

Lebanon Resists Bush Civil War Provocations

by Michele Steinberg

The legitimate leaders of Lebanon from the Christian, Sunni, Shi'ite, and other communities are carrying out an heroic effort for peace inside their country against almost unsurmountable obstacles that include two terrorist bombings carried out in Christian neighborhoods on March 18 and March 23, provocations by a “democracy mafia” from the United States, black propaganda from Israeli outlets, and a new crop of Lebanese fraudsters, who are puppets of the U.S. neo-conservative warmongers, along the model of Iraqi exile and convicted crook, Ahmed Chalabi. On March 8, and March 14, Lebanon saw the largest demonstrations organized in the history of Lebanon, the first called by Hezbollah leader, Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah to *support* the presence of Syrian troops in Lebanon as a force for stability (a position supported by the United States for over 20 years), and the second, a unity rally that featured Parliamentary member Bahiya Hariri, the sister of the former Prime Minister, Rafiq Hariri, who was assassinated on Feb. 14; she called for Syria to leave Lebanon entirely. Lebanon's large Shi'ia population also participated in this demo.

Rather than returning to the violence that kept Lebanon in a destructive civil war from 1975 to 1990, now Lebanon's senior leaders are determined to keep the peace, along the lines of the Peace of Westphalia, which ended the Thirty Year's War of religious hatred and blood-letting in 1648, as Cardinal Nasrallah Sfeir, Patriarch of the Maronite Church in Lebanon, told *EIR* (see following interview).

Simply put, the opposition has no intention of allowing a U.S. occupation as seen in Iraq, to replace the Syrian forces that they now oppose.

Sources in Lebanon, Washington, and European capitols make it clear that Lebanese leaders are fully aware that the “war party” circle in the Bush Administration has a policy to destroy Lebanon—and Syria—as laid out in the 1996 policy paper, “A Clean Break: A New Strategy for the Realm,” authored by neo-cons who became senior officials in the Cheney-Bush administration, and went full tilt for the Iraq war. This circle of neo-cons, including Cheney aide David Wurmser, Defense Under Secretary Doug Feith, and the now-disgraced Pentagon heavy weight, Richard Perle, not only pushed for the Iraq war, but pressed the White House to immediately invade Syria and Iran in Spring, 2003. Opposition from U.S. military and intelligence institutions, active and retired, blocked the move. But now, in 2005, the “neo-cons” have become the “neo-democracy” movement, trying to start

a war with Syria, over its occupation of Lebanon.

However, following the March 21-23 Arab League summit in Algeria, attended by Syrian President Bashar Assad, who met with UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, as well as with the heads of state of major Arab countries, President Assad stated that he will determine a timetable for rapid withdrawal of the Syrian troops, which now reportedly number about 8,000, which means that approximately 6,000 have already left Lebanon since February.

Lebanese leaders are determined to prevent the Bush league “neo-democrats” from turning their country into a staging ground for a “new Iraq” in Syria—or into a new Khyrgystan, which on March 23 erupted into mob violence—egged on by the U.S. ambassador, who had been meeting regularly with the opposition—leading to “regime change.” The case of Khyrgystan would prove the point—while President Oskar Akayev was driven out, what happens next is not clear, and violence looms.

The Olive Branch

The signs that the Lebanese opposition is not playing along with the “war in the name of democracy” plan of the second Bush Administration are evident, especially in an intensification of dialogue with Hezbollah, the largest Shi’ite group, which the Americans and Israelis have insisted be on a “terrorist list.” Hezbollah already holds seats in the Lebanese parliament, and the European allies refused the U.S. pressure to condemn Hezbollah.

Extremely important are the comments by Bahiya Hariri on March 14 to the largest opposition demonstration to date, where she praised Hezbollah Secretary General Nasrallah, and also the Shi’ite Parliamentary leader Nabih Berri, for “their act of heroism in leading the resistance [to Israeli occupation] that liberated the country.” She said, “Let us merge the two struggles into one, the resistance to occupiers and . . . struggle to build Lebanon.”

Then, on March 20, thousands of partisans of the Hezbollah gathered for the first time at the tomb of Rafiq Hariri to pay tribute to the former prime minister, a Sunni muslim. They placed a floral crown and Lebanese flag on the grave, located near a mosque in central Beirut’s Martyrs’ Square.

The March 14 demo was the last of the large demonstrations after both the Lahoud government and Maronite Patriarch Sfeir called for an end to the contesting street demonstrations before they could degenerate to violence. On the eve of his trip to Washington, Sfeir issued a call for an end to “muscle-flexing on the street,” because of the protests’ harm to stability and the economy.

If George W. Bush had been told that Patriarch Sfeir would rail against Syria and Hezbollah, as Bush and his Secretary of State cum National Security adviser Condoleezza Rice had been doing, he was in for a surprise.

Instead, Patriarch Sfeir told Bush that friendly relations with Syria, peace with Lebanon’s neighbors, was of the highest priority. He also delivered the message from the Lebanese

that the disarming of Hezbollah was a Lebanese matter, to be decided by the Hezbollah itself, reported the March 24 *Arabic Monitor*. This message potentially cuts the legs out from under the “Clean Break” strategy.

On March 17, following his meeting with Bush, Patriarch Sfeir, also told a gathering at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C. what they probably did *not* expect to hear from the figure who is described as the conscience of the Lebanese opposition. Instead of calls for revenge in the name of democracy, the audience heard the Patriarch say that “the Lebanese are united around the idea of solving any internal differences through peaceful and constructive dialogue, to preserve their unity and to protect their national institutions”; that Lebanese leaders of all convictions are alarmed by the continued migration of Muslim and Christian youth due to the lack of job opportunities and the suffocating political conditions at home; and that “The opposition would not demand Lahoud’s resignation until after the parliamentary elections.”

And in an exceptional statement of unity and peace, on March 17, Sfeir told *EIR* in an interview, that the 1648 Peace of Westphalia is what he and others are working for in Lebanon. “What is good for Lebanon is . . . peace,” he said, “We want to be good friends with all our neighbors. We want to walk together hand to hand. . . .”

Fires in the Streets

The Patriarch’s statements were a far cry from the

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bloodlust sounded by the U.S. “Project Democracy mafia,” such as neo-conservative warmongers Paula Dobriansky, and Paul Wolfowitz, the number-two man in the Department of Defense, who was the architect of the Iraq war, and Principle Assistant Secretary of State David Satterfield, now acting as the ambassador to Lebanon, after the sudden departure of Ambassador Jeffrey Feltman, for “personal reasons.”

On Feb. 28, Dobriansky, an Assistant Secretary of State for Global Affairs, Satterfield and Wolfowitz were egging on mass demonstrations, extolling the “cedar revolution,” and telling “the people” to take destiny in their own hands. What they want to see in Lebanon is what happened in the impoverished nation of Khyrgystan on March 24, when opposition mobs (supported by the U.S. Ambassador) seized government buildings, took hostages, and set fire to automobiles and buildings.

This vision would be the fulfillment of what George W. Bush called, in his Jan. 20, 2005 Inaugural speech, lighting “a fire in the minds of men.” In reality, that phrase was fed to Bush by his handlers and speech writers out of Feodor Dostoevsky’s novel, “The Possessed,” where a nihilist revolutionary revels in the burning roofs set on fire by a mob he instigated, slyly insisting the violence is *good* because it is, “a fire in the minds of men.”

One of the key figures behind this policy of fiery chaos is George Pratt Shultz, the former Secretary of State under Ronald Reagan, whose maneuvers intensified and prolonged the fratricidal war in Lebanon in 1982-88. Shultz is now Co-Chairman of the Committee on the Present Danger, an outgrowth of the “Foundation for the Defense of Democracies,” (FDD), which he helped to build after the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks.

Under Shultz’s umbrella, which informally includes the neo-con “Temple of Darkness,” i.e., the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), and the U.S. Committee for a Free Lebanon (USCFL), are two would-be “Chalabis,” Dr. Walid Phares, a Senior Fellow at FDD, and Farik Ghadry, head of the supposed Reform Party of Syria, who are using the Israeli and neo-con press to build a false trail of information that can be then used to fool the U.S. Congress into repeating against Syria, the genocidal war it authorized Bush to wage in Iraq. Already the Christian evangelical fanatics and the right wing Israeli lobby are pushing warmongers in Congress to pass the “Syria Liberation Act,” to guarantee the implementation of “Clean Break.” The House of Representatives already passed a bill to “punish” Lebanese government officials, who do not demand the ouster of Syria, in the event that the opposition does not win the elections in May. Rep. Elena Ros-Lehtinen (R-Fla.) is sponsor of both bills.

To fuel the Congressional moves, on March 24, Walid Phares wrote a lengthy piece for the neo-con lie factories that “Syria has no intention of relinquishing power over its puppet state [i.e., Lebanon]” and filled pages with half-cocked information about Syrian intelligence agents and terrorists. On March 23, Ghadry, who lived many years in Lebanon, wrote

even more inflammatory lies for the Israeli Ynetnews.com, internet version of *Yedioth Aharonot*, saying that Syria plans to “set it [Lebanon] ablaze” and has recruited Palestinian terrorists from the West Bank to kill Lebanese leaders. Washington sources find Ghadry laughable—he is a former contractor with the Department of Defense, a total neo-con agent, whose Reform Party of Syria, created in October, 2001, operates essentially “out of the washroom of AEI,” according to one specialist in South West Asia.

But the lies of these operatives are no small or laughing matter—they are targeting Lebanese unity itself. Members of the Lebanese opposition told *EIR* that it is by constant daily dialogue among all religious and political factions that a return to civil war is being avoided, and the dirty tricks are being surmounted. One ugly example of the disinformation occurred last week when the press throughout the Arab world was filled with a lie that Patriarch Sfeir had called on Bush to disarm Hezbollah. “This was a *manufactured* tale,” a Christian leader heatedly told *EIR*. Sfeir issued a strong denial of the false report, and plans are underway to set up a meeting between Patriarch Sfeir and Sheikh Nasrallah of Hezbollah. The opposition is extremely optimistic that Syria is withdrawing and that Lebanon can be whole for the first time in decades, and at peace with Syria.

But the arrival of Satterfield to beef up the U.S. Embassy as a “command center” for “fire in the minds of men,” i.e. in the streets and homes—could bring a new phase of violence.