

Lebanon's Hariri Killed To Make a 'Clean Break'

by Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

The assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri, in Beirut on Feb. 14, was a carefully planned and executed act, geared to trigger a chain reaction of events in the region, that would conform with the long-standing policy of the neo-conservative junta running Washington.

To understand the why of the assassination—although the material perpetrator, the who, remains unclear—one must look back at the 1996 policy paper prepared under the supervision of now-Vice President Dick Cheney, and his neo-con task force of Richard Perle, Doug Feith, David and Meyrav Wurmser, et al. Entitled “Clean Break: A New Strategy for Securing the Realm,” this paper outlined a scenario whereby the 1993 Oslo Accords between Israel and the Palestinian Authority would be torn to shreds, and, first Iraq, then Syria, Lebanon, Hezbollah, and Iran, would be targeted for military assault and political destabilization.

The document flatly stated that Israel should engage “Hisbollah, Syria, and Iran, as the principal agents of aggression in Lebanon, including by . . . establishing the precedent that Syrian territory is not immune to attacks emanating from Lebanon by Israeli proxy forces [and] striking Syrian military targets in Lebanon, and should that prove insufficient, *striking at select targets in Syria proper.*” Furthermore, it said, Israel should divert “Syria’s attention by using Lebanese opposition elements to destabilize Syrian control of Lebanon.” The paper also called for focussing on “removing Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq. . . .”

The outcome of the regional convulsions provoked by the “Clean Break” doctrine, was to be a new Middle East, with Israel hegemonic in the region, presiding over a series of newly balkanized states, run by puppet regimes. The Bush Administration has recently restated its intention to pick off these governments, dubbed “outposts of tyranny,” one by one. The order in which they were to be hit was assumed to start with Iran. Instead, Syria was moved into first place.

The reason for this, one regional expert told *EIR*, is that if Iran were attacked militarily by the United States or Israel, the Islamic Republic would respond asymmetrically, unleashing allied and sympathetic Shi’ite forces in the Persian Gulf and in Lebanon: Hezbollah’s capabilities to target Israel could be effectively deployed. Thus, the source said, the need to eliminate the Lebanese-based Shi’ite Hezbollah as a factor, and at the same time neutralize Syria, before moving against Tehran.

The stage for the immediate destabilization was set diplomatically by UN Resolution 1559, presented by the U.S. and France together, and at the forefront of recent discussions between Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and French President Jacques Chirac. UN Resolution 1559, adopted last September, demands the termination of the Syrian presence in Lebanon (estimated to be 15,000 troops) and the disarming of the Hezbollah. Instead of mounting an Israeli assault directly on Syria—which would have provoked an international outcry—a flanking operation was launched, with a terrorist act that would trigger mass forces on the ground to move against the Syrian presence.

Thus, the assassination of Hariri.

Hariri: ‘Mr. Lebanon’

Rafiq Hariri, a building magnate, was Lebanese Prime Minister from 1992-1998 and again from 2000-2004, when he resigned, in protest over the re-election of President Lahoud, who was backed by Syria. He was known for his key international connections, both with the Saudi Royal Family (he became their personal contractor after building a palace for a member of the Saudi Royal Family in Taef, Saudi Arabia in 1977), and with French President Jacques Chirac. Hariri invested massively in rebuilding Beirut after the civil war, and made an estimated \$3.8 billion. Thus he was considered “Mr. Lebanon,” and enjoyed broad popular

support. After he resigned in protest against Syria, he became a symbol for the opposition. Any harm done to Hariri would automatically unleash factional strife and anti-Syria protests.

As soon as the news of the brutal car bomb explosion broke, crowds of Lebanese opposition forces, who saw Hariri as one of their own, took to the streets. At his funeral on Feb. 16, hundreds of thousands demonstrated, demanding the expulsion of the Syrians. At the same time, before any investigation had yielded any leads, a well-rehearsed chorus pinned the blame on Syria. Exiled Lebanese political figure Michel Aoun, for example, stated categorically from Paris: "They [the Syrians] are responsible. It's they who control the security and intelligence services" in Beirut. Druze leader Walid Jumblatt, now with the opposition, echoed Aoun's words, as did Israeli Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom.

After lodging an official diplomatic note of protest with the Syrian government, U.S. Secretary of State Rice ordered the withdrawal of U.S. Ambassador Margaret Scobey from Damascus. "The proximate cause was Lebanon," Rice told the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee, "but unfortunately we have an increasing list of problems with Syria." U.S. Assistant Secretary of State William Burns, who attended the funeral, said that Hariri's death "should give renewed impetus to achieving a free, independent, and sovereign Lebanon. What that means is the complete and immediate withdrawal by Syria."

In a press conference on Feb. 17, President Bush went further, saying, "[W]e've talked clearly to Syria about . . . making sure that their territory is not used by former Iraqi Baathists to spread havoc and kill innocent lives. We expect them [Syria] to find and turn over former regime—Saddam regime supporters, send them back to Iraq. . . ."

But why would Syria, already politically targetted, kill Hariri, when it would obviously be the first place at which accusing fingers would be pointed? "What exactly would the Syrians gain from this?" asked Rime Allaf, Middle East analyst at the Royal Institute for International Affairs in London. "It doesn't make any sense. The first people who will be hurt by this is Syria. Given the chaos in Lebanon and the rising anger between the factions, analytically Syria loses a lot by this," Allaf told Aljazeera.net.

A Syrian analyst at the Middle East Institute in Washington, told Aljazeera, "The Syrians are not crazy and they are not going to be assassinating Lebanese officials." He pointed to the fact that the Syrians had been engaging in dialogue with the opposition. Others noted that Hezbollah, another prime suspect, had been lying low in the recent period, on the recommendation of Syria and Iran, both eager to avoid confrontation.

Chaos and Civil War

The easiest way for the "Clean Break" scenario to be implemented now, would be through a new civil war in Lebanon, which would lead to the balkanization of the country into

ethnic/religious/sectarian entities. Tensions among factions in the country had been heating up prior to the Hariri assassination. Walid Jumblatt, for example, speaking to Christian Maronites at St. Joseph University, accused "elements" of the Syrian Baath Party of killing his father in 1975. The Baath party then demanded that Jumblatt be prosecuted in Lebanon for slander.

Meanwhile, members of the Lebanese government accused opposition figures of being tools of the United States and Israel. The Mufti of Lebanon, Mohammad Khabani, added fuel to the fire, when he stated that the Sunnis in Lebanon believed that they were being targetted through the murder of Hariri, who was a Sunni. As journalist Robert Fisk, who was on site when the bombing occurred, stressed in the British paper the *Independent*: "Anyone setting out to murder Hariri would know how this could reopen all the fissures of the civil war from 1975 to 1990."

Iran and Syria Close Ranks

In response to the propaganda barrage aimed against Syria, the government strengthened its strategic alliance with Iran, another neo-con target. Syrian Prime Minister Mohammad Naji al-Otari visited Tehran, and after talks with Iranian First Vice President Mohammad Reza Aref, stated: "This meeting, which takes place at this sensitive time, is important, especially because Syria and Iran face several challenges and it is necessary to build a common front." The two discussed increasing cooperation in transportation, oil, irrigation, energy, and trade, as part of their "common front," and Aref pledged Iran's support.

More significant, strategically, is the support which Moscow has lent to both Syria and Iran. Flying in the face of Israeli and U.S. protests, Russian President Vladimir Putin sent a letter to Israeli Prime Minister Sharon, one day after Hariri's assassination, saying that Russia would fulfill its pledge to sell Syria vehicle-mounted anti-aircraft missiles. The next day, Feb. 16, Colonel-General Leonid Ivashov, former senior member of the Russian Defense Ministry, and currently president of the Academy of Geopolitical Problems, warned: "Should an aggression be launched against Iran, the war will come to Russian borders." Hassan Rowhani, head of the Iranian Supreme National Security Council (and a negotiator on nuclear issues), visited Moscow for talks with Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov. And on Feb. 26, the head of the Russian Federation Atomic Energy Agency, Alexander Rumyantsev, is expected in Iran, to sign the final agreements on the Bushehr nuclear reactor. According to regional sources, Russia has de facto established guarantees for Iran's security, and is beefing up its southern border, from the Black Sea into Central Asia, a signal that Moscow is taking the threats against Iran and Syria very seriously.

One Iranian official summed up his view of the situation by saying, "The Third World War has already begun." Unless the political opposition inside the U.S. takes over policy-making soon, that indeed is the danger.