some tension within Bashar’s new team.
13 Interview with party insider, Damascus, July 28, 2005. For the official story, see al-Hayat, June 8, 2005.
14 According to one prominent outspoken critic of the regime, Michel Kilo, the discussions were largely disingenuous and reflect ossified mentalities. Interview, Damascus, July 26, 2005.
16 Heated debates surrounded the term “market economy” prior to and during the conference. The term that was finally adopted, “social market economy,” reflects the power of those who do not want a sudden transformation (even discursive) of “state socialist” Syria and those who do not want to compromise workers’ rights. The debate was ideological, as witnessed in the Economic Sciences Association meetings throughout the month prior to the conference. See Economic Sciences Association Series 18, in particular the papers and responses by Ghassan Yusuf, Ilyas Najmeh, Jihad Muhammad, Isam al-Za’im, Mikhail Awwad, Thamer Qasouf and Burhan Ghalyoun. Much of the debate revolves around the importance of the national economy, the role of the state, the importance of competition and the dangers of being engulfed by global capitalism.
17 Interview with Isam al-Za’im, former minister of industry and current president of the Tuesday Economic Sciences Association, Damascus, July 16, 2005.
18 Al-Hayat, December 1, 2004; interview with Za’im.
19 According to Za’im, government statistics show higher levels of growth for 2004.
21 Interview with Za’im.
22 Sukkar, “Threats and Opportunities.”
24 Interview with Za’im. See also Sukkar, “Threats and Opportunities.”
27 Kharboutli, p. 7.
29 Sukkar, “Threats and Opportunities.”
30 Interview with Nahid Sukkar. For more indicators of Syria’s labor force troubles, see the 2005 National Human Development Report (Damascus: UN Development Program and the Prime Minister’s State Planning Agency, 2005).
Unlike its incremental intervention in Lebanon throughout early 1976, Syria's withdrawal from Lebanon in late April 2005 was swift, unplanned and humiliating. On both occasions, Lebanese, regional and international factors overlapped to shape Syrian behavior. But whereas the 1976 intervention consolidated Syria's position in the Arab-Israeli conflict and elicited implicit US gratitude and Israeli cooperation, the 2005 withdrawal undermined Syria's regional security interests and left it besieged in the international arena.

Syria's abrupt withdrawal under immense international and regional pressure caught even its closest Lebanese allies off guard. In less than a month, all Syrian regular army troops stationed in Lebanon since 1976 had been pulled back into Syrian territory. The power of the Syrian intelligence apparatus in Lebanon, once 5,000 strong, remains a matter of speculation among Lebanese and external actors, namely the United States, France and the United Nations.

The former Lebanese opposition, now partially empowered by parliamentary elections, insists that Syria's intelligence personnel continue to operate in Lebanon, either directly or through their Lebanese proxies. They accuse Syria of direct or indirect responsibility for the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri and for other attacks on politicians and journalists. Decades of Syrian intelligence penetration of Lebanon's military and security apparatus cannot be uprooted in a matter of months. But the aura of omnipotence that once surrounded Syria's position in Lebanon is gone.

The Geopolitical Imperative

Syria's interests in Lebanon predate the 1976 intervention that culminated in the forceful entry of the Third Armored Division to rescue Christian militias from defeat at the hands of the Muslim National Movement and their Palestinian allies. Damascus has always considered Lebanon to be a sort of backyard bound to its eastern neighbor by “distinctive relations” ('alaqat mumayyaza), a euphemism Damascus deploys to legitimize its interference in Lebanon's domestic and foreign politics. Indeed, when Lebanon was offered independence in 1943, Syrian politicians forewore their historical claims to those areas annexed by France in 1920 to create Greater Lebanon, but only with the proviso that independent...
Lebanon would not constitute a beachhead (mustaqarr) or a corridor (mamarr) for Arab or foreign actors bent on destabilizing the Damascus regime. The 1943 Lebanese National Pact explicitly recognized this security tradeoff between the two states. Lebanon rarely honored it, however. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, Beirut served as a center for conspiracy and subversion against Syria. After the 1973 Arab-Israeli war, Lebanon entered into the orbit of a rejuvenated and expanded Eastern Front strategy proposed by Damascus in the wake of the conclusion of the first Egyptian-Israeli Disengagement Agreement (Sinai I) on January 18, 1974. The front aimed at protecting Syria from an Israeli outflanking maneuver through Lebanon’s Bekaa Valley, Syria’s soft underbelly.

The Lebanese civil war that began in April 1975 broke out at a most inopportune time for Syria. By inaugurating a cold peace between Egypt and Israel, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger’s shuttle diplomacy had shattered the two-front strategy built by Syrian President Hafiz al-Asad to regain the Golan Heights occupied by Israel in 1967. The steady collapse of Lebanon threatened to compromise Syria’s control over its immediate security environment.

Despite opposition from large segments of the Syrian public and some regime insiders, Syria sent its troops into Lebanon to forestall a further deterioration of its security interests. In a remarkably revealing speech on July 20, 1976, Asad explained the rationale behind his decision. The Lebanese war confronted Syria with a number of equally objectionable possibilities, he said. Defeat of the Christian militias in Lebanon would invite Israeli intervention into Lebanon. This, in turn, was bound to expose Syria’s western flank to an Israeli attack, neutralizing the Eastern Front strategy, undermining Syria’s leverage in a comprehensive settlement and consequently exacerbating its regional isolation. A Christian defeat would also internationalize the conflict, a Syrian taboo, leading to the partition of Lebanon along sectarian lines, and the creation of a pro-Israel Christian state tied ideologically to the West along Syria’s western border. This would set in motion a chain of secessionist demands in the region based on ethnic and religious loyalties.\(^2\)

A Christian defeat in Lebanon and the concomitant creation of a militant entity in the area south of the Beirut-Damascus highway, ruled by a National Movement-Palestinian coalition, was an equally appalling scenario. Allied to then radical Iraq and Libya, this entity could drag Syria into a premature and costly confrontation with Israel.\(^3\)

US Middle East diplomacy paved the way for Syria’s intervention in Lebanon, negotiating secretly the “red line agreement” between Syria and Israel. The agreement stipulated that no Syrian troops could be dispatched beyond a line running directly east from Sidon toward the eastern Bekaa region. It also stipulated that Syrian troops south of the Beirut-Damascus highway could not number more than a single brigade, that Syria could not deploy surface-to-air missiles in Lebanon, and that Syria could not use its air force against ground targets in Lebanon.\(^4\) Kissinger brokered the red line agreement to lure Syria into Lebanon, thereby neutralizing its opposition to his efforts aimed at ending the state of belligerency between Israel and its Arab neighbors. This he did by exaggerating Israel’s desire to intervene in Lebanon to save the Christian Lebanese from total
The bloody confrontation with the Christian militias, starting in the middle of 1984, then, Syria had reemerged as the main broker between Lebanon and Israel. In 1985, Syria's control over the strategic northern city of Tripoli was completed when Sunni Islamist groups concentrated in Bab al-Tabbana were smashed by pro-Syrian, mainly local 'Alawi, militias backed directly by Syrian forces. In the battle, pro-Iraqi Baathist groups, the strongest battalions in the Lebanese Army and the firepower of US destroyers anchored off the Lebanese coast. It would be a classic war by proxy deploying a range of tactics, from urban warfare to suicide attacks against US targets. Less than a year later, Gemayel, defeated in West Beirut and in the mountains, and abandoned by Washington, capitulated to Syrian pressures. Asad refused to meet with Gemayel to discuss future political reforms in Lebanon, a prerequisite for the stabilization of the country, until the latter abrogated the May 17 Agreement, which Gemayel did on March 5, 1984. Earlier, on September 3, 1983, Israel had withdrawn from Beirut's mountain environs in the Shouf to the Awali River in south Lebanon. Syrian-backed Fatah dissidents dislodged Arafat's forces from the northern Lebanese city of Tripoli in late 1983. By the middle of 1984, then, Syria had reemerged as the main broker in Lebanon's domestic politics, regaining substantial control over its security backyard, especially in the all-important Bekaa Valley. Israel's attempt to drag Lebanon into a separate, bilateral peace war was reaffirmed. With the May 17 Agreement abrogated, Syria moved systematically to consolidate its position in Lebanon. In 1985, Syria's control over the strategic northern city of Tripoli was completed when Sunni Islamist groups concentrated in Bab al-Tabbana were smashed by pro-Syrian, mainly local 'Alawi, militias backed directly by Syrian forces. In the battle, pro-Iraqi Baathist groups in Tripoli also were eliminated. In February 1987, the Syrian army returned to West Beirut, from which it was ejected after the Israeli invasion, under the pretext of keeping the peace be-

On June 6, 1982, on the pretext of retaliation following an assassination attempt on its ambassador to Britain, Israel launched a full-scale invasion of Lebanon to destroy PLO strongholds in south Lebanon and Beirut, neutralize the Syrian presence in Lebanon and, subsequently, install a pro-Israel president, Bashir Gemayel. Israel planned that Gemayel would reestablish Maronite Christian hegemony over Lebanon and sign a bilateral peace agreement. Defeated in Lebanon, Damascus was sidelined temporarily as Washington, dismissive of Syria's security concerns, sponsored negotiations between Lebanon and Israel. When direct Lebanese-Israeli negotiations to secure an Israeli withdrawal within the context of a security agreement between the two countries opened on December 28, 1982, Damascus smelled another Camp David in the making. When Amin Gemayel, with US encouragement and mediation, concluded a Lebanese-Israeli agreement on May 17, 1983 that all but ceded Lebanon's security to Israel, the Syrian reaction was swift and surgical. Damascus viewed the May 17 Agreement as an attempt to encircle Syria's western flank with an Israeli security zone and satellite state. If left unchecked, it would rob Syria of the only asset it possessed in the confrontation with Israel.

By July 1983, Syria had gathered its Lebanese allies in a National Salvation Front. Henceforth, the fight to abrogate the May 17 Agreement commenced in earnest. In the ensuing battles, Syria rallied its Shia and Druze allies in Lebanon to defeat Gemayel, who was backed by Maronite militias, the Multinational Forces, the strongest battalions in the Lebanese Army and the firepower of US destroyers anchored off the Lebanese coast. It would be a classic war by proxy deploying a range of tactics, from urban warfare to suicide attacks against US targets. Less than a year later, Gemayel, defeated in West Beirut and in the mountains, and abandoned by Washington, capitulated to Syrian pressures. Asad refused to meet with Gemayel to discuss future political reforms in Lebanon, a prerequisite for the stabilization of the country, until the latter abrogated the May 17 Agreement, which Gemayel did on March 5, 1984. Earlier, on September 3, 1983, Israel had withdrawn from Beirut's mountain environs in the Shouf to the Awali River in south Lebanon. Syrian-backed Fatah dissidents dislodged Arafat's forces from the northern Lebanese city of Tripoli in late 1983. By the middle of 1984, then, Syria had reemerged as the main broker in Lebanon's domestic politics, regaining substantial control over its security backyard, especially in the all-important Bekaa Valley. Israel's attempt to drag Lebanon into a separate, bilateral peace war was reaffirmed.

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Israel vs. Syria

The struggle for Lebanon defined the Syrian-Israeli regional confrontation throughout the 1980s. Anwar al-Sadat's trip to Jerusalem on November 19, 1977 hardened Syria's desire to dominate Lebanon lest a domino effect set in motion similar unilateral initiatives. Any attempt to disentangle Lebanon's civil war from Syria's own objectives vis-à-vis the Arab-Israeli conflict was now impossible. The bloody confrontation with the Christian militias, starting in February 1978, and symbolized by the heavy bombardment of Lebanon by Syrian forces. In the battle, pro-Iraqi Baathist groups, the strongest battalions in the Lebanese Army and the firepower of US destroyers anchored off the Lebanese coast. It would be a classic war by proxy deploying a range of tactics, from urban warfare to suicide attacks against US targets. Less than a year later, Gemayel, defeated in West Beirut and in the mountains, and abandoned by Washington, capitulated to Syrian pressures. Asad refused to meet with Gemayel to discuss future political reforms in Lebanon, a prerequisite for the stabilization of the country, until the latter abrogated the May 17 Agreement, which Gemayel did on March 5, 1984. Earlier, on September 3, 1983, Israel had withdrawn from Beirut's mountain environs in the Shouf to the Awali River in south Lebanon. Syrian-backed Fatah dissidents dislodged Arafat's forces from the northern Lebanese city of Tripoli in late 1983. By the middle of 1984, then, Syria had reemerged as the main broker in Lebanon's domestic politics, regaining substantial control over its security backyard, especially in the all-important Bekaa Valley. Israel's attempt to drag Lebanon into a separate, bilateral peace war was reaffirmed.

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between its warring allies: the Shi'a Amal movement and the Druze militia. Throughout the second half of the 1980s, the Palestinian camps in Beirut and south Lebanon fought running battles with Syria's proxy Amal militia. Arafat's influence in the camps had to be contained for Syria to deploy Lebanon effectively in the geopolitical contest with Israel.

By the middle of 1988, Syria's attention turned to the upcoming presidential elections in Lebanon. Maronite opposition, however, blocked the election of Syria's nominee, Michel Daher. With only 15 minutes left in his presidency, Gemayel appointed Gen. Michel Aoun, then commander of the Lebanese Army, prime minister of a caretaker cabinet. Championing the cause of liberating Lebanon from all foreign armies, Aoun launched a “war of liberation” against Syrian troops deployed in Lebanon on March 14, 1989. Aoun's war played into the hands of Saddam Hussein, who, since signing a ceasefire with Iran in August 1988, had been calling upon Syria to end its “occupation” of Lebanon. This was Saddam's way of punishing Asad for aligning with Iran during the Iran-Iraq war. Worse still, Syria's Lebanon troubles compounded a growing regional isolation. Arafat was steering the PLO closer to negotiations with Washington. Renouncing its claim to the West Bank in 1988, Jordan joined Iraq, Egypt and North Yemen in the Arab Cooperation Council in February 1989. The Casablanca Arab summit of May 1989 underscored Syria's weakened regional position. It was an emergency summit convened with the explicit purpose of finding an Arab solution to the Lebanese conflict, despite Asad's insistence that Lebanon was Syria's business and no one else's.

Washington's Bandwagon

Syria's position in Lebanon was not undermined by the Arabization of the Lebanese conflict, however. The Ta'if Agreement of October 22, 1989, the fruit of a Saudi, US and Syrian agreement imposed on Lebanese deputies, confirmed Syria's dominant role in Lebanon. While providing for the gradual elimination of confessionalism in Lebanon's political system, Ta'if consecrated Syria's role as the external balancer of power among the different Lebanese communities, an objective Damascus had pursued for many decades, and recognized that Lebanon and Syria are linked together by “distinctive relations.” Invoking the language of the 1943 National Pact, the accord stipulated: “Lebanon should never be made a source of threat to Syria's security…. Consequently, Lebanon does not allow that it be made a corridor or a beachhead for any power or state or organization seeking to undermine its security or the security of Syria.” Ta'if committed Syria only
to “redeploy” its troops to the Bekaa Valley and its western approaches two years after “the political reforms [agreed upon at Ta’if] are adopted in a constitutional manner.”

While most Lebanese politicians interpreted the latter proviso to mean two years after the Ta’if reforms were incorporated into the new constitution, the Syrian regime offered its own very liberal legal interpretation: two years after confessionalism was eliminated. The future mission of Syrian troops in Lebanon was considered a bilateral issue to be determined by Syria and the future Lebanese government. Throughout the Ta’if deliberations, Christian deputies, suspicious of Syria’s intentions, requested a timetable for a Syrian withdrawal linked to the constitutional adoption of the proposed political reforms. Damascus refused to offer such a timetable, however. Saudi promises that Arab pressure would secure a Syrian withdrawal were for naught.

Be that as it may, Aoun rejected the Ta’if Agreement because it failed to specify a timetable for the Syrian withdrawal, and as long as he barricaded himself in the presidential palace, implementing it remained elusive. Then Iraq invaded Kuwait in August 1990. The US desire to include Syria in the coalition arrayed against Iraq intersected with Syria’s desire to deny Saddam the opportunity to emerge as the leader of the Arab world and threaten its geopolitical interests in Lebanon and beyond. By jumping on Washington’s bandwagon, Syria secured from the US a free hand in Lebanon, with quiet support from the Gulf states and Egypt. Washington also accepted the Syrian interpretation of Ta’if—constitutional reforms without Syrian withdrawal—which was the scenario Maronite politicians had warned against in the Ta’if conclave. This amounted to an implicit US acceptance of a Syrian custodianship over Lebanon. On October 13, 1990, Syrian troops, supported by Lebanese soldiers under the command of the pro-Ta’if government, attacked Aoun’s forces in East Beirut and dislodged him from the presidential palace. Syria’s relationship with Lebanon now entered a new phase.

**Toward Total Control**

From 1991 until April 26, 2005, Syria exercised near total control over Lebanon’s domestic and foreign politics. Indeed, during this period, Syria became at one and the same time the dominant domestic actor in Lebanon and the main external party overseeing the transition from war to peace. Control over Lebanon not only served the Syrian track of the Arab-Israeli negotiations launched in the October 1991 Madrid peace
1996, when Israel launched Operation Grapes of Wrath against UNSC 425. Hizballah has continued to mount periodic attacks.

Understanding included a Syrian member. Kassir, Syria and its Lebanese allies were apprehensive when Israel withdrew from Lebanon in May 2000. The withdrawal threatened to rob Damascus of its main bargaining chip with Israel, and the Syrian and Lebanese governments promptly pressed their case that continued Israeli occupation of the Shebaa Farms—a thin strip of land considered by Israel and the UN to be part of the Golan Heights, but considered by Syria and Lebanon to be part of Lebanon—meant that Israel has not complied with UNSC 425. Hizballah has continued to mount periodic attacks on Israeli army posts in the Shebaa Farms since May 2000.

Beyond geopolitical considerations, Lebanon assumed increased saliency since Syria after 1990. This took a number of different forms, all converging in supporting the politics of regime survival in Damascus. Intra-regime alliances were consolidated through business cartels and deals that saw in the Lebanon of the early 1990s great entrepreneurial opportunities. Regime insiders and their children, with their Lebanese partners, entered into one of the most lucrative business sectors in post-war Lebanon, particularly cellular phone companies and reconstruction projects. Wealth generated through state capitalism in Syria was recycled and invested in these projects.

In typical neo-patrimonial fashion, intelligence barons were allowed to accumulate staggering fortunes in Lebanon to secure their loyalty to the regime back home. The Bekaa, under Syrian control since the middle 1970s, emerged as a depository for Syrian export products. Syrian commodities passing through Lebanon and re-exported by sea or air were exempted from custom duties. Checkpoints manned by intelligence officers on the main roads into Sidon and the north were akin to customs booths that charged fixed amounts per passing truck. One study estimated the revenues generated by these checkpoints from 1976 to 1990 at around $1.6 billion. The same study estimated the cost of fees paid by public and private companies to Syrian intelligence officers between 1976 and 2004 at around $5.4 billion, and total Lebanese losses as a result of the Syrian military and intelligence presence in Lebanon between 1976 and 2005 at $27 billion.

Most importantly, Lebanon served as an open market for hundreds of thousands of Syrian workers who flocked to Lebanon in the early 1990s during the reconstruction boom. The economic health of the Jazira and Hasaka regions depended on remittances sent by these workers to their families. Moreover, the economic health of the Jazira and Hasaka regions depended on remittances sent by these workers to their families.

Syria's domination of Lebanon proceeded along a number of parallel tracks. Legally, it was institutionalized through formal treaties between the two states. On May 22, 1991, the Treaty of Brotherhood, Cooperation and Coordination streamlined the security and foreign policy objectives of the two countries. Article 1 stated: "The two countries will work to achieve the highest levels of cooperation and coordination in all political and economic and security and cultural and scientific and other fields." The treaty also provided a mechanism for the institutionalization of coordination between the two countries through bilateral executive, economic, foreign, and defense and security committees. Given the power disparity between the two states, the treaty amounted to the institutionalization of a Syrian overlordship in Lebanon, especially in the foreign policy and security fields. The latter objective was given legal status with the promulgation of a Defense and Security Agreement, signed by the defense and interior ministers of both countries on September 1, 1991. The agreement provided for comprehensive coordination and cooperation between the military, security and intelligence establishments of Lebanon and Syria. It was designed to streamline the security and defense establishments of the two countries in a pro-Syrian ideological orientation to ensure Syria's domination over Lebanon's military establishment and intelligence apparatus. With the Treaty of Brotherhood, it provided the political and security infrastructure for Syria's hegemony over Lebanon.

**Shelving Ta'if**

Once the treaties were signed, the militias were demobilized—except for Hizballah—and political reforms were adopted into the constitution, Syria shelved Ta'if. Lebanese politicians were no longer allowed to mention in their speeches the need to complete the implementation of Ta'if because this implied Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon. Lebanese political parties...
opposed to Syria's domination were emasculated: the Christian Phalange Party was overtaken from within, and its leadership recomposed of pro-Syrian cadres; the Lebanese Forces were banned and their leader Samir Geagea imprisoned, on charges of orchestrating the assassination of former Prime Minister Ra’chid Karami. The supporters of the exiled Michel Aoun were hounded. Trusted Lebanese lieutenants, but always under Syrian supervision, oversaw the reindoctrination of the Lebanese Army along pro-Syrian lines. The intelligence apparatus was restructured to serve Syria’s interests. Syrian intelligence officers penetrated every nook and cranny of Lebanese life, and had the final say in appointments in almost all public institutions, the media, the courts, the universities and the professional associations reached its zenith. The law organizing punitive litigation was amended and passed on August 7, 2004, against the wishes of the majority of parliamentarians, ending the independence of the judiciary and giving the intelligence agencies free rein. In effect, the state was run by the security agencies, hiding behind a civilian institutional veneer.

Against this backdrop, on September 2, 2004, Washington and Paris pushed through UN Security Council Resolution 1559 calling on “all remaining foreign forces to withdraw from Lebanon” and mandating the “disbanding and disarmament of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias” in the country.
The resolution also declared its support “for a free and fair electoral process in Lebanon’s upcoming presidential election conducted according to Lebanese constitutional rules and devised without foreign interference or influence.”

Syria opted to confront the international community in Lebanon. Despite UNSC 1559 and opposition from a broad spectrum of Lebanese politicians, including Hariri and Walid Jumblatt, President Bashar al-Assad decided to renew Lahoud’s presidency. Hariri, who had been in conflict with the intelligence apparatus ever since Lahoud’s ascension to the presidency, decided against forming a new cabinet. Instead, he opted to confront Syria in the 2005 parliamentary elections. A parliamentary majority would give him control over executive institutions. US and French pressure, through UNSC 1559, with implicit Arab support, would force a Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon. Hariri could then dismantle the Syrian political-security apparatus in Lebanon.

The Day After

The assassination of Hariri on February 14, 2005 set in motion a train of events ultimately leading to Syria’s hurried departure from Lebanon. US, French and Saudi pressure on Damascus was overwhelming and effective. Crown Prince ‘Abdallah refused to discuss Hariri’s assassination with Syrian Foreign Minister Farouq al-Sharaa, summoning Bashar to Riyadh instead. In their brief meeting on March 3, 2005, ‘Abdallah handed Bashar an ultimatum to withdraw the Syrian army and intelligence apparatus from Lebanon forthwith.

Syria’s withdrawal caused much acrimony on both sides of the border. Many Syrian workers left Lebanon, and most Lebanese were happy to see them go, despite their economic utility. Syria’s political edifice in Lebanon collapsed swiftly, and a considerable number of its Lebanese backers disappeared from public life. Those who contested the May-June 2005 parliamentary elections were utterly defeated (except for Amal and Hizballah). Newspaper reports documenting the excesses of Syria’s security chiefs and their Lebanese partners confirmed views held by most Lebanese of the darker side of Syria’s absolute control over the past 15 years. In his famous speech on March 5, 2005 announcing the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon, Bashar acknowledged that mistakes were made. “We drowned in the details and rushed ahead in our relations with some Lebanese at the expense of others,” he stated.

In the same speech, Bashar summarized the new attitude of Damascus toward Lebanon: “Syria’s withdrawal from Lebanon does not mean the absence of a Syrian role [in Lebanon].” This role is governed by many geographic and political and other factors. On the contrary, we [will be] more at liberty and more forthcoming in our dealings with Lebanon.” Syria’s continued interest in matters Lebanese was soon signaled by the closure of the long border with Lebanon as the first post-withdrawal cabinet was being formed in mid-July 2005.

The message was not lost on Lebanese politicians: Damascus wanted assurances that the new cabinet would not assume a confrontational stance toward Syria. The July 28, 2005 ministerial manifesto of Fuad Siniora’s cabinet addressed the need to rebuild relations between the two countries, labeling them “distinctive in their strength, depth, transparency, equality and sincerity.” These may be reassuring words, yet they were said in a tone of confidence absent from previous manifestos. Past practices, more so than agreements, must be changed, though some sections of the Defense and Security Agreement require amendment to achieve parity between the two states. Vengeful actions on either side will deepen fresh wounds.

A new page in Syrian-Lebanese relations has indeed been turned. Both countries need time to accommodate themselves to the new reality. The sooner they do so, the better for them both.

Endnotes

1. The only exception is the battalion of Syrian troops posted in Dayr al-’Asha’a, a stretch along the Lebanon-Syrian border where the exact boundary has yet to be demarcated.
5. See Kissinger’s comments at the April 7, 1976 National Security Council meeting, recorded in Years of Renewal, pp. 1046, 1050.
13. See, for example, Saddam’s speech of November 17, 1988, in FBIS-NE-88–223.
22. For the text of the treaty, see al-Safir, May 13, 1999.
25. Interviews with Saudi journalists in Dubai and Beirut, April and June 2005. See also the Washington Post, March 4, 2005.
26. The only other exceptions involved candidates who ran in otherwise “safe” electoral districts, such as Nadir Sukkar in Baalbak-Hermel and As’ad Hardan in the South.
27. See the text of Bashar’s speech in al-Hayat, March 6, 2005.
28. See the text of Siniora’s manifesto in al-Nahar, July 26, 2005.
Like most places in the world that, time and time again, have been fit into the journalist’s script or forced into the novelist’s frame, Lebanon has been tirelessly taxed with metaphors and allegories. Simultaneously, it has been presented as the terrain for metaphorical and allegorical construction. In its pre-war heyday, Lebanon was the “Paris of the Orient,” the “Switzerland of the Middle East,” the “land of milk and honey.” During its 17-year civil war, Beirut became itself the metaphor for the no man’s land of destruction, captive to a self-sustaining cycle of armed conflict. Mikhail Gorbachev warned of the “Lebanonization” of Yugoslavia as that country’s dismemberment into ethnic, religious and cultural cantons loomed.

It is very difficult to find a metaphor that does justice to the country or its capital since the post-war chapter opened in 1992, and even harder to find one for the shock of the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri on February 14, 2005 and the momentous “Independence Intifada” (in Arabic, intifadat al-istiqlal) that followed. This time, the revolution really was televised. Rarely has a popular mobilization received so much attention from the global media, and possibly never before has a movement for political change been so conscious of the image it was projecting to the world. Never, for instance, has a franchise of the global advertising mogul Saatchi & Saatchi participated so overtly in the shaping of a popular uprising. With the benefit of only a few months

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to look back upon Istiqlal ’05, it would not be unfair to evoke Guy Debord’s *The Society of the Spectacle* and interrogate the “spectacular” virtues of the uprising. From the myriad events that have punctuated these months, myriad anecdotes have inspired myriad metaphors. I kept a diary in the days leading up to April 13, the thirtieth anniversary of the outbreak of the civil war. If my entries do not lend themselves to drawing conclusions, they underscore the contradictions of the historical moment ushered in by Istiqlal ’05.

**April 4**

‘Alam al-Sabah, the morning show on the late Hariri’s Future television network. The anchors are still decked out in the black-and-white palette of official mourning. It has been 50 days since the fateful morning of February 14. A thick black streak diagonally bisects the Future logo, and a log marks the passage of days since moment zero. Newscasts begin: “Today is the nth day since the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri, and the investigation has yet to reveal the truth.” Straightforward grieving for Hariri and demands for a full investigation have morphed into a non-stop kaleidoscope of mourning: video clips, songs, graphics, slogans and public service announcements unreel incessantly across the screen. Along with the anchors’ self-presentation, the morning show’s structure has been adjusted to fit the new “circumstances.” There are more news updates, Astrological predictions and segments on fashion, hairdressing, beauty and child psychology have been canceled.

The adult psychology segment is still running. Today, the psychologist, a warm, sensible, bespectacled fellow, is planning to reply to a query from Damascus. A woman had called a couple of days ago, but considering the gravity of her question, he intends to dedicate the entire segment to answering her. The woman, a mother of three, employed, lives and works in Damascus while her husband lives and works in the United Arab Emirates. She had called for advice on tranquilizers because she is no longer able to control her anxiety attacks. She said she was becoming a “bad mother” and a “bad employee.” Ever since Hariri’s assassination, she has been captivated by the news; she feverishly reads all the newspapers available in Damascus, including the pan-Arab daily *al-Hayat*. She is consumed with fear about the fate of Syria if the Americans harbor the designs for her country that they did for Iraq. She believes the country would fall apart, and worries about protecting her children. She cannot afford to flee, nor does she wish to. She cannot sleep and cannot eat. She has lost hope and her will to live. Her children are aware that she is increasingly detached and angry; they see her crying helplessly.

Momentarily interrupting the atmosphere of grief and repressed fear that the nation’s prodigal patriarch was no longer there to hold the fiction of post-war Lebanon together, the psychologist goes through the conventional litany of cautions against the impact of stress on the psyche and the body. He advises the woman to seek the help of a psychologist in Damascus and find a way of explaining to her children why she is in this state without transferring stress onto them. On the subject of alarm, he explains that she should diversify her sources of news, and pay equal attention to the positive reports in the media.

**April 5**

Traffic in the city is almost back to normal. Rumors abound that undocumented or “illegal” Syrian workers are leaving Lebanon in droves. Every other person in the Rawda Café tells of a building concierge who has packed up and left. The Sabra and Shatila Palestinian refugee camps, thriving residential quarters for these migrant workers, are said to have been almost entirely emptied of their Syrian populations. Sukleen, the waste management company with a contract to collect garbage countrywide, is reported to be frantically recruiting workers from Sudan and Bangladesh as replacements for its almost entirely undocumented Syrian labor force.

Rumors also abound of booby-trapped automobiles being discovered and dismantled in the nick of time. Three in Burj Hammoud yesterday. One in Dhour al-Shuwayr the night before. Checkpoints are being set up all over the city to reassure people, many in eerie locations, such as near the Saint Georges Hotel, where the force of the February 14 explosion has left a gaping crater. One night, they stopped and searched only black cars; another night, they stopped and searched exclusively BMWs; and yesterday they were targeting Mercedes.

In the locker room at the gym, I eavesdrop on a conversation between two 20-year old women. Theirs is a generation born just as the war was ending. Presently, they are “discovering” the rituals of adjusting to living in fear and taking precautions against the arbitrary explosion of violence. There is no rhyme or reason to the booby-trapped cars, and the logic of spreading terror seems to have taken hold. The two girls are chatting about their fiancés and their social lives. They are scared of making plans to go out at night and partake in their usual walks on the Corniche. They have been shopping at small grocery stores near their apartments, avoiding big shopping centers and their parking lots because “they are such obvious targets.”

**April 6**

They are everywhere. If it’s not a flag, it’s a sticker that demands “the truth.” What would happen if “the truth” came out? According to quite a few in the opposition, the government in Syria would fall “comme avec Milosevic,” replete with the UN-led investigation, due process and a tribunal in The Hague. To many, that scenario seems far-fetched, embarrassingly unimaginable.

At the instigation of the ex-prime minister’s sister Bahlia, the mayor of Beirut, ‘Abd al-Ghani ‘Aris (who can’t stop French from slipping into his Arabic as he is interviewed live on Future), and downtown business owners have decided
to launch a series of festivities beginning with the weekend preceding April 13, to celebrate national unity and restore life to what has become a deserted, desolate city center. People are exhorted to perform their patriotic duty, defy the barriers of fear that national tragedy and car bombs had instilled in hearts and minds, and go out to wine, dine and be merry in downtown Beirut. Restaurants and cafés are offering their menus at half-price from April 9 until April 13. A program of free concerts and activities is planned to animate every nook and cranny in the area, celebrities plan to make appearances, television programs are planning to broadcast from the midst of the celebrations, and Middle East Airlines, Lebanon’s flagship airline, will be offering discounted tickets for Arabs to come and celebrate Lebanon’s rise from the ashes. “It’s democracy tourism,” says Bahiyya.

Every aspect of the spectacle is thought out beforehand, including a slogan encapsulating both life-affirming celebration and national unity: “Lebanon, a country for all, a country for life” (Lubnan lil-jami’, watan lil-hayat). Each day is assigned a symbolic color that people are encouraged to wear on their sleeves. Saturday will be colorless; Sunday will be red for the bold Lebanese people and their valiant army. Monday will be green for the hope-filled future; people are encouraged to plant an olive tree or a cedar tree. Tuesday will be white to wish peace upon all Lebanese; people are invited to plant white flags everywhere.

April 7

Rawda Café, a gorgeous spring day. A Filipina nanny pushing a toddler in a carriage is humming the national anthem to lull him to sleep. By now a slew of pop stars have released “versions” of the anthem, each accompanied by a dramatic video clip documenting the Independence Intifada. The dictionary of political rhetoric has acquired a new expression—“the living martyr.” Rafiq al-Hariri is a “living martyr” because his spirit, his legacy and his courage will live on despite his assassins’ sinister designs. Marwan Hamadeh, one of Hariri’s allies, is a “living martyr” because his body and soul survived the sinister attempt on his life.

In downtown Beirut, people are out in massive numbers. Bahiyya al-Hariri’s initiative is an astounding success. Shouts of support for her dead brother rise intermittently from the crowd. Joie de vivre—regarded by Lebanese as a national trait—is back with a vengeance. Restaurants use the flag to cover tables. There is an average two-hour wait at every one. A man flanked by his family of four, doused in perfume, screams at a headwaiter: “I flew from Dubai for this! Can’t you find me a table?” The frenzied, breathless maitre d’ throws back the sharp upward nod that means no.
The country remains without a government. Negotiations between the two major political camps over the formation of a cabinet are tense. On the face of it, there is an atmosphere of looming national crisis and total collapse. However, underneath the surface, there is a barely muffled sense of exhilaration, because never before in the post-war era has there been a real contest for power. Syrian hegemony was such that contests for power were despairingly petty, subverted to serve narrow ends—sectarian, communitarian and, most often, individual.

While the map of sectarian divisions remains significant, the alignment of coalitions upgirding the two major camps does not break down on strictly sectarian lines. That, in some sense, is also hopeful. The two organized Shi’i forces, the Amal movement and Hizballah, have been aligned in their pro-Syrian endorsement with the president and his nebulae of Christian allies, organized conservative Sunni movements, Sunni figures who competed with Hariri over his claim of chief Sunni leadership and the Druze figure challenging Walid Jumblatt’s claim to chief Druze leadership. If the opposition camp represented a similar coalition of forces, including sectarian elements, but secular ones as well, their feat was that they superseded differences in ideological vision by agreeing to a set of common goals.

On the eve of the thirtieth commemoration of the outbreak of the civil war, the power struggle between the opposition and the pro-Syrian forces moved to the realm of the constitutional mandate for holding elections in May. The debate, due to take place in Parliament, would be an endurance test, and an intelligence test as well, for the coalition cementing the opposition camp.

Meanwhile, the showcase of national unity is still on display in downtown Beirut. Today, downtown churches will hold concerts of patriotic songs. Artists will begin painting a mural in the Saifi Village, the pre-war carpenters’ souk turned into high-end loft-like housing for the very discriminating few, to commemorate the war and celebrate national unity.

Cartoonists and comic book artists will decorate an alleyway in the Village. Corazon Aquino, who was invited to speak at a rally on April 13, has announced that she will not be able to come. Neither will Nelson Mandela.

In the storytelling corner, Nancy Ajram, one of the most adulated of Lebanese pop stars, is reading the story of “The Two Butterflies” to a group of children. The story was later recounted word for word on television: Two butterflies, one with blue wings and the other with yellow wings, were flitting about seeking protection from the pouring rain. They batted their wings and pleaded with tree after tree and bush after bush—but in vain. No tree or bush would shelter both of them together. Determined to stick together rather than be separated, the butterflies continued their dangerous quest. Moved by their bond of unity, the sun took pity on them, and emerged from beyond the clouds to stop the rain. The two butterflies were saved. The moral of the story is Lebanon’s newly forged unity. Ajram tells the children. Her most assiduous competitor, Haifa Wehbe, is scheduled to read a story on April 13.

“What of memory in the question of reconciliation?” Three panelists, Hani Fays, a Shi’a cleric and intellectual, renowned psychotherapist Shawqi Azouri and Ziad Baroud, a lawyer and activist for human rights and democracy, are scheduled to answer this question at the annual event of Mémoire pour l’Avenir (Memory for the Future), an association dedicated to preserving the memory and archives of the civil war.

Under the faux crystal chandelier in the fancy downstairs room of the Phoenicia Hotel, which was quickly renovated after sustaining extensive damage from the February 14 explosion, Hani Fays pleads for reconciliation with the wondrous eloquence of a man schooled in Nahj al-balagh, the collection of speeches and sermons attributed to Ali bin Abi Talib, the son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad venerated by the Shi’a as the first Imam. Reconciliation, he proposes, needs a language forged in national unity and the living experience of our collective being. Memory can find a domicile in the metaphorical domains of that language, because metaphor is constitutive of the expression of truth. Memory as allegory, spoken in a subordinate clause, will endow that language of reconciliation with the strength and grace to subvert the demons of the war and those who try to hijack national unity.

After apologizing for his poor command of Arabic and his inability to translate “technical” terms from French, Shawqi Azouri prefaxes his presentation by quoting Jacques Lacan in French: “Etre ce n’est rien d’autre qu’oublier” (Being is nothing other than forgetting). Azouri is advocating forgetting—turning the page, so to speak—but not before reading that page and understanding it. His extensive clinical experience with the lingering trauma of the war has led him to conclude that generations of Lebanese have yet to achieve “closure.” Mourning and grief have been dragged out well into the post-war era. While
the shelling ended in 1991, Azouri argues, the war did not. In
lieu of armed conflict was Syrian tutelage, administered through
terror and capable of holding the entire population captive. The
tragedy on February 14 was the first occasion for a collective
expression of grief. Borrowing the “Stockholm syndrome” meta-
phor, Azouri explains that a portion of the population could not
yet break free from the hold of its captors and partake in the
cathartic release of collective grief. Those who have recovered
their agency have a duty to extend a gentle and loving hand to
rescue their brethren, still bound up in the psychopathology
of the hostage. The clue to achieving closure, he says, is to be
found in the report drafted by a UN-appointed commission
of inquiry that confirmed the necessity for a UN-sponsored
international investigation into the crime. In its conclusion,
the report says that in order for the Lebanese to weep over their
death, they had to know the truth.

Ziad Baroud, the last to speak, argues that reconciliation is
predicated on restoring to the justice system its true mission.
He proposes to repeal the 1991 General Amnesty Law that al-
lowed warlords and heads of militias to go home free and stake
their claims in the political arena. Instead, Lebanon should
organize trials to recognize crimes committed during the war,
attribute responsibility, determine punishment and unburden
the pain of victimhood from silence. There it is, frozen into a
snapshot: Lebanon, the country where ‘Ali bin Abi Talib sits
side by side with Jacques Lacan, with the journalist Samir Kas-
sir (since assassinated) mediating their conversation.

On the Future channel this night, Yahya Jabir, a poet and
playwright, anoints the “martyred” former prime minister with
still a grander title. Jabir inaugurates his lengthy opus, spoken
in free verse, chock-filled with colloquialisms, this way: “On
Saint Valentine’s Day, in front of the Saint George Hotel, Saint
Rafiq al-Hariri was martyred.”

April 13

No color code for the day. Today will be the last opportunity
to buy candles and scarves decorated with the Lebanese flag,
gingerbread cookies with red-white-and-green icing, ashtrays
that read “freedom,” “independence” and “sovereignty,” neck-
lace pendants where a crescent hugs a cross. There was more
to buy. There were T-shirts to suit every taste: 100 Percent
Lebanese, We Remember to Forget and Istiqlal ’05. All of it,
of course, made by “100 percent Lebanese designers.”

The most meaningful event is a protest organized by the as-
sociation of parents and kin of the kidnapped and missing from
the war whose fate remains unknown. They carry pictures of their
beloved, nearly 17,000 souls snatched in 17 years of civil conflict,
the nagging ghosts and open wounds of the war. Most of them have been killed, but their deaths are not yet acknowledged. Some, perhaps a mere handful, languish in the jails of Syria, suspended between life and death. In downtown Beirut, their families’ protest is the only site where the horror of war is resurrected from forgetting. Sets of postcards reproducing difficult images from the war—the checkpoints, the crossing points, the snipers, the militia fighters, the tanks—are sold as mementos.

There is a sweeping magnetism to crowds. I lose myself in downtown Beirut to become one of “the people.” The moment was staged for them. I don’t know exactly who they are. I know they are not those who can’t afford to be in downtown Beirut. I know they are a very small fraction of the people, perhaps an even smaller fraction of those who are genuinely afraid, whose lives are under threat. The people who staff the tourism industry, who make the orange juice seem fresh and deliver it promptly, the people who carry trays of food and cut sandwiches into the dainty squares that earn them the name “nouvelle cuisine.” Bahiyya al-Hariri’s call for the consumption of leisure—under the guise of patriotism—could only be heeded by the well-to-do. But the “other people,” the taxi drivers, the waiters, the delivery van drivers, the farmers, the manicurists, the cashiers, the fortune-tellers, even the peddlers, all are relieved the commerce of leisure and joie de vivre are back.

I am caught in a paradox. I am moved by stories of when “people” took to the streets and the government fell, and when people took to the streets on March 14, in answer to the Hizballah protest, when “other people” thanked Syria for its guardianship of Lebanon. Compelling stories tell of young men and women carrying a Qur’an in one hand and a cross in another, of Druze carrying their flag in one hand and the flag of the Lebanese Forces, once their sworn enemies, in the other. Hands clasped together as the national anthem transformed distinct communities into “the people of Lebanon.” They willed themselves for the first time into being “the people,” reclaiming citizenship.

And yet something is amiss. Crowds make one giddy and dizzy. They can push one toward dangerous degree of self-righteousness. I am moved to the depths of my heart watching a crescent hug a cross, the Qur’an and the Bible in one clasp, but the country remains profoundly hostage to sectarian segregation. The picture from inside the meanderings of the leaders constituting the coalition of the opposition camp is a poignant testament. The political maneuvering around the electoral law, the calculations, the shaping of interests, the negotiations are dizzy. They can push one toward dangerous degree of self-righteousness. I am moved to the depths of my heart watching a crescent hug a cross, the Qur’an and the Bible in one clasp, but the country remains profoundly hostage to sectarian segregation. The picture from inside the meanderings of the leaders constituting the coalition of the opposition camp is a poignant testament. The political maneuvering around the electoral law, the calculations, the shaping of interests, the negotiations are dizzy. They can push one toward dangerous degree of self-righteousness. I am moved to the depths of my heart watching a crescent hug a cross, the Qur’an and the Bible in one clasp, but the country remains profoundly hostage to sectarian segregation. The picture from inside the meanderings of the leaders constituting the coalition of the opposition camp is a poignant testament.

Ultimately, “the people” will be betrayed. They will prove to be more noble, progressive and courageous than the politicians claiming to represent them. So observed Samir Kassir, one of the chief architects of Istiqlal ’05, just weeks before he was assassinated on June 2 in Beirut.

**Afterword**

It was not all Gucci commemorating the thirtieth year since the outbreak of the war—not all “Cedar Revolution” as per the coinage of the State Department. There was an alternative stage at the National Museum on the “Green Line” that used to split the city along an east-west axis. It was organized by agents of civil society, activists for social justice, human rights and gay rights, advocates for the physically handicapped. There was civility, solidarity, patriotism and national unity—without the baubles and the dainty square sandwiches.

April 13 ended with fireworks. By April 14, frustration reigned again. The country was still without a government, and the investigation into the assassination of Hariri had not advanced by a single meaningful step. It was not clear whether Syria would be out or just out and back in. The leadership of the opposition was upset that the celebrations had deflected energy and focus from the exertion of political pressure from the street. They still had the fight in their spirit and planned to reclaim Martyrs’ Square as a public space for dissent, not parading flags and selling cedar-shaped gingerbread cookies. By the end of the week, an electronic clock counted the days until the parliamentary elections. On May 29, the opposition claimed another victory as elections were held in the administrative district of Beirut.
“Lebanon was built with Syrian muscles,” declared an elderly Lebanese in the early 1990s. He was referring to the hundreds of thousands of semi- and unskilled Syrians who have worked in Lebanon on a temporary basis in construction, agriculture, manufacturing and services since the mid-twentieth century.

The old man was also expressing mild surprise at how the presence of Syrian workers in Lebanon had become the subject of great controversy, even as a new generation of Syrian muscles stretched and strained in aid of the tremendous boom of construction in post-war Beirut. After the war, Syrian workers stood accused of everything from taking Lebanese jobs to informing on opponents of Syrian political and military control of Lebanon. By the time of the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri in February 2005, the presence of Syrian workers was a major grievance fueling the “Syria Out!” demand of the Lebanese opposition. There were even a number of attacks on these workers during the “Independence Uprising” and the rapid Syrian troop withdrawal in April. By May, it was reported that Suq al-Sabra in south Beirut—also known as Suq al-Hamidiyya (one of the main Damascene markets) because of the numerous Syrians there—was virtually deserted.

No one knows for sure how many Syrians were working in Lebanon before the momentous events of the spring. The dearth of solid numbers was one factor stirring up controversy over the presence of workers—mostly rural in origin—whose purposes in Lebanon were far more mundane than those attributed to them by their antagonists. The Syrian laborers now heading back to the country are testament to enduring attraction of higher

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wages, even with the soldiers gone and the grip of Damascus on its western neighbor greatly weakened.

**Like Sugar in Tea**

Before the 1975–1990 civil war, Syrian labor was hardly a controversial topic in Lebanon, mobilization by the Lebanese labor movement against cheap competition notwithstanding. It was thought natural that the “Switzerland of the East” should attract manual workers from less well-off neighbors, and the Lebanese economic miracle in fact required inexpensive, unskilled labor, which, for various reasons, could not be supplied from within Lebanon. General Security figures from 1970 recording 279,541 Syrian workers in Lebanon barely interested the press. These workers were temporary migrants who worked hard for low wages and did not press collective demands or seek to make a visible home in Lebanon. In the words of a 1972 newspaper headline, this was a labor force that, at the end of the day, “melts away like sugar in tea.”

This apparently expansive outlook darkened with the economic crises of the mid-1980s and as the civil war raged. The slide in the value of the Lebanese currency, budget deficits, increasing debt, a negative trade balance, runaway inflation, falling real wages, massive emigration and growing unemployment shook the once proud Lebanese economy. Foreign labor—including Syrians—quickly emerged as a scapegoat. The issue took on bold political colors following Syria’s defeat of Gen. Michel Aoun during 1990–1991. Syria now presided over the political settlement encapsulated in the 1989 Ta’if Accords. The Syrian army and security services hunkered down for a long stay and Syrian regime figures began to muscle in on Lebanese commerce. As the Syrian political and military “presence” felt to more and more Lebanese like an “occupation,” Syrian workers came to be seen as an extension of Damascus’ policies and a source of numerous problems in a country struggling to rebuild. They were, in the words of columnist ‘Ali Safa’, a “frightening specter.”

**“One Syrian for Every Two Lebanese”**

In July 1995, economist Michel Murqus published an article in the daily newspaper al-Nahar that sparked years of heated debate in the Lebanese press about the numbers and social impact of Syrian workers in Lebanon. Murqus’ headline stated that “1,435,991 Syrians have stayed in Lebanon since 1993.” The authority of this oppositional discourse was given a boost in August 1997 when the patriarch of the Maronite Church, Nasrallah Sfeir, endorsed a figure of 1.2 million Syrian workers, citing their competition with Lebanese workers as one of five “basic problems” facing the country. Numbers like this were later backed in certain academic quarters. Such a flood of foreign workers—one newspaper headline said Lebanon was “nearly drowning”—had dire repercussions for Lebanese sovereignty and politics, claimed a succession of press articles. The hands of the state were tied by corrupt Syrian control, which removed decision-making from the Lebanese authorities and public. Syrian military roads meant the borders were impossible to police. Smugglers and associated mafiosi were flourishing. Overly numerous workers burdened security services, police and prisons, threatening the rule of law. Syrian workers were impossible to tax, meaning hundreds of millions were lost to the treasury. Worse, could not many workers have links to the Syrian security services that are responsible for extensive human rights abuses in Lebanon (as well as in Syria)? It is frightening, said one Lebanese, when your concierge, who knows everything about you and your family, is Syrian and a potential informant. Syrian workers were also seen as a threat to the political position of an embattled Christian minority in a country where power depended on sectarian numbers, especially if Syrians were to be naturalized.

Just as insistently, Murqus and other critics charged that Syrians were a drain on the Lebanese economy. They sent practically all their earnings home, to the tune of billions of dollars a year, putting a huge strain on the currency and balance of payments, and on Lebanese business, which failed to benefit from their feeble consumer spending. As one refrain went, the Syrians “even bring their bread.”

The critics went on to blame Syrian workers for the plight of unprotected “armies of unemployed” Lebanese. That employers were forced to employ Syrians for fear of security services was a common claim. So was the idea that Syrian squatters in abandoned, war-damaged houses caused numerous problems, and the argument that Syrian workers proliferated in city slums, straining municipal resources. Syrians appeared regularly in the crimes and misdemeanors sections of the daily papers, accused of rape, murder and theft—hardly surprising, said some, given that they are uneducated single men, a long way from home. Some said an influx of migrants taking local jobs was causing Lebanese to leave the country, a particular bugbear of Christians worried over the sectarian balance. For some, finally, Syrian workers were seen as a threat to the civilized culture and identity of Lebanon itself.

**In Defense of Syrian Labor**

The first major attempt to rebut Michel Murqus’ figures was a 1998 study for the Syrian-Lebanese Supreme Council by demographer Roger Sawaya, who claimed that Lebanon hosted no more than 253,000 Syrian workers. He argued that Murqus’
numbers related to entries and exits, but not individuals. The same person could enter and exit 12 times a year, however, greatly inflating the gross figures. Further, exits were undercounted as many did not hand in their entry cards on departure in order to escape the exit fee from Syria on return. Moreover, Murqus’ calculations ignored the fact that many exits and entries registered not workers, but tourists, residents, visitors and students. Others picked up the baton, arguing that al-Nahar was biased, that Murqus’ figures were against all logic and science, and his estimates for workers by sector greatly exaggerated, his figures for remittances wildly inflated and his economics self-contradictory or simply wrong.

As for politics, defenders of the Syrian workers continued, how could the Lebanese complain about the Syrian hand in Lebanon, when Syria ended its civil war and guaranteed Lebanese security? Had not 15,000 Syrian martyrs fallen defending the Lebanese, their sovereignty and the larger pan-Arab cause from Israel and the US? The admitted regulatory problems were being addressed by the joint committee established in the Labor Agreement of October 1994, which would result in an agreement to regulate work and workers as soon as possible. Lebanese employers bore a heavy responsibility for the lack of regulation and taxation in any case, as they refused to register their work force in order to avoid labor law, taxes and red tape.

As for the economy, how can the Lebanese say the Syrians are a drain, the retort has been, when Syrians built Lebanon, whether the wealthy families who arrived fleeing socialism in the 1960s or those manual laborers who have taken the low-status, low-income jobs Lebanese refuse. The latter perspective is emphatically shared by Syrian workers and their Lebanese employers. Salim al-Dahhash, a construction worker who became a concierge, says: “Syrians are distinctive for their labor, particularly in construction. The Lebanese are simply not accustomed to this kind of heavy labor. They don’t want to do it. They want to sit in offices, in banks, to work with computers. They can’t carry heavy things on their shoulders, or work with their hands.”

Abu ‘Uthman, a Lebanese shopkeeper and employer in Beirut makes the same point: “All the Lebanese want to work as prime minister or president of the republic!”

The defenders of the Syrian labor force in Lebanon say that those who deny these simple facts of division of labor and supply and demand have “political goals and intentions.” Or, they are hypocritical on two counts. First, it is the Lebanese who seek to employ cheap Syrians. Second, Lebanon itself lives on remittances from out-migrants working abroad. Economists note that in any case Syria pays the major social costs—such as health care and education—of the reproduction of the Syrian work force. The Lebanese capitalist pays only subsistence wages. Some estimate the profits made by Lebanese employers at $500 million per annum. Finally, it is argued, market integration between
Syria and Lebanon is necessary to build up an Arab economic bloc which can face up to hegemonic economic and political projects led by the Turkish-Israeli alliance.\textsuperscript{17}

As for social problems, these defenders contend that Lebanese unemployment is much more a result of structural problems than of Syrian competition. In many sectors, Lebanese and Syrians do not compete as the Lebanese refuse to do menial labor. Slums result not from the backwardness of the Syrians, but from the failure of the Lebanese authorities to take foreign workers into account in their urban planning. The Lebanese should point the finger, it is added, not at the supposedly backward rural migrants, but at their own failure to grant basic human rights and human dignity to Syrians.\textsuperscript{18} The notion that Syrian migrants cause out-migration is discounted because out-migrants are usually those with professional or vocational qualifications who do not compete with Syrians. Finally, accusations of criminality and exaggerated fears about Lebanese culture are occasionally denounced as racism.

The defense of Syrian labor, however, failed to persuade the Lebanese public. The Israeli withdrawal in May 2000, which reduced the rationale for the Syrian security presence, and the death of Hafiz al-Asad in June were both grasped as political opportunities by those opposed to Syrian control. After 2000, words turned into actions. Students loyal to Aoun engaged in high-profile campaigns, including selling “Lebanese” produce on the streets. The youth of certain city quarters—especially in Sidon—barred Syrians, accusing them of crimes. Violent incidents of uncertain provenance were reported. Harsh Syrian repression of protesters further polarized the situation. With the assassination of Hariri, widely blamed on Syria, popular anger saw a legitimate target in Syrian workers. Numerous attacks were reported, some resulting in fatalities, although hard numbers are lacking.\textsuperscript{19} Syrians departed the country in significant numbers.

### The Uncounted and Unprotected

Not surprisingly perhaps, the extended controversy over the presence of Syrian workers in Lebanon sheds only limited light on the migrants themselves. For all the ink spilled, it bears repeating that no accurate statistics on these workers exist. Syrians usually do not acquire Ministry of Labor work permits, and employers do not keep records lest they attract taxes and social costs. Recorded exits and entries are seriously unreliable, a fact admitted even by their champions, and do not single out workers. Absent a survey using sampling and multipliers, the best estimates come from the educated guesses of economists such as Kamal Hamdan about labor force absorption by sector. These estimates suggest numbers peaked at around 600,000 at the height of reconstruction in the mid-1990s, but fell with the recession to around 400,000 by 2000 and fluctuated around that number thereafter.\textsuperscript{20}

From the mid-twentieth century, most Syrians have come to Lebanon to work in agriculture or construction. Syrians take the majority of the unskilled and semi-skilled jobs in agriculture, where female workers are also found in significant numbers. In construction, Syrians make up most of the unskilled and semi-skilled work force, often as young male day laborers, although some of them also practice more skilled trades of tiling, plastering, décor, and even electricity and plumbing. Syrians excavate road beds and pour asphalt. They work across Lebanese manufacturing, perhaps most numerously in the garment industry. They earn wages in vegetable markets, supermarkets, groceries and butcher shops. They rent shops selling cheap electrical goods or clothes, and they work on their own account as ambulant food or lottery ticket sellers. Syrians bus tables and wash dishes in hotels, restaurants, cafés and clubs. They drive trucks, minibuses and taxis, cut hair, sweep streets, collect garbage and work as concierges in buildings. They do menial labor in hospitals and sometimes—unofficially—perform more skilled work in the health sector for a fraction of the pay given to Lebanese.

For unskilled and semi-skilled labor, pay varies from $7–12 per day. Those much less common Syrians who take skilled work in, for example, tiling, and perhaps supervise two or three laborers, can earn $25 per day.

### Working in Exile

Syrians come to Lebanon, where wages are several times higher than at home, determined to improve their lot in life. As Abd al-Qadir, who works in a grocery in Beirut, puts it: “We are not able to provide for our sons, our mothers and our fathers over there in Syria, so we want, by necessity, to go…wherever there is work.” A construction worker who became a concierge adds: “The one goal of work is to build a house and bring up a family and children [and] give them] an education.” Migrants seek also to raise capital for land or a small business in Syria, as they are expected to do back home. As Radwan, a supermarket worker from Aleppo, relates: “When I…go to Syria, they don’t say to me, what did you eat, what did you drink. [Instead they ask] how much money did you bring?” Workers know the stigma associated with failure: only the “zeroes” or “less-than-zeroes” stay behind, said one.

In order to compete, Syrians have to be willing to be sweated in labor-intensive, low-wage, exhausting and insecure work. Employers emphasize that they take on Syrians because they are cheaper and cause fewer problems than less hard-working and more regulated Lebanese. As Abu ‘Uthman puts it, “We work Sunday, seven days a week, without stopping. Therefore, I want a worker who is willing to sacrifice himself.” Hours are long, holiday and night work is the norm, breaks are infrequent and workers can be fired at any time without compensation. Work can be dangerous and is largely unregulated. Written contracts are absent, as is social insurance. Armanje, from Aleppo, who worked in both radiography and decorating, was asked if employers offered him accident insurance. He replied, “No. And we don’t even ask…. All we care about is [getting] the work…. If we asked [about insurance], the employer would say, are you here to work or to flirt?”
Whether or not the Syrian troop presence protected workers’ life and property (one might say that it caused their insecurity), and whether or not some workers were also informants for Syrian security, Syrian power in Lebanon did not lead to any progressive change in workers’ conditions. Nor did it protect them against disposability and low wages. Indeed, labor market regulation was a taboo topic for the Lebanese partly because of Syrian control, which extended to the Lebanese labor movement. The Syrian regime had no wish to rock the boat in Lebanon by encouraging its workers to “raise their heads.” Workers’ access to Lebanon greatly predated the Syrian intervention in any case. Open borders reaching back to the 1940s had much to do with the interests of Lebanese employers. If Syrian workers were hand in glove with the regime in Damascus, as per the persistent rumors, why were they so afraid of it?

Syrian migrants cut their consumption in Lebanon to the minimum. The idea is to send money to Syria, where everything can be purchased more cheaply or is provided by the state. According to one story in circulation, cost cutting applies even when Syrians die on construction sites. To avoid the exorbitant costs of transporting a corpse, the story goes, bodies are taken home wrapped in a kilim in the boot of a taxi, or even, as one version has it, as passengers in taxis or buses.

Syrians are usually exhausted by a life where social goods and lives are suspended. Lebanon feels like a place of exile. As one Syrian retailer compares his home to Lebanon, “Back in Syria, life is very good. It’s very cheap—food, clothes, housing—it’s heaven.” Such conditions drive Syrians away from Lebanon, and account for the fact that there is no second generation of Syrian migrant workers there in spite of three generations of mass migration reaching back to the 1950s. Lebanon is a place for earnings, not affection. As ‘Abd al-Qadir, who has worked in Lebanon since 1989, affirms, the country could be easily exchanged for another. Armange concurs with some passion: “I like to have Lebanese friends, but the Lebanese doesn’t have a friend. His friend is his pocket.”

Exploitation or Opportunity?

Some Syrian workers clearly achieve a modicum of success in terms of the goals they set for themselves, which are already structured, of course, by what is attainable. Migrants can receive wages three or four times higher than in Syria, and income levels, within narrow limits, can be increased through acquiring new skills. Some return to establish themselves in independent business, such as a barber from Aleppo who raised enough capital to open a relatively successful shop. Others return with improved status and marriage prospects. Still others return after decades to live in semi-retirement in good-sized houses surrounded by their children and grandchildren.

On the other hand, many are less successful, even in terms of their relatively modest goals. Armange said: “I thought that Lebanon might make us realize our ambitions but I’m disappointed.” Ibrahim, a construction worker, became fed up with the grinding regime in Lebanon and returned to Syria in August 2004 but without substantial savings. Others might fall ill and have to return empty-handed. Even for those “doing well,” the labor regime in Lebanon takes its toll. Why else would ‘Abd al-Qadir remember, in the manner of a convict or a conscript, the exact length of his longest period away from home? “Eleven months and 20 days,” he recounts.

There is little evidence that migrants see their work as valued, protected and well-remunerated. Syrians are often strongly
conscious of low pay, long hours, hard and unprotected work, insecurity, employer profiteering, lack of benefits and Lebanese hostility. Radwan asserts that, compared to other migrants who have work contracts, health coverage and travel arrangements on the employers’ account, “Our rights are destroyed.”

Syrian workers are not oppressed by a pure form of capitalist exploitation based on the extraction of relative surplus value by capitalists revolutionizing the means of production. Capitalism is uneven and the labor regime in Lebanon reproduces its labor as disciplined commodities—sweated workers with limited access to social goods or ability to make political or cultural claims. Above all, therefore, exploitation operates to prevent the social extension of workers’ lives beyond their status as a disposable commodity.

Such a labor regime has been present in Lebanon for Syrians since the 1950s, even as their numbers have fallen and risen with political crises. By the summer of 2005, many of those who withdrew in March and April had returned or were thinking of doing so, and the Lebanese public, in the wake of a virtual halt in construction and agriculture, was admitting, at least tacitly, that it needs those Syrian workers. Even with all the talk of new regulations, history suggests that, absent an organized challenge from below, this exploitative regime will continue for some time.

Endnotes

1 André Bourgey and J. Pharès, “Les bidonvilles de l’agglomération de Beyrouth,” Revue de Géographie de Lyon 48/2 (1973), p. 121. The resident working population of Lebanon in 1970 was 572,000 Lebanese. Albert Dagher, “Al-Quwa al-'Amila wa al-Namu fi Lubnan” in Linking Economic Growth and Social Development in Lebanon (Beirut: UN Development Program, 2000), p. 86. Thus (discounting other foreign labor), Syrians made up about a third of the working population of Lebanon. Likewise, the fact that the population of Beirut was 45 percent foreign in 1973 was not seen as a cause for alarm. André Bourgey, “La guerre et ses conséquences géographiques au Liban,” Annales de Géographies 94 (1985) p. 3.


3 Al-Usha' al-'Arabi, August 14, 1995.

4 Al-Nabat, August 4, 1997. The other four problems he identified were Israeli occupation, the Palestinian refugees, the Syrian troop presence and Lebanese emigration.


8 See, for example, Oweijane Khoury, “L’Immigration au Liban.”


10 See, for example, Oweijane Khoury.

11 Ibid.


13 See the article by Mikhail Awwad in al-Diyar, January 26, 1998.


15 Unless otherwise noted, all quotations of Syrian workers and Lebanese employers are from interviews conducted by the author in the spring and summer of 2004.

16 Khouri, quoted in al-Sharq, July 1, 1997.

17 Ibid.

18 Al-Nabat, August 10, 2002.

19 Damascus claimed 36 dead and 250 injured. Al-Hayat, July 19, 2005. The Lebanese daily al-Safir reported on two deaths and more than a dozen attacks on April 19, 2005.

20 See Daghet, “Al-Qowa al-'Amila.” See also economists Kamal Hamdan, Marwan Iskandar and Ghassan Ayyash, quoted in al-Safir, April 19, 2005.

21 See, for example, al-Nabat, March 23, 2005.
The state of relations between the Lebanese state and the 400,000 Palestinian refugees in Lebanon often can be gauged at the gates of the Ain al-Hilweh refugee camp in the coastal city of Sidon, halfway between Beirut and the Israeli border. Toward the end of July 2005, the Lebanese army erected roadblocks at most of the entrances to the camp, taking the names of anyone entering or exiting and causing long traffic delays. The pretext for the checkpoints was a search for the would-be assassins of newly reappointed Defense Minister Elias Murr, who had survived an attempt on his life on July 12. Murr claimed to know that the perpetrators were “hiding inside Palestinian refugee camps.” No one in Ain al-Hilweh or elsewhere has been arrested in the case.

In subsequent press interviews, unnamed officials said that the checkpoints were put in place to catch insurgents returning from the events following the assassination of Rafiq al-Hariri and Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon have not discernibly changed the situation of Palestinians in Lebanon. While a surprising government edict has made it easier for Palestinians to get clerical and manual jobs, calls for disarming them and permanently settling them in Lebanon grow louder.

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Iraq. The Palestinian refugees themselves saw the measures as an intensification of routine harassment, a possible commencement of their permanent “settlement” in Lebanon or even the beginning of efforts to disarm the militias who call the camps home. The refugees suspect that UN Security Council Resolution 1559, which in September 2004 mandated the “disbanding and disarmament of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias,” has a much better chance of being enforced than the UN General Assembly’s Resolution 194, which way back in 1948 affirmed the refugees’ right of return to homes in what is now Israel and their right to compensation for lost property.

The road closures in Ain al-Hilweh and the subsequent whirlwind of accusations and rumors are typical of what Palestinians have faced in Lebanon since fleeing there as refugees in 1948—and what they continue to face after the assassination of ex-Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri, Lebanon’s “Independence Uprising” and the rapid departure of Syrian troops in 2005. If anything, the eventful spring of 2005 has underscored the ways in which Lebanon’s complex sectarian politics, US military adventurism in the Middle East and the uneven application of UN resolutions have adversely affected Palestinians throughout their long exile in Lebanon. It is an exile whose present remains fraught with painful exclusion and whose future remains profoundly uncertain.

Eternal Scapegoats

Lebanese questioned about the origins of the 1975–1990 civil war frequently point the finger at “outsiders”—by which they mean, first and foremost, the Palestinians. On the day after a bomb killed Hariri and 19 others, an Islamist militant named Ahmad Taysir Abu ‘Adas took responsibility for the carnage in the name of the hitherto unknown Jama’at al-Nusra wa al-Jihad (Party of Victory and Jihad) through a videotaped message. The young man’s Palestinian background added to the atmosphere of suspicion against Palestinians, even if most Lebanese had already decided on Syrian culpability for the crime and considered Abu ‘Adas’ announcement to be specious.

In the coming weeks and months, Palestinians were blamed for any number of ills by almost all Lebanese political sides. When on March 8, 2005, Hizballah organized a massive demonstration against UNSC 1559 and “thanking” Syria for its help in maintaining stability in Lebanon, right-wing Maronite members of the anti-Syrian opposition immediately accused the party of padding its numbers with bussed-in Syrians and unidentified and uncounted Palestinian refugees. These accusers ignored the enmity the Syrian regime has shown toward independent Palestinian political organizations over several decades, as well as the contempt refugees feel for the Syrian regime because of its role during the civil war. Because Syria sent troops into Lebanon in June 1976 on the side of the Maronite Phalange Party, Palestinians hold Syria partly responsible for the Phalangists’ overrunning of the Tal al-Zaatar refugee camp after a 48-day siege later that summer. At least 4,280 Palestinian and Lebanese camp residents perished in Tal al-Zaatar. Between 1985 and 1988, the Shi‘i militias of Amal—allyed to Syria—placed the camps of Beirut and southern Lebanon under intermittent sieges during which the camp residents resorted to eating cats and donkeys and over 3,000 Palestinians died.

At the peak of the Independence Intifada, one could hear grumbling blaming Palestinians for political disturbances and accusing them of supporting the Syrian regime’s military presence in Lebanon. While the memorial wall for Hariri in downtown Beirut features mostly anti-Syrian slogans, one can also find statements against Palestinians interspersed with the more sentimental odes to the late prime minister. Ironically, even politicians loyal to Syria—like Murr—have been willing to scapegoat Palestinians.

In fact, the demonstrations of the spring highlighted the ease with which the oft-touted reconciliation between Leba-

April’s celebrations of Lebanese national unity erased Palestinians and their suffering from the Lebanese story.
to precipitate the war was that Phalangist militiamen stopped a bus carrying some 30 men and women home in the Beirut suburb of Ain al-Rummana, and slaughtered them all. The day of national unity was celebrated with ceremonies and portentous speeches full of hope and joy, but void of the concrete details which make April 13 such an ironic date for celebration of Lebanese unity: the great majority of those massacred on the bus were Palestinian.

Most Lebanese narratives of the civil war similarly efface Palestinian suffering, or focus on the undisputed wrongdoing of Palestinian militants when they wielded some power in the south or in the camps of Beirut. The myriad fratricidal atrocities committed against Palestinians by the Lebanese—massacres and sieges that left tens of thousands of Palestinians dead and tens of thousands more twice or thrice displaced—are forgotten in the interest of the same post-war amnesia which refuses to name culprits of the war and goes so far as to celebrate murderers and elect them to high office. The Phalange Party’s former military commander Elie Hobeika, the man who directed the infamous 1982 massacre in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps, became a government minister after the civil war. Samir Geagea, who as the subsequent head of the Lebanese Forces was responsible for the murder of many Palestinians and many more Lebanese, was amnestied in July 2005 to great adulation. The one massacre of Palestinians that is publicly commemorated, that at Sabra and Shatila, has in a sense been appropriated by Hizballah, which maintains the massacre site as a memorial, holds rallies there and weaves rhetoric about the massacre into its political declarations.4

Dire Conditions

The attempts at erasing Palestinians physically and figuratively from the landscape of Lebanese politics have translated into dire material conditions for the refugees. Some 400,000 Palestinians in Lebanon are registered with the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), slightly over half of whom reside in 12 official refugee camps.5 UNRWA and several local and international NGOs provide education, vocational training and health services to the refugees (particularly those residing in the camps). Nevertheless, both inside and outside the camps, Palestinian standards of living are severely vitiated by the paucity of UNRWA and NGO resources, the decrease in PLO funds allocated to the diasporan communities, the degree to which public services in Lebanon have been privatized and the Lebanese restriction of Palestinian rights. For example, while Palestinian refugees in both Jordan and Syria have the right to work, until recently the refugees in Lebanon were prohibited from engaging in over 70 manual, clerical and professional careers. Even today, Palestinians do not have the right to own or inherit property.6 Nor can they partake of Lebanese primary or secondary education. Palestinians cannot petition to gain Lebanese citizenship7 and, in fact, may have their citizenship revoked.8 They must endure a difficult process to obtain housing repair or construction permits,9 cannot establish NGOs solely dedicated to Palestinians,10 and must pay a substantial fee to attend Lebanese universities.11

The political affairs of the camps are administered by Popular Committees composed of representatives of various Palestinian factions. Where, once, political factions used to shape and direct camp lives, today, NGOs surviving on European or Australian funding are the most prominent socio-political organizations in the camps, providing basic assistance to supplement the ever dwindling UNRWA services.

The camps, especially in and around Beirut, often do not have potable water, and their electricity is either provided by donated generators, or when connected to the Lebanese grid, subject to long blackouts. The camps have open sewer systems, and their labyrinth-like alleyways do not allow for open public spaces. Because the camps are not allowed to expand beyond their small surface area, they have been built up vertically and in what cannot be a very safe fashion. Because Palestinians have been unable to find jobs or start businesses outside the camps, they have modest shops providing goods and services in the camps, which are often used by both residents and neighboring Lebanese. Living conditions in the camps are so dire, in sum, that Ghassan al-Khatib, a visiting Palestinian Authority minister, declared himself “stunned” and added that “even in camps in Gaza and Nablus in the Occupied Territories, the situation is better than that of the camps in Lebanon.”12
Most camps have been in place so long that they have become part of their surrounding built environment, and although the density of buildings and the difference in posters and slogans often signal the camp boundaries, they are otherwise indistinguishable—at least to unfamiliar eyes—from the Lebanese slums amidst which they have arisen. In fact, many poor Lebanese—and, until recently, many Syrian workers—also live in the camps. The camps in the south, where armed men belonging to the factions guard the entrances, are much more distinguishable as Palestinian. This is most true of Ain al-Hilweh, which has not only very prominent Palestinian checkpoints at each entrance, but also is the camp most subject to occasional cordons and searches by the Lebanese security apparatus.

Ain al-Hilweh, the largest Palestinian camp with some 45,000 residents, is also the most scrutinized, perhaps because on occasion militant Lebanese Islamists have taken refuge there. In the wake of the Syrian withdrawal and the ominous accusations about Palestinians, all camps now see Lebanese soldiers posted at entrances, but Ain al-Hilweh is under special surveillance. The entry procedures to the camp are so time-consuming as to turn away possible visitors who may want to use the camp’s shops or mechanical services. While local politicians call Ain al-Hilweh a “security enclave” or, less politely, an “island of lawlessness,” US diplomats have accused the camp of harboring Syrian intelligence agents. Palestinians see these accusations and the intensification of Lebanese security surveillance of Ain al-Hilweh as signs that the Lebanese might try to disarm the factions whose role is to guard the camps.

Disarming the Camps

In response to Law 88 of March 20, 1991, Palestinian armed groups, along with other militias—with the exception of Hizballah and the Israeli proxy South Lebanese Army—surrendered their heavy weapons. However, in adherence to the Cairo Agreements signed between the PLO and the Lebanese government in 1969, which guarantee self-administration for the refugee camps, the camps continue to be policed by Palestinian armed groups. The extraterritoriality of the camps and the armed status of Palestinian militias have long been contentious issues in Lebanon, and since the end of the war, almost all Lebanese are united in wanting to reestablish control over the camps. In contrast to the early 1980s, when PLO guerrillas were highly visible combatants in the war, armed Palestinians are today confined to the camps or remote places. In rural areas, some Lebanese see the handful of tattered Palestinian military training camps as encroaching on their farmlands, but in most of Lebanon, ordinary Lebanese have little, if any, interaction with armed Palestinians.

Nevertheless, the mythology persists that Ain al-Hilweh and other camps are havens of lawlessness, and the Syrian military...
withdrawal has only intensified the antipathy toward the Palestinian armed presence. A recent poll found nearly 80 percent of the Lebanese demanding Palestinian disarmament. The institutionalization of these calls in the UNSC 1559 has meant that Palestinians interpret any restrictions on their movement or lives as a sign of impending disarmament.

Most Palestinians see disarmament as a twofold threat. On the one hand, they often invoke the massacres at Sabra and Shatila in 1982, when they were left exposed by the evacuation of PLO guerrillas and, despite the promise of protection by the international community, thousands of men and women were slaughtered by the Phalange militia in cahoots with the Israeli military. On the other hand, disarmament would decisively spell the end of Palestinian refugees’ autonomy over their affairs and pave the way to dreaded ta’awun (“implantation” or permanent settlement) in Lebanon. In the absence of citizenship rights, such a move would mean that Palestinian refugees would become minorities completely devoid of any protection or rights in a country that does not want them.

Compromise Without Consultation

What increases Palestinian refugees’ anxiety is the ease with which Mahmoud Abbas, their nominal president in the Palestinian Authority, has been willing to cave in to Lebanese—not to mention US and Israeli—demands and abdicate the refugees’ rights with no consultation. In the first official visit to Lebanon by a Palestinian leader since the 1982 evacuation of the PLO, Abbas met various Lebanese officials in July 2005 and promised that he would “back any decision” of the Lebanese government regarding the implementation of UNSC 1559 in the Palestinian camps. The response in the camps was muted but defiant: even youths belonging to Abbas’ Fatah faction declared that they would immediately rearm themselves “even if it cost $1,000 to buy a gun.” Almost all raised the specter of Sabra and Shatila as their reason for wanting to continue holding on to their aged Kalashnikovs and handguns.

The news coming from the PA in recent months has alarmed the refugees. In the spring, it was reported that Abbas was going to step back on demands for the right of return and settle for compensation for the refugees’ lost property instead, in order to strengthen his hand vis-à-vis final status negotiations. When Abbas later called for citizenship for Palestinian refugees in their host countries, the activists among the refugees were highly critical. Although ostensibly one cannot complain about the rights and protections that come with citizenship, accepting the citizenship of another Arab country (and even more so, being forced to take citizenship of another country by the PA) is seen as the initiation of procedures to resettle the refugees. The situation is complex: on the one hand, in an ideal world, Palestinians would want to accept citizenship in order to facilitate work, travel and property ownership, among other things, but such a solution brings to an end their transitory refugee status, which despite its many shortcomings, has the benefit of leaving open the possibility of returning to their homes or settlement in the future Palestinian state.

Glimmers of Hope

The news is not all bad, however. Subsequent to Syrian withdrawal and indirectly related to it, two events have proffered the refugees a glimmer of hope. After months of negotiations between civil society organizations and various political organizations—members of the PLO, as well as Hamas and Islamic Jihad—Shatila camp held its first ever elections in exile, in which 11 members of the camp’s Popular Committee were chosen by some 1,500 voters (the other 11 members of the Committee are appointed by the factions). A “crisis of trust” had precipitated the elections, as most camp residents were unhappy with the administrative capability and competence of the extant Popular Committee. The participation of camp members in choosing their representatives was considered significant by the refugees not only because it allowed them a voice in the management of their local affairs, but also because it augured the possibility of participation in broader Palestinian politics through channels other than the factions, which do not invite the same enthusiastic support today that they did in the PLO’s heyday in Lebanon.

Perhaps more important to the great majority of the Palestinians has been the memorandum by the new labor minister, Trad Hamadeh, issued at the end of June, which removes prohibitions on Palestinians working in manual and clerical jobs. Previously, over 70 jobs were unavailable to Palestinians, and most had to find work illegally, or become reconciled to unemployment or under-employment. The memorandum still forbids Palestinians from acquiring professional jobs and still requires them to register with the Labor Ministry, but it also means that some of the most vulnerable Palestinian job seekers can now look for employment without fear of being outside the law. The decision is significant because, in a sense, it is an unintended consequence of Syrian withdrawal. On the one hand, the number of Syrian manual workers in Lebanon has dropped precipitously after Hariri’s assassination, leaving many construction contractors short-handed. Allowing Palestinians to engage in manual labor, then, allows Lebanese businesses to tap into an under-utilized
resource sitting at their doorstep. On the other hand, Hamadeh is a Hizballah sympathizer, whose accession to the Labor Ministry has been a result of the extensive negotiations that went on after the Syrian withdrawal, as well as Hizballah's electoral victory in the May–June parliamentary elections. His willingness—and Hizballah's—to give the refugees the right to work fits with Hizballah's previous calls for Palestinian civil rights and is part of the party's larger strategy to consolidate its hegemony as the legitimate spokesperson for the dispossessed in the region.

Despite the extension of participatory politics into the Palestinian refugee community in Lebanon and the sudden expansion of their socio-economic rights, the horizon for Palestinian refugees remains clouded. Some see these accumulated changes as a prelude to disarmament and resettlement. While Palestinian refugees in Lebanon were never particularly close allies of Syria, the withdrawal of that country's military and an ascendant Lebanese refugee community in Lebanon and to which Lebanon lays claim. The naturalization of Shi'i Palestinians was part of confessional/demographic maneuvering by the political leaders, rather than a sign of humanitarian concern for the Palestinians.

A recent court ruling in Lebanon has declared illegal the 1994 deal described above, and the Lebanese government has seized on this ruling in order to declare a "review" of the naturalization of Palestinians.

The Lebanese state has varying housing policies vis-à-vis Palestinians in different locations. Whereas reconstruction in the southern camps is usually allowed pending UNRWA approval and processing, all repairs and reconstruction of camp housing in and around Beirut camps are prohibited.

All NGOs have to be registered with the Lebanese government and meet state-set quotas on hiring and serving Lebanese citizens.

These fees are now 700,000 Lebanese liras (approximately $500), beyond what most camp students or their families can afford. Since the imposition of these fees, many Palestinian students have dropped out of universities or have put their university plans on hold.

Endnotes
5. The UNRWA registry does not include 1967 refugees, or refugees displaced from other countries (e.g., Jordan after 1970–1973). In addition to the 12 official camps, there are a number of unofficial encampments of Palestinians, some of which receive services from UNRWA. Finally, the number of refugees actually present in Lebanon is open to controversy: some estimate them as far less numerous than the UNRWA registry would indicate, while others—among them the Lebanese government—inflate the number of refugees beyond the UNRWA rolls. See Rosemary Sayigh, "Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon: Implantation, Transfer or Return?" Middle East Policy 8(1) (2001), p. 101.
6. Property Law 296, published on April 3, 2001, is specifically designed to disinherit Palestinians (rather than other aliens residing in Lebanon) of properties they own.
7. In 1994, a deal between Amal leader Nabih Berri and Sunni political notables facilitated the naturalization of 15,000–20,000 Palestinians, some of whom were Shi'i and the others Sunni; they mostly belonged to seven villages in the Galilee near the border between Israel and Lebanon and to which Lebanon lays claim. The naturalization of Shi'i Palestinians was part of confessional/demographic maneuvering by the political leaders, rather than a sign of humanitarian concern for the Palestinians.
8. A recent court ruling in Lebanon has declared illegal the 1994 deal described above, and the Lebanese government has seized on this ruling in order to declare a "review" of the naturalization of Palestinians.
9. The Lebanese state has varying housing policies vis-à-vis Palestinians in different locations. Whereas reconstruction in the southern camps is usually allowed pending UNRWA approval and processing, all repairs and reconstruction of camp housing in and around Beirut camps are prohibited.
10. All NGOs have to be registered with the Lebanese government and meet state-set quotas on hiring and serving Lebanese citizens.
11. These fees are now 700,000 Lebanese liras (approximately $500), beyond what most camp students or their families can afford. Since the imposition of these fees, many Palestinian students have dropped out of universities or have put their university plans on hold.
We have a problem here. There is no real [opposition] party except for the Muslim Brotherhood.” So an official of Jordan’s new Ministry of Political Development and Parliamentary Affairs summed up the raison d’être of his place of employment.

The formal goals of the ministry created in December 2003 are to create strong parties that endorse King Abdallah II’s vision of “Jordan First”; to increase the political participation of women and youth; to advance democratic dialogue and respect for the opinion of others, including judicial reform; and to promote a responsible press which serves the objectives of the Jordanian state and its people and represents the vision of change. This is not some US-sponsored project, ministry officials repeatedly assert, anticipating the criticisms of a suspicious population. They are right: the ministry in fact represents the Jordanian regime’s attempt to build a base of long-term support while avoiding substantive political liberalization.

Remaking the Opposition

The very groups that helped the regime ward off dissent in the past—“ethnic Jordanians” from the East Bank versus Palestinians and Islamists versus the left—have suddenly become potential opponents. While some fault the new king, it was his father, King Hussein, who bred the current difficulties. Relying on East Bank tribal leaders and the Islamists, Hussein ignored rural economic development even as he signed an unpopular peace treaty with Israel in 1994. Islamists now preach against the regime’s foreign policies, while the tribes have been steadily deprived of their

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sinecures in the public sector. The neo-liberal economic policies of King Abdallah have further eroded the state’s ability to promise secure employment to Jordanians of East Bank origin.

The regime realizes that it needs an opposition. The Political Development Ministry continually declares it wants to hear all opinions, that political development means freedom of expression. Demands must be institutionally channeled, so the populace feels it has a voice. However, the regime rejects the current oppositional institutions in Jordan. Political parties, the ministry feels, should be non-religious and non-ideological. Professional associations, religious groups, women’s and university groups, cultural and sports clubs should all be non-political and uninvolved in political platforms, erasing decades in which these organizations served as substitute forums for outlawed political parties. The minister of political development is making the rounds of all these groups, explaining the negative effects of politicization and interference of “external” forces.

Instead of what already exists, according to the head of the ministry, the king envisions three parties: right, left and center. To this end, the regime-supporting press devotes full-page articles to party members of old—leftist Baathists, Arab nationalists and even communists. Turning the previous policy on its head, and recalling maneuvers of Anwar al-Sadat during the 1970s, the left is now promoted to combat the right.

The previous privileged role of the right and religious groups is accordingly being reevaluated. Religious preachers, says the official Jordan First pamphlet, should concentrate on advising Jordanians on their daily lives and leave politics to those more qualified and specialized in the task. “Religion cannot take the role of the state, police, security…. They cannot say that normalization is forbidden—the state has already ruled on it. For decades now, religious sermons do not tell the truth. They preach fairy tales and unscientific theses.” The army, however, is exempt from the educational visits of the Political Development Ministry, since it is believed to be non-political.

Youth, Education and Computers

A major focus of the ministry is on youth. “The older generation is already gone, but the ministry can educate the young to adhere to the rule of law in all circumstances. We will try to bring the tribes along, to educate them as we go,” a ministry official explained. The ministry sets its goals in conjunction with the Ministry of Education in order to inculcate civility and create youth who respect the government’s laws.

To this end, a combined USAID and Jordanian program seeks to revamp the educational system. The Education Reform for Knowledge Economy project is intended to make Jordan a model of education reform and a regional information technology hub, reminiscent of USAID’s private sector remodeling project in the 1980s. At that time, Jordan was used as a laboratory or “test” for USAID’s revised approach to private sector development, intended to strengthen business organizations and create a flourishing private sector. That the previous effort met with little success has not deterred this new education reform program being one of the broadest in the Middle East and North Africa.

Education reform is designed to tackle the problem of rote memorization and lack of analytical thinking in the education system, as well as inadequate teacher training, schools and equipment. Computers will be integral to all phases of education in this project, and teachers will be trained in their use. E-learning will also be included. Key to the new curriculum will be incentives for girls’ participation, and school-to-work programs. Several US companies have already been identified to rewrite the curriculum. The World Bank committed over $300 million in loans to the effort, while the majority of USAID’s contributions, almost $400 million, are in grants. The reforms parallel King Abdallah’s plans, announced soon after his ascension to the throne, to make Jordan an information technology (IT) center.

One major problem is making schooling relevant to the needs of the labor market. What the labor market needs, however, is unknown, a fact USAID acknowledges. They suggest immediately contracting a study to determine the answer. What labor market is being discussed—domestic or regional—is another issue. While hopes for a flourishing Jordanian IT industry permeate the discussion, much of the higher education system has been geared toward regional labor markets, with expatriate workers in the Gulf countries sending their earnings back home. The domestic market is dominated by a weak service industry, retail businesses, public sector employment and, now, export processing zones. Early childhood education is another priority. This will focus exclusively on kindergarten, for ages four to six. Kindergarten is now dominated almost entirely by the private sector, mostly run by charitable or non-governmental village or family associations.

There is little public knowledge of what the reforms precisely entail. Indeed, the question of popular participation in the new curriculum has been sidestepped. While political debate rages in the United States over the issue of sex education in the classroom, Jordan’s education reform can simply contract the development of “youth reproductive health messages” for the new curriculum.

The project’s public reception has been mixed. The Westward-looking middle class believes it will bring computers into the schools and create a system akin to the US school system, which they observe closely for clues as to their children’s brighter future. Others think the new curriculum is designed to “adjust” the
teaching of the religious schools, remove extremism and delete references to “the Zionist enemy.” Islamist groups protest the changes, claiming they represent the creeping imposition of American values. This negative attitude toward the educational changes has gained increased currency in the climate of the Iraq war, as any initiative by the Jordanian government is suspected of being

Women enter the new vision of Jordan at the sewing machines of the export processing zones.

authored on American orders (bi-amr Amrika). “Tell America to let up on us on the schooling,” said one professional woman who had been in favor of the changes when interviewed in 2004. “We need our education system to improve for the global world,” she stated back then, fending off criticisms from others that the changes would decrease coverage of Islam. Now, she and many others have changed their assessment of US-associated changes.

Women and Rural Export Zones

Women are the ministry’s other main focus. In February 2003, before the parliamentary elections of that year, the king decreed a new law establishing a quota of six women in parliament’s lower house. While women are formally encouraged to be a regime-supporting pillar, their participation is “managed” by the regime, which creates quasi-official women’s organizations, and controls or marginalizes existing ones. Further, to empower women as a bloc might require challenging the de facto base of the regime in conservative East Bank tribes and families. As the highly publicized women’s campaign to end the honor crimes law demonstrates, the regime restricted the movement’s activities, and ultimately subordinated women’s demands to its need to maintain tribal support. No monarchical decree amended the law, as occurred for other issues lacking public support.

The promotion of women might appeal to Westernized urban Jordanians, and certainly to the international community. Substantively, it is not seriously supported by the regime. However, the focus on women provides aid from international agencies that continue targeting women for funding and micro-financing. Once the money is allocated by these agencies, it is often used for different purposes. Micro-loans are provided to women’s organizations to establish themselves and purchase transportation, and to engage in embroidery, sewing and growing za’tar (thyme). But these activities remain disconnected from market demands, and thus selling the products is difficult.

In reality, women enter the new vision of Jordan at the sewing machines of the export processing zones. In a factory building of the Century group in northern Jordan’s Qualifying Industrial Zone (al-Hasan Industrial Estate), around 100 veiled women, married and single, sew indigo blue Calvin Klein women’s thongs and blue and purple Gap bras. Other sewing lines stitch for Hugo Boss, Nike, JC Penney, Old Navy, Tommy Hilfiger and Victoria’s Secret.

Goods produced at the al-Hasan Industrial Estate are exclusively for export to the United States, as per a deal with Washington, and cannot be sold on the domestic market. The deal with Washington allows Jordan to export the products of the Qualifying Industrial Zones to the US duty- and quota-free, provided that the products have a pre-specified minimum percentage of value added from each of the participants in the deal—in Jordan’s case, 12 percent from Jordan and 8 percent from Israel. This provision means that many of the labels on the bras and thongs sewn in northern Jordan say Made in Israel. Recently, Victoria’s Secret began labeling their garments Made in Jordan.

The companies in Jordan’s roughly 12 industrial zones are mostly East Asian, mainly Taiwanese and Chinese. Some are Israeli or Turkish; very few are Jordanian-owned. Managers of Israeli companies leave daily affairs to Jordanian or East Asian line supervisors, since incidents involving Isreis disciplining Jordanian women workers came to light. The political goal of creating goodwill between the two parties has not panned out. The Israelis fly in to check on their businesses and fly out the same day. Even government personnel obligated to attend functions with the Israelis prefer the Chinese, Pakistani or Indian managers and do not feel friendly toward the Israelis.

The zones are dominated by the textile industry, and staffed largely by women. The labor for some zones was initially brought in from China and Southeast Asia. In the highest-producing zone, 6,000 of 16,000 workers are Chinese, Filipina or Bangladeshi women. Despite the complaints of managers that Jordanian labor is inferior, Jordanian labor has now taken up half or more of the work in the zones. Most of the factories are closed to outsiders and inspection. The labor is low-paid, with no minimum wage enforcement or oversight for treatment (cases of severe abuse are reported periodically in papers). Even if the bra and thongs sewn on them in Jordan, the seamstresses could not afford them.

Many Jordanian women are bused in from the surrounding countryside, up to an hour away. To work in these zones, the women rely on inexpensive child care services. In the factory mentioned above, 25 women use the industrial zone’s own nursery for their children, while many others put their children in nurseries in their home villages. Many of these nurseries, including that in this industrial zone, are unregistered and unregulated. Only now has the supervising ministry drawn up minimum safety and health guidelines for nurseries, which have yet to be implemented. The initial standards are basic, such as locating the nursery away from busy streets and intersections, and furniture,
kitchen and bathroom requirements. The best nurseries in the
country, according to the supervising official, were only average.\textsuperscript{14}
Nurseries are not included in the education reform initiative, since they serve children under four years old.

To draw labor into an industrial zone in Amman, a program was
copied from East Asia, bringing women and girls from rural areas for stretches of two weeks at a time. A bus takes them home after that period for one day, and collects them again. While on the industrial estate, they stay in dormitories. Half the participants failed to return after the first period of work after the program was introduced.

At the macro level, the export zones create employment and generate export revenue, but their effects on the local economy are ambiguous. To the US embassy and Jordanian government, they create growth, provide an inflow of money and empower women. Visitors to the US embassy, including State Department official and vice presidential daughter Elizabeth Cheney, tour the zones. The premise that this employment will empower women relies on a simple equation of money with power, a formula not substantiated even in areas with long histories of formal female employment. Money does not by itself alter the underlying system of patriarchy. Such an assumption also ignores the potential backlash from unemployed male relatives.

Women may be employed, but the problem of male unemployment, particularly in the rural areas, remains. In the end, no matter how much the zones add to stability and growth, their success may well be temporary. Firms locate in Jordan for access to the US market, and that advantage will end with the termination of the Multi-Fiber Agreement in 2005.\textsuperscript{15}

The Future of the Regime

More importantly, the dynamic of women working in these zones while the state detaches itself further from the provision of social services has left child care in the hands of the private sector. In rural areas, the private provision of child care is almost exclusively in the hands of non-governmental organizations organized along village or kinship lines. In line with increasing rural female employment, the demand for child care services has skyrocketed in those areas, a trend not observed in the urban areas. Nurseries and kindergartens have increased particularly near the export processing zones. These child care facilities are necessary for women to put their young children while they themselves work, officials at the zones stated. According to the head of the nurseries section of the Social Development Ministry, the extended family is in serious decline and not available as a resource for many rural working women.

Instead of extended families aiding in caring for children, broad kinship groups are now in charge of child care provision. Private associations providing child care are part of a large-scale societal trend of organizing along redefined village and kinship lines. Classified as voluntary civil society associations, they use kinship idioms, often altered from prior kin understandings. As the state withdraws from social welfare provision, these associations redistribute welfare, jobs and social services such as child care within the circumscribed network. In only rare cases do associations aid non-kin or non-members.

State-level incentives encouraged organizing along tribal or village lines, indirectly incorporated into the state through municipal leaders. The state receives international aid to support the organizations. Subsidies are provided for the establishment of child care facilities by these organizations, which were given preferential treatment over women’s or Islamist organizations. By default and through decentralizing administrative changes, the populace is encouraged to seek aid from local village or family groups. While the associations are society-based and not government creations, they lack the bargaining power vis-à-vis the state often attributed to grassroots or neighborhood associations. Recently announced local elections will further this policy of incorporating local Jordanian authorities, now in charge of municipal welfare services, while discarding the mass of the Jordanian population that previously formed the regime’s base of support.

As part of Jordan’s attempts to generate new and loyal constituencies in economic liberalization, the Political Development Ministry focuses on fostering youth who obey laws and advancing women as symbols of progress and modernity. But women are effectively a front for the real policy of retribalization. Regime actions demonstrate that its real pillars are local leaders and reorganized families, which it now provides with incentives via decentralization, along with a reinvigorated and heavily financed military. Subordinate and detached political parties are sought that present no threat to the regime’s ongoing state of semi-authoritarianism. The retribalization of civil society will only further this trend. While at the grassroots level these kin and municipal associations may be democratic in practice (at least for males), their relation to the state precludes them from being an effective force for democratization.

Endnotes

13 Interviews with owners, managers and officials in the Amman, Kerak and Irbid industrial zones, April-May 2004.
14 Interview with the head of the Nurseries Section, Directorate of the Family, Ministry of Social Development, May 3, 2004.
Reading Culture, Identity and Space in US Foreign Policy

Waleed Hazbun

Inundated by “theories” about the putative role of Islamic and Arab culture in shaping Middle East politics, one might ask: what role does American culture play in US foreign policy? In recent years, some of the most innovative contributions to the study of US relations with the Middle East have come from investigations into the role of culture, identity and space.

Drawing on Edward Said’s Orientalism, Douglas Little’s American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East Since 1945 (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2004) sets out to explain how negative cultural stereotypes about Arabs and Muslims have shaped American popular attitudes and policies toward the Middle East. This readable and insightful survey is littered with examples of derogatory images from American popular culture and condescending comments from policymakers. It remains unclear, however, how these cultural biases generated policies and alliances that frequently shifted to find new modes to promote US interests in changing geopolitical contexts. American Orientalism is most illuminating for exposing American habits of seeking to remake the region in the US image and pretensions about the universality and superiority of American ideas and ways of doing things.

Focusing on a critical period in the late 1950s, Salim Yaqub’s Containing Arab Nationalism: The Eisenhower Doctrine and the Middle East (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), seeks to challenge such “culturalist” explanations of US policy as presented by Little. Yaqub’s rich, detailed narrative traces the rise (and decline) of US efforts under the anti-Communist Eisenhower Doctrine to shore up traditional monarchies in reaction to the rise of Nasser and Arab nationalism. Yaqub claims that the US and Nasser operated within a “shared moral framework” that proclaimed the virtues of national independence and economic development, but that, in pursuit of strategic interests, they differed over means and methods. The value of Yaqub’s critique of culturalist approaches, however, is limited by the very nature of such approaches. Culture is of limited explanatory power when it is viewed as a set of “fixed” ideas and attitudes rather than as a context in which meanings are formulated.

US Middle East policy in the late 1950s was in flux, but what might have shaped the decisions of policymakers was an American Cold War culture that viewed geopolitics primarily in terms of American spaces under threat from Soviet encroachment. Such is the possible implication of Henry Bromell’s Cold War spy novel Little America (New York: Vintage, 2001). The story recounts the fate of a Middle Eastern kingdom called “Kurash” which closely resembles Jordan in 1958. There is one major difference. The country has been erased from the map. Bromell begins his tale by telling us that the plucky monarch was assassinated and a few years later the territory swallowed up “like a snack” by Syria and Iraq. The novel centers on the quest of the narrator, now a history professor, to reconstruct what happened in the fateful year of 1958 and learn what role his own father, a CIA agent, played in those events. While some of the descriptions and names might sound awkward, the political and cultural context is portrayed with uncommon sophistication. Bromell, who has written for high-quality TV shows like “Northern Exposure” and “Homicide,” folds into the story of his fictional Kurash real elements drawn from regional politics and US covert operations in Jordan and neighboring countries while imagining an alternative endgame. Moreover, the title Little America refers to the cultural space, as well as the state of mind, Americans forged while living in the Middle East in the late 1950s. As it happens, Bromell was raised in such a space, and his father worked for the CIA.

To better understand the relationship between American culture and US policy, one of the best works to turn to is Melani McAlister’s Epic Encounters: Culture, Media and US Interests in the Middle East Since 1945 (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005). Adopting what she terms a post-Orientalist approach, McAlister argues that American cultural engagement with the Middle East has not been limited to “us vs. them” oppositions and the practice of “othering.” It has also relied on practices of affiliation, appropriation and cooptation in which the Middle East has been critical to the formation of identities and meaning for various cultural and religious communities within the US. Through a series of careful readings of films, novels and media images, the book demonstrates how a “web of meanings” produced by these representations and discourses has facilitated, and sometimes challenged, the expansion of US power in the Middle East.

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McAlister begins by exploring how the language and logic of early Cold War discourse drew upon the Exodus narrative in representing the threat of Communism as a form of slavery from which the US, cast as a Moses figure, provided hope for liberation. Layered on this reading, McAlister explores biblical epic films released during the era, such as *The Ten Commandments* and *Ben-Hur*, which were popularly viewed as Cold War allegories. McAlister suggests an interlacing of these readings whereby Americans understood US Cold War policy as a form of “benevolent supremacy” in which the US embraced independence movements in the Third World but feminized these new nations by ascribing their role within a US-dominated order as one defined by a consensual but unequal union as in “right-ordered marriages.”

*Epic Encounters* outlines a struggle between alternative visions of the role the US should play in defining the global order. The more liberal vision posited that the US should accommodate the rising power of rival states (Germany, Japan, OPEC) by playing a managerial role in world affairs. McAlister explores this vision through a reading of the US tour of *The Treasures of Tutankhamun* exhibit in the late 1970s. In official and popular discourse the Egyptian relics were presented and discussed as part of the “common heritage of mankind” rather than as the exclusive property of contemporary Egypt and its national heritage. In a similar way, she suggests Americans viewed US efforts to manage the production and flow of Middle East oil in terms of “imperial stewardship” serving not US national interests but the wellbeing of the global economy.

Most illuminatingly, McAlister traces the rise to dominance of a rival, conservative view of the US role in the world. This morally charged geopolitical vision rejected accommodation with rivals to US power. It sought to expunge what it viewed as the domestic roots of US failure in Vietnam, including a lack of will and the erosion of unity caused by the anti-war and feminist movements. McAlister traces the role that popular understandings of Israel played in this transition. She emphasizes not the role of the American Jewish community or the Israeli lobby but that of evangelical Christians, guided by biblical prophecy, who read Israeli expansion in the 1967 war and its muscular approach to counter-terrorism as a guide for the US. This moral geography (a term drawn from Michael Shapiro) was popularized during the Iranian revolution and hostage crisis in which the Americans viewed themselves as a (sometimes feminized) nation of innocents subject to violent, unprovoked assault. In media imagery, political commentary and popular films, US involvement with the region was erased while Iranian actions were viewed as irrational and explained as dictated by adherence to the tenets of militant Islam.

In some of her most original passages, McAlister dwells on race. For example, she explores the appropriations of Egypt and Islam within African-American communities that led them to generate less benevolent understandings of the role the US played abroad. Her discussions of race are part of her post-Orientalist project to show how US-Middle Eastern cultural relations involved complex interconnections between heterogeneous cultures. Following this claim, McAlister argues, in the context of American debates about multiculturalism, the moral authority wielded by the US military in the 1990–1991 Gulf war depended on its embrace of racial diversity (which she terms “military multiculturalism”). Discussing the film *The Siege*, however, she notes how this racial multiculturalism failed to incorporate Arab and Muslim elements that could only be viewed as (potentially threatening) outsiders.

McAlister does not suggest a causal relationship between culture and politics, but shows how most Americans have continually constructed a self-image for themselves as citizens of a benevolent world power acting to support universal principles and interests. In this way *Epic Encounters* provides a guide to understanding post-September 11 US policy even though the book was first published in September 2001 and focuses not on policymakers but on popular culture in the domestic US sphere. With a new post-September 11 chapter organized as a series of readings of now familiar media images, the rich tapestry woven throughout the book creates a matrix for understanding how the Bush administration has been able to advance policies and invoke solidarities which a few years ago would have been almost unthinkable. As McAlister concludes, “To oppose US policy [in the Iraq war] was to suggest the Arab or Muslim people did not have the right to democracy; support for the push towards war was brandished as an anti-racist credential.” To the degree that the “Bush Doctrine” resonates among Americans—supported by a saturation of media imagery continually portraying the United States as “an island of liberty in a sea of danger”—it threatens to establish a new dimension to the definition of US interests in the Middle East that could be difficult to dislodge.

Culture, as geographer Derek Gregory argues, is intimately connected with space and spatial practices. In *The Colonial Present: Afghanistan, Palestine, Iraq* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), Gregory draws heavily from Edward Said’s notion of “imaginative geographies” which fold distance into difference to generate what Gregory calls “architectures of enmity.” In contrast to McAlister’s subtle readings of media representation, Gregory’s text burns with passion and anger. Diverted from his ongoing project on the culture of travel in nineteenth-century Egypt, Gregory set out to tell the spatial stories of ordinary people in Afghanistan, Palestine and Iraq victimized by state violence unleashed in the wake of the September 11 attacks. Most of the events covered by *The Colonial Present* are familiar. What drives Gregory’s plotline is a theoretical apparatus appropriated from Giorgio Agamben’s discussion of the figure
of *homo sacer* in ancient Roman law. The *homo sacer* is a legal term referring to those viewed as outside the law. This operation creates the “space of exception” inhabited by those subject to the sovereign’s power but excluded from any protection, with neither rights nor voice. In a series of twinned chapters about Afghanistan, Palestine and Iraq, Gregory uses this abstraction as a means to depict the unrestrained actions of the US, Israel and US-led forces in these three places. The chapters build upon each other to portray the landscape of what Gregory terms the “the colonial present” in which metropolitan cultures continue to privilege their own interests and mobility by denying the sovereignty of uncivilized “others.”

Gregory argues that, in the immediate aftermath of the September 11 attacks, the US folded the deterritorialized network of al-Qaeda into the bounded space of Afghanistan to create a territorialized military target. At the same time, due to al-Qaeda responsibility for the attacks the territory of Afghanistan could be viewed as a space outside of civilization. Thus, the inhabitants of this space were reduced to targets on a map or simply coordinates on a bombing grid.

Gregory begins his Palestine chapters by noting that Zionism constructed Palestine as an empty space, inhabited by only mute objects. Israeli territorialization, he argues, was coupled with Palestinian deterritorialization. These chapters provide a detailed survey of microtopographies of the colonial present. He shows not only how Palestinians have been displaced from land and homes, but effectively disconnected from space itself. Drawing on the work of Israeli architect Eyal Weizman, Gregory relates how this process has only been intensified by the Oslo process in which Palestinian space has been splintered with internal boundaries while Israeli West Bank settlements were expanded outward and connected by a fluid network of militarized highways, bypass roads and communications infrastructure. Meanwhile, lacking control over their borders, airspace and underground resources, Palestinians have been subject to a three-dimensional matrix of monitoring and control consisting of aerial surveillance, watchtowers, checkpoints, separation walls, roadblocks and hilltop settlements. This sets the scene for his retelling of the brutal 2002–2003 Israeli reoccupation of the West Bank in which Palestinian society was viewed as located within uncivilized, barbarian space, allowing Palestinian civil infrastructure to be targeted and destroyed.

In the Iraq chapters, Gregory emphasizes how the war was conveyed as a cinematic performance in which American knowledge about Iraq, as presented in the media, was conveyed in the idiom of military knowledge with its specialized means for visualizing space and time. For example, aerial maps listed potential targets while the commentary focused on explaining the tools and techniques needed to make opaque spaces (such as urban Baghdad) transparent.

*The Colonial Present* is unrelenting. Gregory’s powerful indictment barely pauses to consider the limits of its own narrative or the complexities of processes discussed. It nevertheless offers a compelling spatially oriented lens through which to view ongoing processes of war, violence and occupation. *The Colonial Present* can also be read as a warning about those who seek to claim that September 11 has led to the “collapse of distance.” Such a view is on display in the *9/11 Commission Report*, which concludes: “9/11 has taught us that terrorism against American interests ‘over there’ should be regarded just as we regard terrorism against America ‘over here.’ In this sense the American homeland is the planet.” Echoing McAlister’s readings of American popular culture, Gregory notes that with the construction of “America’s Iraq” we now hear rhetorical claims such that “Americans in Iraq presumably do not count as ‘foreign’ because they are universal soldiers fighting for a transcendent Good.”

Finally, one for the kids. *Addicted to War: Why the US Can’t Kick Militarism* (Oakland: AK Press, 2004) comes in the form of a comic book and launches its polemic against the economic and social costs of American militarism through the voice of a mother explaining to her son why his school must hold a bake sale to pay for not only books but also toilet paper. Written and illustrated by Joel Andreas, an anti-war activist and scholar of the Communist revolution in China, this “exposé” portrays American warmaking abroad and militarism at home as driven by the powerful economic interests of the military-industrial-corporate media complex. This storyline flattens much of the political complexity found in US-Middle East relations and fails to consider how culture and affect shape, and pose obstacles to reshaping, US policy. Nevertheless, as an exemplar of American anti-war pop cultural production, it is suitable for activists of all ages.
This award-winning film portrays the experiences of isolated, fearful, and defenseless Arabs and Muslims detained by the US government in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 attacks, as well as the ordeals of their families. Family members were sealed off from each other, from society and from information about why the arrests were made, where the detainees were held and what their eventual fates would be. In the end, all of the Arabs and Muslims picked up in the immediate post-September 11 dragnet were released, although many were deported. Not one was charged in connection with the attacks. Their names remain under seal. Persons of Interest, so named because the FBI categorized the detainees in this way—"of interest, of special interest, of high interest, interest unknown"—tells the stories of a handful of them.

The directors, Allison Maclean and Tobias Perse, effectively capture the insecurity of being held incommunicado by setting nearly the entire film in an austere, narrow and colorless room where a disembodied voice speaks to the standing, prop-less "person of interest." The anonymous, unseen interrogator conveys the sense of unbridled power standing behind a system that arrests, detains and places in solitary confinement persons who have been accused of nothing but membership in particular religious or ethnic groups. The detainee is decontextualized—stripped down to his ascribed essence—in an attempt to represent the homogeneous and dehumanized Arab/Muslim imagined by the persons who ordered and made these arrests. A success of the film is that it fails to dehumanize. The subjects come off as incredibly human, persons who chose to live in the United States for the same reasons as others, to support their families and live in dignity.

One hears the ring of selective enforcement in the former detainees' descriptions of their arrests and detention. One man says that the main evidence against him was a postcard of the World Trade Center taped to the deli counter where he worked. A Latina married to an Arab speaks of "thousands" of armed agents entering her building shouting: "Does an Arab live here?" Others describe being stopped by police and asked where they were from; once arrested, they were asked whether they knew how to fly, were religious or attended a mosque. One woman describes her son's bail as ten times higher than that of a drug dealer. Another man relives the experience of being led in shackles down a prison hall, hearing on the loudspeaker as he was brought into an elevator: "Special package from one to nine."

The film reports that more than 96,000 anonymous tips were reported to authorities after the attacks, tips that provoked FBI visits to people's homes and workplaces. One man was arrested outside a Burger King after a member of the public called the police. Asked first by the police where he was from, he was detained, held in solitary confinement for 30 days, and eventually released. Charges of "unauthorized use of a rental car" were dropped. In the process, he spent $25,000 in legal fees.

The sense conveyed by many of the former detainees and their family members is that life in the US is no longer the same: anything you have does not feel like yours, because it can be taken from you at any time. This sense of "home-land insecurity" matches the findings of my study of Arabs and Muslims in metropolitan Chicago, who report feeling the watchful eyes of others observing their performance of everyday tasks, such as checking the mailbox or loading the trunk. Minor infractions, such as the late delivery of a rental car, have the potential to become life-altering events.

Persons of Interest is about families as much as it is about individual detainees. Wives relate their fear at not knowing the whereabouts or the status of their husbands. One woman who finally gets to visit her husband is rendered speechless when she sees him emaciated, in handcuffs and chains, with the eyes of a "crazy person." In the end, some families are literally split apart by the outcomes of these arrests, as spouses must live in two different countries and children lose a parent.

It is extremely difficult to depict on film what it is actually like to be imprisoned, shackled and held incommunicado in solitary confinement. One of the last persons to be interviewed in the film effectively recreates some of this experience. He spent 382 days in prison, 100 of them in solitary confinement, sometimes reminiscing about his life and other times feeling he would never see freedom again. The film shows that former Attorney General John Ashcroft was true to his word. "Terrorists among us be warned," he said. "If you violate your visa by one day or if you violate a local law, we will work to ensure you stay in custody as long as possible." Substitute Arab and Muslim non-citizens for terrorist, and you have the government's policy.

Persons of Interest is a riveting, well-paced and important film that documents a time in American history that must be subjected to public scrutiny. All Americans should watch it. The film does not offer analyses or provide answers, but it does offer rich material for what one hopes will be discussions of that next level of responsibility for members of a democratic society.


In this thoughtful memoir, originally published in Arabic, geologist Rushdi Said connects the trajectory of his own experiences as a nationalist technocrat to the broader sweep of twentieth-century Egyptian history. Said's highly personal, critical perspective is regrettably uncommon in English works on this historical period. Because access to post-1952 Egyptian government archives is so strictly limited, memoirs like his...


are of great value to historians of Egypt for the insight they provide into the inner workings of the state.

Born in Cairo in 1920 to Coptic Christian parents, Said studied geology at Cairo (then Fuad I) University. He then moved to the United States to earn his doctorate at Harvard University. Following his graduation, Said returned to Egypt to teach and became a well-respected member of the international scientific community, authoring the groundbreaking work, *The Geology of Egypt.* Said first served the government in 1961–1962 as a member of a convention charged with drafting a document to express the philosophy of Gamal Abdel Nasser’s regime and serve as the foundation for a political party. In 1964, Nasser appointed Said to the Egyptian parliament after the poor showing of Copts in legislative elections. Four years later, Said was appointed chairman of the board of directors of the Egyptian General Mining Organization, serving in this position until he resigned in 1977. In 1981, Said left for the US after Anwar al-Sadat ordered his arrest, along with some 1,500 prominent political and intellectual figures. Said believes his arrest was prompted by his unfulfilled agreement to join a statement protesting Sadat’s role in fueling animosity between Muslims and Copts.

Said’s narrative exudes both a boundless faith in the potential of the post-revolutionary Egyptian state and a profound disappointment in the actual policies the government chose to adopt, particularly following the death of Nasser in 1970. Said argues that projects like the Aswan Dam and efforts to build an industrial sector “converted Egypt into a modern nation” and helped diversify Egypt’s economy. In contrast, the book is sharply critical of the state’s failure to mediate the role of political Islam in Egyptian politics. Said also argues that “Copts are distanced from sensitive political positions and are excluded from sitting on policymaking committees and from occupying positions of trust.” As an illustration, he describes difficulties that he faced in the Egyptian university setting.

Said provides great detail about his own endeavors and struggles, but devotes less attention to the broader implications of the development of science and technology in Egypt. He is predominantly concerned to chronicle his efforts to reform the bureaucratic and organizational structure of the Egyptian General Mining Organization and streamline production and labor in ventures such as the Red Sea phosphate mines. He does not trace the social impact of the organization’s projects or the often fraught relationship between technological ventures and local communities in the post-colonial world. During the 1970s, as Sadat shifted the Egyptian economy away from industry toward tourism and service industries, the Egyptian scientific community suffered from diminished state funding. In addition to the corruption that bedeviled Sadat’s Open Door policy, this shift helped to cement Said’s opposition to state policies.

Although *Science and Politics in Egypt* is fundamentally a work of autobiography, Said associates his own experiences with broader historical trends. Developments such as the emergence of the Wafid Party, the 1952 revolution and the rise of the “religious right” in Egypt “left an impact on me, determined my attitudes in public life and stimulated my interest in public affairs.” However, because his work represents the perspective of the Western-educated political and economic elite, Said’s description of the lifestyle of the great majority of Egyptians reflects that elite’s understanding of Egyptian history. At one point, he asserts that many Egyptians continue to live as they did in medieval times; at another he argues that isolation from the “mainstream of civilization,” namely Europe, resulted in Egypt falling behind. Both of these characterizations reflect European colonial attitudes and fly in the face of works like those of Kenneth Cuno, Judith Tucker and Nathan Brown, which demonstrate the dynamic nature of economic and social practices, even in rural areas.

Still, *Science and Technology in Egypt* represents a rare and valuable insider’s perspective on Egyptian political history. Said’s integrity and his bravery in opposing a regime that did not gladly tolerate dissent shines through in his retelling of the story of his own life and the story of post-revolutionary Egypt.
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