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## Interview: Dr. Abdallah Bouhabib

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# Bush paralysis on Lebanon: not such a 'great beginning'

*Dr. Bouhabib, Lebanon's ambassador to the United States, was interviewed by William C. Jones of EIR's Washington bureau on April 20.*

**EIR:** What was it that caused the recent escalation of Syrian attacks on the Lebanese in West Beirut after the consolidation of Lebanese forces under General Aoun?

**Bouhabib:** First, the intentions of Syrian forces have always been to enforce their hegemony over Lebanon. And the recent fighting in Lebanon is a result of regional games that ended up in Syria being isolated. The end of the Iran-Iraq War made Syria lose one game—or one card, as it were. The uprising in the West Bank and Gaza made Syria lose another card that they used to trade with. The coming back of Egypt to the Arab League would shortly make Syria lose a card. You know Syria was playing an important role in the area largely by accident, rather than because of its size or its importance. [Due to] the fact that Iraq was busy in the Gulf War and that Egypt, because of Camp David, was isolated from the Arab world, Syria became like a super-regional power. Now all of these cards are being lost to it, so they are trying to grab onto the Lebanese card to keep it together and to enforce Syria's hegemony over Lebanon.

Some people say that it is the seizure of the illegal ports, that General Aoun has imposed on these illegal ports, made Syria mad. Why? This illegal port is not a Syrian port. Why should Syria get mad at the illegal port? Why should Syria destroy a country because of the seizure of an illegal port? Syria is doing it because it's in her interest. It has nothing to do with the ports. It has nothing to do with the Muslims or the Christians in Lebanon. They are squeezed. There is an Arab League committee trying to push for peace in Lebanon. And they are squeezed by that and cornered because peace in Lebanon means Syria out of Lebanon. There is no peace, there will be no peace as long as Syria is in Lebanon.

**EIR:** Concerning the ports you mentioned, it has been widely known that a large portion of the drug trade has been under Syrian direction, possibly using the funds to finance their war effort. Could the fact that General Aoun intervened to establish control over the illegal ports have caused the Syrian reaction?

**Bouhabib:** The drug traffic was not the key issue. The drug traffic was moved to other ports under Syrian control. It was mainly the isolation of Syria in the area which led to the present escalation of the conflict.

**EIR:** Although the Syrians are not quite alone in the arena. Are they receiving considerable logistical and material support from the Soviet Union?

**Bouhabib:** The Soviet statements on Lebanon have been moderate. The "spirit of *perestroika*" would not allow them to come out openly to support Syria. If the U.S. would act to demand a cease-fire, to take the issue to the U.N. Security Council, I do not believe the Soviets would move to oppose it. If the U.S. accepts the French proposals on Lebanon, the Soviets would dare not oppose them. There must be no foreign involvement in Lebanon. Why is the U.S. not treating the Syrian occupation of Lebanon as it would the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan or the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia? The U.S. is treating us differently. Why is the occupation of Lebanon not being treated in the same way as the occupation of other countries? I hope that the death of 250 Marines, tragic as the incident was, harmful as it was to Lebanon also—not only to the families of those Marines—would not reduce the United States from being a superpower or the superpower of the world, to a small power, a power where the Secretary of State would say, as did Secretary Baker, that we have no influence on Syria—"scant" is the word he used, scant influence on Syria. This is unacceptable from a superpower unless the intention is to reduce the role of the United States in the free world.

**EIR:** Traditionally the United States has been supportive of Lebanon throughout the years for a variety of reasons, up until the bombing which you referred to, where 250 Marines were killed. Recently, however, there seems to have been a shift in U.S. policy, if we consider the recent statements of Henry Kissinger, in which he said that God may not forgive him for saying so, but that he "rather likes" Syrian President Hafez Assad. Do you think that such comments indicate a shift in U.S. policy with regard to Lebanon, an acceptance of a Syrian presence in the country, perhaps in deference to overriding agreements with the Soviet Union with regard to

the Middle East?

**Bouhabib:** I think there is a misconception in the head of former Secretary of State Dr. Kissinger, that Syria can join Israel in a peace conference, that King Hussein is too weak to join, that the Israelis would not talk with Arafat, and that therefore Syria is the only candidate. This only shows the lack of knowledge of the area, the lack of knowledge of the peoples of the area.

I do not know how a giant like Mr. Kissinger, a giant in international thinking, can reduce himself to saying that Syria can play a role in the peace process. Syria is a country that lives on a "no peace, no war" situation. They are afraid of peace; they are afraid of war. And if Mr. Kissinger thinks that he convinced them in 1974 to have this disengagement agreement with Israel, it's because it was in the Syrian interest, not in American or Israeli interest. There is no doubt that Mr. Assad is a tough negotiator and a strategic thinker, but we should not read too much into that, and I think that Mr. Kissinger is totally and completely wrong on this.

**EIR:** Do you think that anything has changed in the Syrian attitude or behavior which would motivate a change in U.S. policy toward Syria?

**Bouhabib:** There is this kind of softness toward Syria. They want to turn an eye from Syria. They accused Lebanon of having a drug problem, of exporting drugs to Europe and the United States, without really pointing the finger at who is really controlling and protecting drug-trafficking. They say that terrorism is emanating from Lebanon. They don't say who is in charge of protecting these terrorist camps in Lebanon. They talk about the Pan Am 103 bombing, and they talk about Jibril, but they close their eyes to where Jibril is. They mention that his headquarters is in Damascus, but they try to avoid all of this kind of thinking. And it's probably because there is a strong trend of thinking in Washington that sees Syria playing a role in the peace process.

**EIR:** What is the actual military situation on the ground in Lebanon? What is the ability of the Lebanese Army to hold out, and what would be required by them to keep from getting wiped out?

**Bouhabib:** Let me say the following. The Syrians never fought a war. They bomb. In 1967, they did not fight Israel, nor in 1973. It was bombing or anti-aircraft missiles. In Hamar: It was destroyed by bombing. Tripoli in Lebanon was destroyed by bombing. Now again they are bombing. They never fought. The destruction in Lebanon is beyond the wildest imagination. We are receiving a lot of humanitarian assistance from Europe, especially from France, but we have yet to hear anything from the United States.

**EIR:** There have been certain moves in the U.S. Congress, for instance, a unanimous resolution in the U.S. Senate, calling on the President to demand a cease-fire. Do you think

there is momentum building to force the Bush administration to do something concretely, either together with the French or independently?

**Bouhabib:** I hate to see an administration which is in its initial stages and a President who has articulated his goals as peace in the world and support for all beleaguered peoples, friends of the United States, I hate to see them moving simply as the result of pressure coming from Capitol Hill and from allies such as France. It doesn't say much about the "great beginning." If this were the attitude of a smaller country, it can be understood, but to be an attitude of a superpower, that's really amazing.

**EIR:** What is the attitude of the Israeli government toward the growing Syrian destruction in Lebanon? The Syrian destruction of a sovereign Lebanon ought to be a threat to them. What has been the Israeli reaction to the latest Syrian escalation?

**Bouhabib:** I haven't heard any comment from the Israelis except "hands off." I think that if I were Mr. Shamir, I would be happy about what is going on in Lebanon. It gives them a justification to say "Ah, those who want us to allow the idea of having an independent Palestinian state, look what is happening to Lebanon," using us as an example in order to protect themselves.

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