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Lebanon

The assassination of Hariri and the Sorcerer's Apprentice

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On February 14th, 2005, Rafic Hariri, the former Prime Minister of Lebanon, was assassinated in a horrible crime that resulted in dozens of innocent deaths and injuries, and huge destruction of the hotels and other buildings in the vicinity. The reverberations from the explosion are still continuing, and will probably continue for years to come.

These repercussions not only hit Beirut, Damascus and other capitals in the Arab region, they went round the world - not necessarily because Hariri was an international figure (as his supporters and other profiteers abusing his terrible death want to show), but because his death - based on the accusation that he was assassinated by Syria - became an opportunity to launch a process of huge political change, serving the current imperial politics of the United States.

What about “Freedom Square”?

Among the places that were chosen to be part in this process, we should mention “Martyrs' Square”. It is probably not a coincidence that this square is in the middle of Solidère, an area whose buildings were mainly owned by Hariri. It was certainly not a coincidence to have Hariri buried next to the square. With that, the whole theatre was ready with the convenient sound equipment as well.

[<https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/lbprot2-2.jpg>]

In the square, thousands of young Lebanese have been gathering daily for more than a month, waving the Lebanese flag. Their main demand has been the end of what they call the “Syrian occupation”.

For left-wing and progressive Lebanese, the square is full of contradictions, and not a little shame and sadness. We do share with those innocent and enthusiastic young people their complete condemnation of the control exercised over the Lebanese situation (as well as the Syrian situation) by the Syrian regime's corrupt intelligence services - and we condemn this regime's products and partners too.

However, we also reject utterly, and feel terrible disgust at, the hatred towards the Syrian people that was shown by many in the square - as if they are completely incapable of distinguishing between the executioner and the victim, or between a regime and the people. The Syrian people suffer even more than the Lebanese from the oppression of his regime. The simplest human feelings call for solidarity with the Syrians instead of chauvinistic slogans, full of hatred, against them. These feelings have also led to physical violence against Syrian immigrant workers in Lebanon, already abused and humiliated in living conditions similar to slavery.

It's also a shameful fact that most of the people in Martyr's Square who call for the complete withdrawal of Syria's troops were not much bothered by Israel's occupation of the south of our country and never once cried out against it. Moreover, the Martyr's Square majority completely agree with UN Resolution 1559 that includes the disarmament of the Resistance - namely Hizbollah, a party now considered as part of the support for the current Syrian authority.

Despite its sectarian character and its political agenda closely related to the Islamic Republic of Iran, Hizbollah is the only real force inspiring authentic respect in the political life - not only because of its important role in liberating South Lebanon, but also because it did not get involved in the internal corruption in the local political system. Moreover, Hizbollah remains one of the major forces in the Arab region facing continuous American-Israeli political attack, and indeed is the main target of Resolution 1559.

Several Israeli spokespeople, including the Foreign Minister and the Army chief, openly talked about Israel's major role in drawing up this resolution. It is important to note here that this resolution - the disarmament of Hizbollah - could not possibly be effected without rivers of blood flowing on the same land liberated from Israeli occupation.

It would entail a real massacre among the Lebanese people, a massacre that the Zionists and American neoconservatives would doubtless be delighted to see. The prospect of such an event shows how fragile and hypocritical are the loudly screamed slogans of "the Unity of the Lebanese" in the Martyrs' Square! What a fake "Lebanese Unity", that could be the entry to a huge division among the Lebanese in the near future!

A Tragic Death and the Making of a Myth

There is no doubt that the explosion of February 14th was a tragic event and calls for complete condemnation. There is also no doubt that the victim, Hariri, played a very important role in the lives of the Lebanese in the last two decades. He remained Prime Minister for 10 years, at a very critical stage in this country's life.

[<https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/hariri.jpg>]

Rafic Hariri

Hariri was a businessman as well as a politician, and had been accused of many things in his career. Among the most important of these accusations is the unjust - though apparently legal - seizure of a vital and highly profitable piece of real estate in Beirut, - the city centre!

Another is his participation in the creation of one of the worst violations of the requisites of democracy and the rule of law, i.e. the sharing out [1] of the government posts between leaders of the different confessional groups. This led directly to the looting of national treasury by these self-same groups, and the allocation of important posts to incompetent appointees of these self-same confessional overlords, all in collaboration with the Syrian security services.

A further stain on Hariri's reputation is the breaking of the General Union of Workers and the whole trade union movement - again with the direct participation of the Syrian intelligence services and Lebanese political forces close to Damascus. Yet another was the decision prohibiting public assemblies which led to a massacre in 1993 during a demonstration against Oslo Agreement. He was also instrumental in defeating the proposed law allowing civil marriage, an obvious step towards equality between citizens.

The reconstruction process under Hariri was based on reckless borrowing, which saw the external debt leap from \$1.5 bn to more than \$40bn. And under Hariri the loyalty of businessmen, politicians and intellectuals was universally bought, in a corruption process without precedent.

It seems obvious that the process of constructing a myth around Hariri and turning him into a 'saint' is part of another operation - to make Syria the only possible suspect in his assassination. But it is not just Damascus that would pay the price for such an outcome. It would be paid by the Lebanese and Syrian people, in addition to others in the region, namely Iraq, Palestine, and Iran.

We raise this question, while at the same time we are keen on the necessity of convening an honest investigation to uncover the real responsibility for this crime. Here, we do not neglect the full responsibility of the Syrian regime that led things to become as bad as they are, due to the dictatorship of the system, the corruption, and the hegemony of the security services in the political, economic, and social life - not only in Syria, but in Lebanon as well.

The Syrian regime's practices in the balance

One of the things which led to the collapse of the unification process between Egypt and Syria in the early sixties - the short lived 'United Arab Republic' - was the attempt by Egypt to be absolutely hegemonic in this process, particularly through the use of its security services inside Syria. The vital process of Arab unity was dealt a big blow by these Egyptian methods.

Although the presence of the Syrian Army in Lebanon was not within the same framework, a process of unity between the two countries, the practices of the Syrian army and intelligence services repeated - in a worse manner - what was practiced on the Syrian people between 1958 and 1961 by the Egyptian regime, instead of deepening the understanding and harmony between the two countries. This cannot but leave heavy shadows for years to come on the relation between the Lebanese and Syrian people.

On the other hand, it is simplistic and misleading to deny any positive aspect of the Syrian role in Lebanon, for example their contribution to the end of the civil war, in addition to the process of liberation from the May 17th 1983 Lebanese-Israeli agreement that was imposed by Israel and later from the Israeli occupation itself. However, this does certainly not justify the hegemony practiced by the Syrian regime in Lebanon or the hateful practices of the Syrian security services against the Lebanese people, the institutions, and the political life in Lebanon.

Another factor is the major role played in the production of a local political authority collaborating with the Syrian security services on the basis of self-interest and corruption. This authority completely faked the political life in Lebanon, corrupted the relations in our society, and cooperated with those services in looting the economy of the country and hitting its vital interests. There are also the Economic Conferences that have been convened since 1991, and that led most of the time to agreements to the advantage of the Syrians, at the expense of the Lebanese

Syria's Lebanese counterpart is the government headed for the moment by the previous Chief of Army, Emile Lahoud, who came to power in 1998 through pressure by Damascus and the Syrian security services on the Lebanese Parliament. His mandate was extended for 3 years last autumn through the same pressures.

The Opposition and the "Independence Intifada"

Before analysing the opposition, it is important to stress the fact that it is part of the same political layer that composes the government. Before the recent international and regional changes, a major part of the "opposition" had shared with the current authority benefits from the military and political Syrian presence in Lebanon, and they had participated in the making of the series of decisions and practices that led to the total decline of the country and its institutions.

The main forces, with a real popular base, in the opposition, which are leading what it is wrongly called "the Intifada of the Independence", are divided in fact into two major parts:

– One part includes the most sectarian forces most directly related to imperialist external forces and even close to Israel - all within the Christian reactionary framework. These are namely the Lebanese Forces, the opposition within the Phalangist Party, and the "Free Patriotic Movement" (supporters of General Aoun who led a disastrous "liberation war" against the Syrians in 1990 and took refuge in France).

– The other part includes forces that had been until recently part of the current system. Of its major components is the political bloc related to Hariri and which represents his line, interests, and tendencies. Another component is Walid Joumblat, his party, and his parliamentary bloc - knowing that before his disagreement with the current Lebanese authority related to Damascus, this leader considered himself, few years ago, as one of the “whales” of the current regime and its relation with Syria and one of the principle profiteers from the corruption reigning (these are his own expressions). He has recently mentioned in a lecture at Saint Joseph University that he did not dare take this “new” anti-Syrian position previously because Henry Kissinger, the previous America Secretary of State, had completely “endorsed” full power of Syria in Lebanon in 1974. Now, Joumblat adds, he was encouraged by the recent change in Washington's position towards Syria. Moreover, his “revolt” has reached a stage of demanding an international protection for Lebanon, or even a kind of ‘mandate’. He has recently even expressed through the media positive attitudes toward US occupation of Iraq and the “coming democracy” achieved through American artillery, according to his analysis.

Obviously, although the movement mobilized by the opposition - which is certainly contradictory, tied to its religious sects and especially its class interests, and mainly belonging to the local bourgeoisie and the electoral feudal layer - does represent popular demands like the end of the hegemony of the security services and the Syrian regime on Lebanon, it is at the same time involved - at least in its major parts - in projects that we cannot separate from the current American Israeli attack in the region.

The American Israeli attack and its objectives

It is clear that the main project of the neoconservatives in the Bush administration concerning the Arab region and its surroundings (namely Iran), is - in the context of what they call the Greater Middle East since the last war on Iraq - the complete control of the resources of this region, which are quite strategic to the Imperialist American interests. For this, all means are justified, namely dividing the countries in this region and tearing them apart through ethnic, religious, sectarian, and national discrimination. This includes Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and maybe others. Iran is now being threatened now on the pretext of its nuclear programme.

Within this whole general context, we can look at UN Resolution 1559 noting that President Bush, the American administration, and the Israelis have been almost daily stressing in their speeches the importance of its application, even with the possibility of military intervention as an ultimate means of implementing the resolution, according to Bush.

In the same context, we find that the attack at the local level not only targets the Syrian military presence, but also the Palestinian arms in the camps and Hizbollah's weapons as well. This fits in well with the vision that the American administration has to the “solution” of the Palestinian matter, a “solution” that conflicts with the rights of the Palestinian people. The right of the Palestinians to return to Palestine is to be replaced by their settling wherever they are, including Lebanon.

Can we take a stand?

It is important that the Lebanese communists and the local left in general do not remain at the margins of the popular mobilization, taking place within a national crisis that might be the most critical in Lebanon's history. Within this very complex situation open to all possibilities, they must be capable of producing their own agenda, an agenda that secures the unity of the people, beats the attack currently faced, and unites sections of the masses from the two

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opposed “camps” - on the basis of the national and class interests of the people and at the same time against Resolution 1559 and against the corrupted ruling political layer found in both camps.

It is also important to note here that the Syrian president has recently declared in his speech at the Damascus parliament his readiness to deal positively with Resolution 1559; hence the immediate retreat of the Syrian troops to the Bekaa and then to the Lebanese-Syrian borders, in line with the Taef Agreement.

On the other side, the Lebanese opposition - in their “common” declarations (for a part of it keeps its own version that is completely coherent with the American- Israeli vision [2]) - is demanding the application of Taef - especially regarding the Syrian presence and pretends being keen on the protection of the Islamic Resistance.

The whole country is at a very critical stage - a crossroad that might lead to positive outcomes or towards disaster. In order to prevent the latter outcome, the position of progressive and national forces should include the following:

- 1) To form a juridical committee of investigation by honest and independent judges. This committee should be elected by the whole juridical body and should uncover the crime and must be able to get assistance from any homicide experts - local or international in order to identify responsibilities.
- 2) To reject Resolution 1559
- 3) To protect the Resistance and refuse its disarmament.
- 4) To fully apply the Taef Agreement, including the withdrawal of the Syrian army and security services, combating political sectarianism, in addition to establishing relations with Syria based on brotherhood and solidarity - at all levels including the military facing Israel and the imperialist attack.
- 5) To establish an Election Law on the basis of one single constituency and proportional non-sectarian representation. This elected Parliament would become a constituent assembly that reviews and reconsiders the Constitution in order to lead the road for complete secularism.
- 6) To establish laws giving Palestinians living in Lebanon their full civil rights including ownership, work, and social security - in the context of supporting the Palestinian people struggles for their Right to Return to their homeland - Palestine.
- 7) To give convenient solutions to the social life crisis of the local working population by raising the salaries, re-establishing the independence and vitality of the Trade-Union Movement, and ensuring social security and social services that terribly declined in the last 2 decades - especially at the health and education levels in addition to work opportunities.

[1] “Share out” (Mohassassa) is a particular phenomenon in the Lebanese sectarian system consisting of the repartition of the main public functions on sectarian basis and by consensus between the 3 Presidencies (of the Republic, the Parliament, and the Government)

[2] The Israeli newspaper Haaretz, according to the Al-Safir local newspaper on March 5, pointed out that Lebanese personalities have recently sent letters to Israeli officials in charge, namely Yuri Lubrani, the assistant of the Minister of Defense, to ask them “to encourage USA not to

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decrease the pressure it is practicing on Syria to withdraw from Lebanon.”