

## Middle East Report by Thierry Lalevée

### Toward the final phase of partition

*The partition of Lebanon continues, moving along the lines of the Bernard Lewis Plan—and Syria may be next.*

Since the shameful withdrawal of the multinational peacekeeping forces in Beirut last spring, events in Lebanon have for the most part passed unnoticed. The blanket of silence over the daily drama of the Lebanese nation has been imposed to cover the final steps in the partition of the country according to the plan put forward by then-Secretary of State Henry Kissinger as early as 1970.

That Lebanon is being fractured into pieces now, as Kissinger and his friends are launching a bid for power in a second Reagan administration, is no coincidence. Kissinger's Mideast friends, from Israel's Ariel Sharon to Syria's Hafez al Assad, have felt most encouraged by news coming from Washington. Assad said as much to *Le Monde* on Aug. 1 when he praised Kissinger as "different from other American politicians. He has a global view of the future. It seems to me that often he had a better view of Israel's interests than the Israelis themselves." Assad was returning Kissinger's own compliment. In his memoirs, Kissinger characterized Assad as one of the "most intelligent Middle Eastern leaders" he had ever met.

This exchange underlines the strange relationship between Washington and Damascus and the fact that under Kissinger's influence, the State Department has dismissed Assad's military alliance with Moscow as "irrelevant" in dealing with Lebanon. Secretary of State George Shultz wrote on Aug. 15 to Kenneth Bialkin of the Conference of the Presidents of Jewish Organizations that although Da-

mascus was "impeding" talks between Beirut and Jerusalem, Syria had changed its tactics "and now supports the central government in Beirut. In that sense, the United States and Syria have similar goals."

These similar goals refer to the negotiations in Geneva between Hafez's brother Rifaat al Assad and Ariel Sharon, where the corpse of Lebanon was divided between "Israeli and Syrian spheres of security."

Damascus is supporting Lebanon's government, but has ensured that the power of that government goes no further than greater Beirut. Even in that zone, central decisions are hampered by the warring Muslim and Christian factions. On Aug. 27, Shi'ite Muslims stormed the Saudi embassy, an act aimed against Sunni Muslims. In addition, the death in late August of the Lebanese army's chief of staff Gen. Nadim Hakim, in a helicopter crash, has weakened the Lebanese army's ability to function as a unifying force. The death of Falangist *padrone* Pierre Gemayel, father of President Amin Gemayel, has also fueled speculation of greater factionalization among the Christian groupings in the country.

In northern Lebanon, Syria has imposed its own control over the region and the economically important port of Tripoli. In recent weeks, Damascus has begun to destroy any opposition to its rule, such as the Islamic Unity Movement of Sheikh Shabaan, whose crime is its support for PLO chief Yasser Arafat. In the central Bekaa valley region, the Syrians have

moved against the Iranian Hezbollah in Baalbeck—only because the Syrians alone want to control the region, as agreed upon by Sharon and company.

The Israelis are withdrawing from southern Lebanon, but few expect the Beirut government will be able to establish control over the predominantly Shi'ite region which is dominated by the Al Amal militias of Nabih Berri, whose visits to Moscow have become as regular as his visits to Damascus.

Furthermore, as Radio Jerusalem reported Sept. 3: "It may be a question of weeks until an independent Druze state is created." The Druze, now embroiled in a fight with Syria, are building their own ports on the coast in an effort to achieve self-reliance. Whether a Druze state would be led by Walid Jumblatt is an open question; no one can forget the Syrian assassination of Walid's father, Kamal, in 1977. Though the creation of a Druze state is wished for by both the Syrians and the Israelis, who look at it as a buffer zone, Walid may prove too vocal and independent-minded. As a good feudal lord, Hafez al Assad has taken his precautions—Walid's own sons are being effectively held hostage in Damascus.

Hafez al Assad may be dying, but Syria will rule over Lebanon before his death. However, the historical irony may be that Assad's own death will lead to the "Lebanization" of Syria itself. The plan of British intelligence's Bernard Lewis, which has dictated Kissinger's destruction of Lebanon, calls for the break-up of all the nation-states of the Middle East. Lebanon is the model for the future of the region, and it is not surprising that although Kissinger has a deal with Assad, he has promised nothing yet to Assad's potential successor. Nor have the Soviets.