



Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center
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The “Syrian order” in Lebanon (1975-2005): Lebanon as a Syrian satellite during the Hafez Assad régime and the weakening of Syria’s hegemony under Bashar Assad

by Dr. Reuven Erlich

■ The assassination of Rafik Hariri, the Lebanese Prime Minister who refused to toe the Syrian line, and the dramatic events following it placed the **30-year old Syrian intervention** in Lebanon back on the Lebanese, Arab and international agendas. This article will both analyze Syrian interests in Lebanon and examine the main stages of Syria’s assumption of control of it, from the beginning of the civil war to the régime of Bashar Assad. It will also examine the weakening of that control, culminating in Hariri’s assassination, mass demonstrations of opponents of the “Syrian order” and its Hezbollah-led supporters. The combined pressure exerted by the international (even Arab) community and internal Lebanese elements led to the withdrawal of Syrian forces from Beirut and north Lebanon, currently (April 2005) underway. All are harbingers of the **end of the Taif régime** (1989 to the present) and the **beginning of a new era for Lebanon and Syrian intervention**. Damascus’ **dominance can be expected to decrease and be less visible than in the past** while Lebanese power bases – Syrian supporters and opponents – will enjoy greater freedom of action. Those two factors wording together are liable to make Lebanon once again an **arena for clashes between Lebanese, Middle Eastern and international forces**, and a focus of **regional unrest** and instability which may spill into **Syria** per se as well.



A statue of Hafez Assad in the Shiite village of Qana in south Lebanon, vandalized two weeks after Hariri’s assassination: a symbol of the end of the Taif régime.

The historical roots of Syrian intervention in Lebanon

- In Arab-Muslim **historical geography**, what are today Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Israel were all once part of a region known as **Bilad al-Sham**.¹ In the 19th century, based on common language, culture and history, the founders of Arab nationalism in Damascus and Beirut considered **Lebanon the western part of Greater Syria**.² After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire at the end of the First World War, Feisal ibn Hussein, during his short reign in Damascus, demanded the unification of Syria within its “natural boundaries,” which were those of Bilad al-Sham and therefore included Lebanon.
- **Post-WWI arrangements** carved the Middle East into separate political units and prevented the establishment of a country whose borders were compatible with the demands of Syrian nationalism. France, traditionally enjoying the support of the Christian Maronite population, received the Mandate for Lebanon and strove to preserve it as Lebanese. The French appealed to the Maronite leadership and on **August 31, 1920 established “the Greater Lebanon,”** which included the Ottoman Christian district of Mount Lebanon Administrative Autonomy (“Little Lebanon,” which had been established during the previous century). Predominantly Christian "Little Lebanon" was enlarged to include the Muslim areas in the south, the north and the Beka'a Valley in the east.
- **Syrian nationalists refused to accept** the new Lebanese state, regarding it as an artificial entity created by French colonialism and without the right to exist. From its establishment, once the Ba'ath party took over and especially during the régime of Hafez Assad, Syrian leaders often noted Lebanon's special relationship with Syria, the spirit of which was expressed by Assad **on July 20, 1976,** when he said: **“Historically, Syrian and Lebanon are one country and one people.”** A clear application of that concept was Syria's **refusal to establish diplomatic relations** with Lebanon and to recognize their common border as an international boundary between two **independent states** (Between Syria and Lebanon exists a long-

¹ “The land of the north,” or Greater Syria. Additional information can be found in *The Syrian Involvement in Lebanon since 1975* by Reuven Avi-Ran (Erich), Westview Press, 1991, pp. 3-6.

² Despite the fact that throughout its history Lebanon kept its own autonomy.

standing argument regarding their mutual border, which has never been exactly defined and marked).³

Syrian interests in Lebanon

■ Syria was not motivated to assume control over Lebanon only by historical aspirations of annexation or ideological reasons of Arab unity. Its deeply-rooted and continuing intervention, and its obvious willingness to pay a high long-term price to continue its domination, were motivated by a **combination of vital interests**, the most important of which were:

■ **Military and security concerns in the context of the Syrian-Israeli conflict:**

■ **Securing the west Damascus flank from Israel attack:** Syria traditionally conspired to keep Lebanon on its Israeli front and **to prevent Israel from exploiting Lebanon and its military weakness to outflank the Golan Heights and invade Damascus or northern Syria through the Beka'a Valley**. That fear increased with the lessons Syria learned during the War of Lebanon, when the Israeli army advanced through the eastern sector ("Fatahland"). In a face-to-face confrontation Israel destroyed most of Syria's first armored division, then broke through Syria's first line of defense in the Beka'a Valley and finally halted its own advance when it **unilaterally** accepted a cease fire which became effective on **June 11, 1982**.

■ **Using Lebanon-based terrorism as a weapon and a means of exerting pressure on Israel:** The Lebanese arena (the eastern sector and south Lebanon) traditionally served as a launching pad for Syrian-instigated terrorist acts against Israel. Such attacks were

³ That is the background for the disagreement over the area known as the **Shebaa Farms** (Har Dov), which is part of the Golan Heights. It became an issue for the Lebanese government and Hezbollah after the Israel army withdrew from Lebanon (May 2000). The **utterly baseless** claim is advanced by Hezbollah that the area belonged to Lebanon, providing it with a pseudo-legitimization to continue attacking Israeli forces in that region.

intended either to wear Israel down or to extort political concessions in the Israeli-Arab conflict. At various periods during the years of conflict Damascus has encouraged acts of terrorism originating in south Lebanon, beginning with the so-called “Arab Revolt” (1936-1939) through the 1950s (See below) to Hezbollah nowadays. Interesting in that context is the statement made in the mid-1950s by David Ben-Gurion, Israel’s Prime Minister: “Lebanon’s government cannot hide behind the Syrians in the matter of fedayoun attacks on Israel from the borders of its country [Lebanon]. We do not wish to complicate matters with Lebanon, but we cannot stand by idly while it allows bands of murderers to operate from its territory and find refuge there” (David Ben-Gurion, December 12, 1956).

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Nothing new under the sun

Terrorism as a Syrian weapon: information which reached the American army attaché in Beirut (July 8, 18953) about raids into Israeli territory conducted by Palestinian bands under the direction of Abu Muhammad Safuri (“The servants of the Lord”), serving the interests of Syrian president Adib Shishakli and Mufti Haj Amin al-Husseini.⁴

⁴ From *The Lebanon Tangle: the Policy of the Zionist Movement and the State of Israeli Toward Lebanon, 1918-1958*, Reuven Erlich (Avi-Ran), (Hebrew), Ma'arahot Publishers, Tel Aviv, 2000, p. 392.

- **Strengthening Syria's regional status and the improvement of its position vis-à-vis Israel:** Dominating Lebanon, subordinating it to Syrian policies and preventing other countries from influencing it were for Syria powerful tools in strengthening its regional status and improving its position of power vis-à-vis the **United States** and **Israel**. By keeping Lebanon as a political hostage, Syria could **prevent an Israeli-Lebanese peace treaty from being signed** and thus further its objective of regaining the Golan Heights (the Syrians prevented progress from being made in Israeli-Lebanese negotiations in Washington within the framework of the Madrid process). In addition, Syria wanted to keep Lebanon-based terrorism as a trump card to prevent the political process from advancing at a pace unacceptable to Syria and not in accord with what Syria regarded as its interests.

- **Internal Syrian interests – the prevention of Lebanon-based subversion:** Lebanon, politically open and having a relatively free press, was traditionally a **hothouse** for anti-Damascus opposition groups which found a haven in Lebanon, organizing and operating from its territory against the dictatorship in Damascus. Opposition groups inside Syria were frequently in close contact with Syrian opponents in Lebanon (such as the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamic groups, the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP) and the Lebanese Forces (the armed Christian Phalanges)). Hafez Assad's régime, striving to stabilize Syria after several years of chronic instability, was particularly interested in severing the long-term contacts between the internal Syrian opposition and its external counterparts in Lebanon.

- **Economic interests:** Syria has traditionally tried to advance its economic interests in Lebanon and sometimes to exploit Lebanon for its own economic purposes. For example, hundreds of thousands of Syrians provide cheap labor in Lebanon and annually bring **hundreds of millions of dollars** into Syria's tottering economy, partially solving its problem of unemployment (more than 20% of the Syrian work-force is unemployed). In addition, Syria is interested in maintaining an asymmetrical trade balance with Lebanon while using the latter as a market for Syrian exports (\$400 million annually). Syria also **exploits an important source of water** (the north-flowing Orontes River,

Nahr al-Assi) which begins in Lebanon and continues into northern Syria; and it takes advantage of **the Lebanese banking system**, relatively well-developed for the region and certainly well-developed in comparison to Syria. **Smuggling through Lebanon, including the production and smuggling of drugs**, is an important source of income for Syria itself and for high-ranking individuals in the Syrian régime (beyond a doubt, Lebanon corrupted the occupying Syrians, as it did other invaders).

The main stages of the Syrian takeover of Lebanon

- From the establishment of its independence in 1943 until the beginning of the 1970s, certain factors prevented Syria's takeover of Lebanon:
 - Syria's **internal weakness**;
 - The **vitality** of the traditional Maronite-Sunni Lebanese régime (which relied on the 1943 National Pact);
 - **Israeli as a deterrent** (especially in light of the lessons Syria and Assad from the Syrian invasion of Jordan in September 1970);
 - **Western patronage**, which relied on the historical precedents of French intervention during the 19th century and American intervention in 1958.⁵
- During the first half of the 1970s the **constraints binding Syria weakened**: for the **first time** Syria had a stable régime (headed by Hafez Assad), the traditional Lebanese régime collapsed during beginning of the civil war (1975-1976), Israeli deterrence was eroded by the Yom Kippur war (1973), the Arab world's self-confidence grew and American patronage was discovered to be problematical (the United States was at the time embroiled in the Vietnam War).

⁵ On July 15, 1958, 15,000 American Marines landed on the beach at Beirut, coming to the aid of Camille Chamoun's pro-Western government, which was facing a rebellion led by supporters of Nasser who received aid from Egypt and Syria. The American intervention led to an end of the civil war raging at that time.

- Thus, during the 1970's a **window of opportunity** was opened in Lebanon for Assad's régime. Egypt's defection from its alliance with Syria in the Yom Kippur war and Syria's lack of desire to enter into a peace process with Israel were **immediate motivating forces**. The civil war and collapse of the Lebanese government provided a convenient excuse and opportunity for bringing Syrian forces in to Lebanon. In retrospect it can be seen that during the second half of the 1970s a **long-term strategic change had occurred in Syria's national priorities** and that the struggle for Lebanon had become **more important** than dealing with the conflict with Israel and the return of the Golan Heights. Only at the **beginning of the 1990's**, when Syria had managed to overcome its difficulties and had finished incorporating Lebanon, did it reenter into negotiations with Israel (during the Madrid Peace Conference in 1991.)

- The process by which Syria took over Lebanon, from the beginning of the civil war to the present time, can be divided into **six main historical stages and a new seventh stage**:
 - **Stage 1**: The military takeover of part of Lebanon during the Lebanese civil war (1975-1976).

 - **Stage 2**: "Digestive troubles" – the Syrian failure to turn its military takeover into political assets (1977-1981).

 - **Stage 3**: Israel and Syria confront one another in Lebanon (1981-1982).

 - **Stage 4**: The Israeli-Syrian clash during the Israeli war of Lebanon (1982-1985).

 - **Stage 5**: The stabilizing and strengthening of Syrian control after the war of Lebanon (1985-1989).

 - **Stage 6**: The Taif Régime: Turning Lebanon into a Syrian protectorate and strategic asset (1989-2005)

- **The latest stage:** Cracks in the Taif régime since Bashar Assad inherited the government from his father, and a new era heralded by the ongoing withdrawal of Syrian forces from Lebanon (March – April 2005):

Stage 1: The military takeover of part of Lebanon during the Lebanese civil war (1975-1976).

- Syria was dragged into Lebanon’s worsening civil war, first as a **mediator**, then as a **political side** attempting to force a settlement, after that as a **limited military presence** at the fighting in Beirut and the Beka’a Valley and finally as a **massive military invader** planning to tip the scales and impose the “**Syrian Order**” on the warring factions.
- **June 1, 1976, was a key date in Syrian intervention in Lebanon.** A reinforced division invaded Lebanon with two main objectives:
 - To protect the **Christian camp**, whose **leaders** (**not** the Lebanese **government**) had sent the Syrians urgent calls for help;⁶
 - To **force the surrender of the coalition** of Palestinian organizations and the Lebanese left wing militias, Syria’s former allies which no longer accepted Syrian dictates.
- The Palestinian-Lebanese coalition, headed by Yasser Arafat and the Druze leader Kamal Jumblat halted the Syrian army at the entrance to Sidon and Beirut. They kept them at bay until the so-called “mountain attack” and the **Arab summit meetings in Cairo and Riyadh at the end of 1976**, which brought about a temporary lull in the fighting between the rival parties.
- **Israel’s stance toward the Syrian invasion of Lebanon:** From the beginning, Israel’s decision makers disagreed about Israeli policy toward the Syrian

⁶ The Syrian claim that its forces entered Lebanon legitimately in the wake of a request from the Lebanese government is **untrue**. Legitimization for the Syrian presence was given **in retrospect** after the Arab summit meetings in Cairo and Riyadh (end of 1976).

intervention in the Lebanese crisis. During the summer of 1976, shortly before the invasion, **two schools of thought** were prevalent in Israel:

- The **first** was represented by the late **Yitzhak Rabin**, then Prime Minister, and **Mordechai Gur**, then Chief of Staff: Israel should not be the policeman of the Middle East and what happened in the Arab countries, including Lebanon, was none of Israel's business as long as its security was not endangered (Gur, after Operation Litani,⁷ even went so far as to claim that Syria should be allowed to take over south Lebanon to turn itself into an "address" for preventing terrorism, since there was a lack of terrorist activity in Golan Heights); the entry of Syrian forces into Lebanon, therefore, was not to be prevented. Moreover, the Syrian entry into Lebanon was perceived as protection for the Christians against the Palestinians and the left-wing militias.

- The **second** was represented by a **minority** which included **Ariel Sharon** (then one of Rabin's advisors) and **Rafael Eitan** (then Chief of the Northern Command): The Syrian military forces in Lebanon constituted a clear and present threat to Israel's security and therefore should not be permitted to enter it and create a threat from a new front, even if the only other choice was a military confrontation between Israel and Syria.

- The **first school of thought** prevailed and was the basis for **Israeli policy, which enabled the Syrians to introduce massive forces into Lebanon. In the spring of 1976, between March and May 1976, an indirect Israeli-Syrian dialogue was conducted through the American ambassadors in Tel Aviv and Damascus.** American secretary of state Henry Kissinger participated, playing an important central role in advancing the indirect, unwritten Israeli-Syrian understanding.

⁷ In March 1978, as a result of the murderous terrorist attack on Israel's main coastal road, Israel invaded Lebanon and pushed the Palestinian terrorist forces to the north of the Litani river (about 25 kms north of the Israeli-Lebanese border), eventually leading to UN resolution 425, which called for the withdrawal of Israeli forces and has since been complied with.

- **That tacit understanding was founded on the following:**
 - **The drawing of a “red line,”** which would run between the area of Syrian activity and Israeli interests, its place to be determined by indirect negotiations between the two countries. Initially (early March) Israel demanded that Syrian military presence be limited to a line running ten kilometers south of the Damascus-Beirut road. Finally (May) it was agreed that it would run from **Sidon to Khuneh (south of Jezzín) and from there to Rashiyya al-Wadi** (in the eastern sector).
 - **Division of areas of interest and influence:** in the wake of the **disintegration of the Lebanese government and the ensuing anarchy**, and as a result of the “red line,” there was a de facto division of spheres of interest between Israel and Syria. North of the line, the Syrian sphere of influence, Syria had the freedom to use its military forces (at that time, supporting the Christian camp) to put an end to the civil war and force its authority on the left-wing militias and the Palestinian organizations. South of the line the Syrians gave de facto recognition to Israeli security interests at a time when the “South Lebanon strip” was created during 1976-1978 under the control of Major Saad Haddad (the South Lebanon strip was the forerunner of the security zone).
 - **A limitation of the types of weapons and the length of the Syrian army’s stay in Lebanon:** the Syrians refused to **commit** themselves to limitations regarding the size of the invading force, the type of weapons they would introduce or **the length of their stay**. They did not correctly assess the complexity of the crisis and were under the impression that **within a week they could impose Syrian order on Lebanon. Thirteen years passed, from the invasion to the Taif Agreement, before they could stabilize their control and hegemony over Lebanon and establish the Syrian Order.**
 - The rules agreed upon regarding **aerial activity:** according to one version, the indirect understanding between Israel and Syria stipulated Syria would not introduce ground-to-air missiles into Lebanon, not operate fighter planes

in Lebanese skies and by implication not interfere with Israeli freedom to fly over Lebanon.⁸

Stage 2: “Digestive troubles” – the Syrian failure to turn its military takeover into political assets (1977-1981).

- Two Arab summit meetings, one in Cairo and one in Riyadh, **retrospectively legitimized** the Syrian invasion and the presence of 20,000 Syrian soldiers on Lebanese soil. They became a dominant factor in the Arab “**deterrent force**” which supervised the collection of weapons and evacuated positions and barricades of the opposing sides. Syrian forces entered Beirut and Sidon, the strongholds of the armed Palestinian organizations and left-wing militias. They assumed control of Beirut and determined the locations of the deployment of the Syrian army in Lebanon while killing their political enemies, most prominently **Kamal Jumblat**, the leader of the Druze and the most prominent figure in the anti-Syrian coalition.



A cartoon by **Pierre Sadek**, who regularly contributes to Beirut newspaper Al-Nahar and other Lebanese and foreign media. The cartoon, published in December 2003, shows **Rafik Hariri**, a pillar of anti-Syrian opposition in Lebanon, thinking about Druze leader **Kamal Jumblat**, who objected to the Syrian army invasion of Lebanon and was later assassinated by the Syrians. In Lebanese public opinion, Hariri was targeted by Syria.

⁸ See in this context *A Soldier in Search of Peace*, (Hebrew), by Avraham Tamir, Idanim Publishers, Tel Aviv, 1988, p. 139. (English edition published by Harper and Row, 1988.)

- **Although the Syrians managed to swallow Lebanon by military takeover and Arab political recognition, they had difficulty digesting it.** They did not succeed in forcing the **Palestinian leadership (Yasser Arafat)** to keep the agreements reached with them. According to those agreements the armed Palestinian organizations had to accept the limitations placed on their armed presence and activity in Lebanon, as stated in the 1969 Cairo Agreement and its appendices (by then the Palestinians, led by Arafat, had acquired the reputation both in Lebanon and the Arab world as serial breachers of agreements). In addition, Syrian relations with the **Christian camp**, which had initially welcomed the Syrian army, deteriorated as time passed.

- At that time, a radical anti-Syrian bias cropped up among the Christians who were disappointed by the Syrians, and they were even willing to cooperate with Israel to a greater extent than previously with the objective of using Israel as a tool to liberate Lebanon from the Syrian occupation. Their foremost representative was **Bashir Gemayel**, commander of the Lebanese Forces, the military wing of the Lebanese Phalanges (which his father commanded), which was supported by the former Lebanese president, **Camille Chamoun**.

- Beginning in 1978, a **violent confrontation** gradually developed between the Christian militias⁹ and the Syrian army. Gemayel's (and his supporters') objective was to liberate Lebanon from Syrian occupation. To do so, the Christians attempted to increase Israel's involvement in the Lebanese crisis and involve it in a military confrontation with Syria. **That policy played a key role in drawing Israel directly into the Lebanese crisis and was one of the factors leading to the war in Lebanon (1982-1985).**

⁹ Prominent among which were the Lebanese Forces led by Bashir Gemayel.

Stage 3: Israel and Syria confront one another in Lebanon (1981-1982)

- At that point the **rules** of the game between Syria and Israel set down in the spring of 1976 and which had survived the Lebanese crisis for some years (including Operation Litani (1978)), were **scrapped**. Tensions increased between Israel and Syria for the following reasons:
 - **An improvement in Syria's relations with the PLO and armed Palestinian organizations which turned Lebanon into a base for launching terrorist attacks against Israel;**
 - **A violent confrontation developed between the Christian camp (Israel's ally) and the Syrian army in Lebanon. The Christian militias (primarily the Lebanese Forces) made great efforts to drag Israel into the confrontation while representing themselves as victims to enlist Israeli sympathy;**
 - **Israel's readiness, as a result of its internal political changes, to deviate from its former policies of indirect involvement ("to help the Christians to help themselves," as Rabin said) and intervene directly to defend its allies in the Christian camp.**¹⁰
- The rules of the game were first broken in the so-called "missile crisis," April 1981: during the confrontation between the Syrian army and the Lebanese militias at **Zahle**, 52 kilometers (about 30 miles) to the east of Beirut, **the Israeli air force shot down two Russian Mi-8 Syrian transport helicopters near Riyaq (to the east of Zahle)**. They mistook them for attack helicopters on their way to strafe the so-called "**French Chamber**" (an important Christian position on Mt. Sannine). That came as the **result of Prime Minister Menachem Begin's promise to Christian leaders Camille Chamoun and Bashir Gemayel that Israel would not sit by idly if the Syrian air force attacked the Christian militias.**

¹⁰ During **Menachem Begin's** second term as Prime Minister two men rose to power who had, as a matter of principle, opposed Israel's 1976 indirect understanding with Syria. They were **Ariel Sharon**, who was appointed Minister of Defense in August 1981, and the **Rafael Eitan**, Chief of Staff.

- On April 29, the day after the helicopters were shot down, the **Syrians brought three batteries of SA6 anti-aircraft missiles into the Beka'a Valley**, which were followed by others (before the helicopter incident the Syrians had dug trenches for the missiles but left them empty, an obvious hint which Israel did not notice). **Israel and Syria then moved to direct military confrontation**, which was, however, limited to the Lebanese arena. Before the war broke out there has been a series of air skirmishes between Israeli and Syrian planes between 1979-1982, all of which ended with the Syrian planes' being shot down.

- After the **Christian** camp's efforts which had lasted for three years (1978-1981), Israel had finally been dragged into a military confrontation with Syria. Once that had been accomplished, the Christian leaders were quick to lower their collective profile and sign the Zahle Agreement with the Syrians (June 1981), signaling the end of the clashes between the Syrian army and the Christian militias.

- To neutralize the missile crisis' explosive potential, the American government (the Regan administration which replaced Carter's in January 1981) tried its hand at mediation. However, the **Syrians** refused to comply with the efforts of the American envoy, **Philip Habib**, and would not remove the missiles from the Beka'a Valley, and not even the public threats made by Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin during the 1981 elections could convince them. **Israel considered an air attack to destroy the missiles but eventually gave up the idea in favor of bombing the Iraqi nuclear reactor**. Rafael Eitan, who was then Chief of Staff, wrote the following:¹¹

“There were other dilemmas which had to be considered: Israel had on occasion stated that it would not accept the presence of Syrian anti-aircraft missiles in the Beka'a in Lebanon. Philip Habib's efforts to convince the Syrians to remove them were unsuccessful and there was no reason to hope they would ever succeed. **The operation to destroy the missiles was postponed because of the weather and then postponed again for political considerations. Now, with the program to destroy the nuclear reactor in**

¹¹ Rafael Eitan and Dov Golshtein, *A Soldier's Story*, (Hebrew), Sifriat Ma'ariv Publishers, Tel Aviv, 1986, pp. 186-7.

Stage 4: The Israeli-Syrian clash during the Israeli war of Lebanon (1982-1985)

■ Syria's place in Israel's perception of the war:

- During the early planning of the war of Lebanon, the Israeli Minister of Defense and Chief of Staff were aware that the presence of the Syrian army in Lebanon was **essentially irreconcilable with the realization of the other objectives of the war**. Nevertheless, the political and military echelons repeatedly stated that **Israel had no wish to enter into a wide-scale confrontation with the Syrian army**. However, according to Israeli intelligence assessments, a broad operation against the armed Palestinian organizations was liable to lead to a direct confrontation with the Syrian army in Lebanon. The concept of those planning the war was that if it had to happen, it was better it be done **towards the end of the campaign against the armed Palestinian organizations and within restricted limits**.

- **Why was Israeli political leadership unwilling to crash the Syrian army in Lebanon as a condition for achieving the other objectives of the war?**

There were apparently two main reasons:

- **Internal political considerations:** Most of the Ministers both within the government and in the opposition were prepared to accept an operative plan whose objective was to **destroy the Palestinian terrorist infrastructure in Lebanon, but they did not want an all-out war with Syria**.
- **International considerations:** In Israeli assessment, American approval or at least **acceptance** could be gotten for the destruction of the Palestinian terrorist infrastructure, while a military confrontation with Syria would necessarily lead to a cease-fire imposed on the Israeli army by the superpowers before other goals could be attained, as had happened in previous wars.



American mediator Philip Habib and Hafez Assad (June 9, 1982) meeting while the Israeli army was advancing through the eastern sector of Lebanon, known as “Fatahland,” during the first days (June 6-8) of the War of Lebanon. The meeting did not prevent a confrontation between the Israeli and Syrian armies.

- Israel did not attack the Syrian missiles in the Beka’a Valley until the war in Lebanon but the tension and potential for a deterioration of the situation remained. **During the months preceding the war** the Syrians carefully followed Israel’s preparations, and it was clear to them that the Israeli army was concentrating forces in northern Israel, preparing for a military operation in Lebanon. They were of the opinion that such an operation would be of limited scale and directed against the Palestinian terrorist organizations. They also received a tactical surprise from the **timing** of the operation and even more so from its **extent**.
- During the first three days of the war (until the battle for Jezzín) the Syrians tended to believe the limited objectives Israel had announced and interpreted Israel’s actions as directed against the terrorist infrastructure in south Lebanon. Therefore, during those first three days they only moved in reinforcements, and conducted restricted military activities to avoid giving Israel an excuse for taking action against them.
- Nevertheless, between June 8-11 the focus of the battles swung from the Palestinian infrastructure in south Lebanon to the Syrian army in the eastern

sector. During those days Israeli and Syrian armored units clashed directly, during which most of Syria's first division was destroyed and Syria's first line of defense in the Beka'a Valley was breached. The Israel army could have taken the offensive and continue maneuvering in the Beka'a Valley, cutting off the Beirut-Damascus highway. However, it did not exploit the opportunity and unilaterally agreed to a **ceasefire** at noon on June 11.

- In retrospect, that was the **turning point** of the war and the reason for the rift between Israel and the Christian camp. **The Christian camp had hoped that with Israeli aid it could shake off the Syrian yoke and liberate Lebanon, and when Israel did not strike the Syrian army and drive it out of Lebanon, the Christians became estranged. Israeli strategy, which avoided a showdown in the Beka'a Valley and the destruction of the main Syrian force in Lebanon, enabled the Syrians to bring in reserve forces from Syria and rehabilitate the units which had been partially destroyed in the battles. What were military failures were later turned by the Syrians into political successes.**



The Syrian 85th Brigade leaving Beirut at the end of the siege on the city (August 21, 1982). At the right, **Walid Jumblat** shooting his weapon into the air to speed the departing Syrians on their way. The Syrian army returned to Beirut at the end of the War of Lebanon. Walid, the son of Kamal, who was assassinated by the Syrians, is today one of the pillars of the Lebanese opposition to Syria's control of Lebanon.

- During the war and the Israeli army's deployment in Lebanon the Syrians – from a **position of weakness** – had to contend with the challenge of an Israeli military presence. Between their withdrawal from Beirut (August 1982) and the Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon and the establishment of the security zone (January 1985), **they waged a determined struggle against the Israeli presence** using Lebanese proxies while maintaining absolute quiet in the Golan Heights and **avoiding** a direct confrontation with the Israeli army.

- In vying for influence with Israel in Lebanon, the Syrians had a number of prominent successes. The most important were
 - The **assassination of Bashir Gemayel**, the leader of the anti-Syrian Christian camp and symbol of the opposition to the Syrian occupation and of pro-Israeli orientation;

 - **The non-ratification of the Israeli-Lebanese agreement of May 17, 1983**, which could have ended the War of Lebanon with political gains for Israel;

 - **The forcible removal from Beirut of the multi-national force**¹³ (dominated by the United States) under pressure from Hezbollah terrorist attacks supported by Iran and Syria and directed chiefly against American and French objectives;

 - **The collapse of Amin Gemayel's régime** under pressure from the Damascus-supported Druze militias;

 - **The failure of the Nakurah military talks between Israel and Lebanon**, resulting in **Israel's unilateral withdrawal** from Lebanon under pressure from terrorism and civil rebellion without any political agreement.

¹³ That force was intended to provide a security umbrella in West Beirut and in fact to support Amin Gemayel's régime.

■ **From the Syrian point of view, the war of Lebanon was a success**, enabling it to strengthen its control of Lebanon. Its military inferiority on land and in the air, the Israeli forces almost at the gates of Damascus and its political isolation all notwithstanding, it managed to hold out against Israel's superior forces, to employ delaying tactics and finally to save the main part of its army in Lebanon from destruction. Those achievements served as the foundation for its struggle against Israeli gains while the Israeli army was in Lebanon and until Israel withdrew **unconditionally and with no political gain at all.**

Stage 5: The stabilizing and strengthening of Syrian control after the war of Lebanon (1985-1989).

■ This stage began with the Israeli army's withdrawal from Lebanon in January 1985 and the creation of the security zone, and ended with the Taif Agreement in October 1989. The collapse of the pro-Israel Christian camp after the murder of Bashir Gemayel, the withdrawal of the Israeli army and the multi-national force, the return of the Syrian forces to Beirut and the cessation of Israeli intervention in Lebanon's internal politics -- **all left the country vulnerable to an increase of Syrian influence. The new strategic situation after the war enabled Syria to complete the process of "Syrification"** it had started during the first years of the civil war (1975-1976) and to force Lebanon to accept its control.

■ **Michel Aoun**, commander of the Lebanese army, served, through his ill-considered decisions, as the **catalyst** for a series of dramatic events which led first to the Taif Agreement and then to the Syrian takeover of the Christian enclave. Lebanese president Amin Gemayel appointed him Prime Minister of a military caretaker government shortly before the end of his term in office. The Syrians refused to recognize Aoun's (legitimate) government, instead recognizing that of the (existing) government of Sunni Muslim Salim al-Huss. On March 14, 1989, Michel Aoun, who had failed to read



the political map correctly, declared a “**war of liberation**” against the **Syrian occupation**. Thus Lebanon was left with no president but with two rival prime ministers, one of whom enjoyed Syrian support and the other who had neither Arab nor international support.

- In the spring of 1989 a new round of clashes began, the third in a series of violent confrontations between the Syrian army and Aoun’s supporters in the Christian camp. This time the anti-Syrian Christians conducted their struggle **from a position of weakness**: between Michel Aoun and his supporters in the Lebanon army on the one hand and the Christian militias (the Lebanese Forces led by Samir Ja’ja’) on the other lay fierce disagreements and rivalries, while Israel and the western countries, which had learned bitter lessons from their involvement in the Lebanese crisis, refrained from **military intervention** on the side of Aoun.
- In the **political arena** Syria, as in the past, exerted Arab and international pressures to bring about an end to the Lebanese crisis and the fighting against the Christians. At the center were **France** and the **Tripartite Arab Committee**, which included the leaders of **Saudi Arabia, Morocco and Algeria**. The Tripartite Committee, which resulted from the Arab summit meeting in Casablanca in March 1989, drew up a document containing proposals for political reforms in Lebanon (the **National Reconciliation Accord**) to end the civil war and Lebanese crisis. A draft of the proposals was brought for debate before 62 members of the Lebanese parliament at a meeting held in Taif in Saudi Arabia. It should be noted that at that time the Lebanese parliament was **an anachronistic, non-representative body** whose 99 members had been elected in 1972 **before the outbreak of the civil war** and which had ceased functioning when the Lebanese government collapsed during the war.
- **Saudi Arabia** played a key role in formulating the Taif Agreement and in convincing the members of Lebanon’s parliament to support it. However, it was **Syria, the most important force in Lebanon**, which influenced the agreement’s final wording. Toward the end of the deliberations in Taif, **Saud al-Faisal**, the Saudi Foreign Minister, left for Damascus for **consultations with the Syrians**, who made certain that Syria’s **strategic interests** in Lebanon would not be

harmed and that the Taif Agreement would assure Syria's position as the most important force in Lebanon.

■ On October 22, 1989, after the promise had been made that Syria would withdraw its forces from Lebanon as a result of the agreement, the Taif Agreement (National Reconciliation Accord) was ratified by 58 of the 62 parliamentary representatives present during a ceremonial meeting in Taif, Saudi Arabia. **The Agreement received the blessings of the Arab world and the United States** and became the **cornerstone** for internal Lebanese affairs and for the country's relations with Syria. It is not surprising that UN Security Council Resolution 1559 of September 2004 is largely based on it and that Syria's supporters in Lebanon (including Hezbollah) have difficulty opposing it.

■ While Michel Aoun **stubbornly refused** to accept the legitimacy of the Taif Agreement, the Syrians made good use of it first to **suppress Aoun and his anti-Syrian followers** and then to **impose the "Syrian order" on Lebanon**.

■ In accordance with the Taif Agreement, on November 24, 1989 a new president was elected: **Elias Harawi**, who was a Syrian protégé with no power base of his own. He appointed a **pro-Syrian government** headed by Salim al-Huss. The new government, founded on Syrian bayonets and enjoying the legitimization provided by the Taif Agreement, was now recognized by the Arab world and the international community. **Michel Aoun and his supporters found themselves isolated**, and thus the ground was prepared for the next step, forcing the surrender of the anti-Syrian forces and the **successful end of the process of the Syrian takeover of Lebanon, which had begun in 1976**.

■ On **October 13, 1990**, a key date in the history of Syrian intervention in Lebanon, the Syrian army and air force, along with a symbolic Lebanese force commanded by Emile Lahoud, attacked the Lebanese army loyal to Michel Aoun at Souk al-Gharb, southeast of Beirut. Aoun's forces collapsed in a matter of hours. The weak Christian camp, divided and isolated, surrendered to the superior Syrian forces. The Christian enclave which had survived since the outbreak of the civil war was captured without any significant resistance. The anti-Syrian Christian

leaders were either killed, arrested or exiled.¹⁴ A **new era**, that of the **Taif régime**, began in Lebanon.

Stage 6: The Taif Régime: Turning Lebanon into a Syrian protectorate and strategic asset (1989-2005)

- With the conquest of the Christian enclave and the suppression of the anti-Syrian opposition, those who would preserve Lebanon's sovereignty and independence suffered a hard blow from which they did not recover until the death of Hafez Assad. The Taif Agreement enabled Syria to control the **Lebanese political and security apparatuses (the presidency, the government, the parliament, the Lebanese army and the security services)** and to **put politicians loyal to itself into power, including pro-Syrian presidents (first Elias Harawi and then Emile Lahoud)**.

- Based on the Taif Agreement, according to which there would be “**preferential relations**” between Syria and Lebanon, and through the use of a Lebanese puppet government and proxies, **the Syrians forced Lebanon into two agreements which legitimized Lebanon's state as a Syrian satellite:**
 - **The Brotherhood, Cooperation, and Coordination Treaty between the Lebanese Republic and the Syrian Arab Republic (May 1991).**

 - **The Lebanon-Syria Defense and Security Agreement (July 1991).**

- During the Taif régime the Syrians did not have to wage another ongoing struggle to establish control and they were able to use the control they already had to derive political, security and economic benefits. It should be stressed that that control was not based exclusively on the presence of military forces and security services but also on Syria's **deep penetration of the Lebanese political, social and economic spheres**. The Lebanese independence to which the Taif Agreement

¹⁴ Most prominent among them were **Samir Ja'ja'**, the leader of the Lebanese Forces, who is still (April 2005) in prison; **Dani Chamoun**, leader of the National Liberals, who was murdered (apparently by Syrian agents); **Michel Aoun** and **Amin Gemayel** fled to France (Amin Gemayel has since returned).

paid lip service existed only on paper. Lebanon became a kind of Syrian county supervised by **General Ghazi Kana'an**,¹⁵ **chief of military intelligence and Brigadier General Rustom Ghazali's successor**. Upper echelon Syrian politicians also followed the events in Lebanon: during Hafez Assad's régime, **'Abd al-Halim Khaddam for a long time held what was know as "the Lebanese portfolio."** **Bashar Assad as well**, before he became president, did his apprenticeship in Lebanon at the end of his father's régime.

- The **traditional opposition** to Syrian control of Lebanon, particularly that of the Maronite Christians, shattered after the Aoun's rebellion. During the Taif régime the leaders of the Christian camp, most importantly the Maronite Patriarch **Butros Sfeir**, did not, for the most part, dare to deviate from Syrian policy. **On the eve of Hafez Assad's death there was no organized opposition in Lebanon capable of taking action**. The former leaders of the Christian camp were either in exile (Michel Aoun, who tried to organize his many supporters from France) or had been sentenced to long prison terms (Samir Ja'ja') or were allowed to return to Lebanon on the promise of keeping a low profile (Amin Gemayel).
- **The Taif Agreement ended both the civil war and the Lebanese crisis** which began in 1975. The Syrians used it to establish a relatively stable internal Lebanese framework based on checks and balances and the fear of a renewed outbreak of civil war. Two outcomes of the agreement were the disbanding of the Christian and Druze militias and **the rehabilitation and strengthening of the pro-Syrian Lebanese government**. In addition, the ruined city of **Beirut** was **rebuilt** by **Rafik Hariri**, who became the symbol of Lebanese rehabilitation.¹⁶ **The Lebanese army was restructured** (today comprising approximately 65,000 soldiers and officers, 11 infantry divisions and a number of special units). **The Lebanese intelligence apparatuses were rehabilitated and reinforced** (under the close supervision of the Syrian intelligence services).

¹⁵ Called by the Lebanese the "High Commissioner."

¹⁶ The rehabilitation was **selective**, focusing on the Sunni-Christian areas, chiefly in Beirut. Shiite areas in Beirut's southern suburbs and other centers, such as south Lebanon and the Beka'a Valley, were outside rehabilitation and rebuilding.

■ However, as mentioned, **Syrian application of the Agreement was selective**, that is, **what the Syrians viewed as inconvenient was ignored or only partially implemented. Three elements are particularly salient:**

- **The Syrian non-implementation of the article dealing with the presence of Syrian forces in Lebanon:** During the past five years, the Syrian military presence has been whittled down and Syrian forces were withdrawn five times, mainly from the area of Beirut and its surroundings, each withdrawal receiving full media coverage. **However, the Taif Agreement article was never completely implemented.** The main part of the Syrian army (20,000 soldiers, a few thousand of whom worked for Syrian intelligence¹⁷) remained deployed in the focal areas in Lebanon until the assassination of Rafik Hariri. Today, 16 years after the signing of the Taif Agreement, in the wake of Lebanese and international pressures the Syrians are finally complying with the article and it would seem that its military presence in Lebanon is at an end.



On the left: A Syrian convoy on its way from Dahr al-Baidar to the Beka'a Valley (March 9, 2005).



On the right: Withdrawal of Syrian vehicles near Dahr al-Baidar traveling in the direction of the Beka'a Valley (March 11, 2005).

¹⁷ Lebanese Minister of Defense 'Abd al-Rahim Murad stated in an interview that there were **14,000** Syrian soldiers in Lebanon. Some of them, he said, would remain in the Beka'a Valley and the others would withdraw to Syrian territory. He refused to answer when asked whether intelligence and security operatives were included in the decision (interview with the BBC, March 6, 2005). In practice, the Syrian army, including its intelligence and security operatives, withdrew from Beirut and Tripoli to the Beka'a Valley, some of them remaining there and some of them continuing on into Syria, a still ongoing process (April 2005).

- **The non-implementation of the article calling for the disbanding of the Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias and the surrendering of their weapons to the Lebanese government:** The militias were supposed to be disbanded within six months after the ratification of the Taif Agreement in accordance with the article giving the Lebanese government authority over all Lebanese lands. While the Syrians **made sure the Christian and Druze militias disarmed and disbanded, they (along with Iran) gave their full support to the continued existence of Hezbollah, an organization with a military-operational infrastructure** (which they took steps to **strengthen**). Hezbollah, a Shiite-oriented terrorist organization, has in effect **remained an armed infrastructure** and has **continued to act against Israel even after the Israeli pullout from Lebanon, in accordance with Security Council Resolution 425**. The Palestinians in the refugee camps (the non-Lebanese militias) also did not surrender their arms, and the Lebanese army (encouraged by Syria) **avoids entering the refugee camps** to confront the Palestinian terrorists.
- A clear breach of the statement which appears in the first article, according to which Lebanon is “**free and independent,**” a country in which **personal and general liberty is respected:** Under the title “Taif Agreement” Lebanon lost its independence and freedom, becoming a Syrian satellite with a repressive Lebanese government. Pro-Syrian Lebanese were appointed to high office, the inner workings of the government (including various ministries and the intelligence and security apparatuses) were completely enslaved to Syrian interests, important decisions concerning Lebanon’s future were made in Damascus and not Beirut, the President, Prime Minister and the armed forces enforced Damascus’ policies, and violence was used to repress those opposing Syria and the pro-Syrian régime.

The latest stage: Cracks in the Taif régime since Bashar Assad inherited the government from his father, and a new era heralded by the ongoing withdrawal of Syrian forces from Lebanon (March – April 2005)

■ During the past few years **dramatic changes** took place in Syria, Lebanon and the entire region leading to changes in the nature of the Syrian order which the Taif Agreement forced on Lebanon. The most important changes were:

- **Loss of fear: since the death of Hafez Assad and the promotion of his son Bashar to the office of president, both Syria and its presidency have been less revered.** Hafez Assad ruled Syria and Lebanon through fear, **using of brutal force to deter his opponents** (usually through the intelligence services and various proxies). Bashar, however, is not a charismatic figure and has neither his father's leadership abilities nor his skill in making decisions. As a result **the fear the Lebanese (and Syrians) had for the ruler in Damascus and his proxies in Lebanon is gradually lessening.** It would seem that the fear is evaporating to a large degree not only among the opponents of the Syrian order in Lebanon but also among Hezbollah and other **Syrian supporters in Lebanon.**

On the right: A mass demonstration of the opposition in Beirut, showing that not only Hezbollah can bring hundreds of thousands into the streets (March 14, 2005).



On the left: An opposition demonstration in Beirut after the Lebanese prime minister, Omar Karami, identified by the public as a Syrian yes man, announced his resignation the first time (February 28, 2005).

- **The withdrawal of the Israeli forces from Lebanon (May 24, 2000) in accordance with Security Council Resolution 425** also led to an **anti-Syrian** awakening, and **without Israeli aid or intervention**. The traditional Christian opposition gained influential allies when the **Druze** (Walid Jumblat and his supporters) and **Sunni Muslims** (Rafik Hariri and his supporters) joined them. **Hezbollah**, which retained its weapons and increased in strength, to a great extent **lost its internal-Lebanese legitimacy**. Within Lebanon, its continuing existence as an armed organization and its anti-Israeli terrorist activities were viewed as an additional gross breach of the Taif Agreement. They were also viewed as not legitimate, especially after the Israeli army, with recognition from the international community, withdrew from Lebanon, which was a bone of contention between Hariri and Hezbollah.

- **The strategic situation in the Middle East created after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, the American invasion of Iraq and the subsequent overthrow of Saddam Hussein marked Syria as one of the countries on American president George W. Bush's Axis of Evil and increased the pressure exerted on it to loosen its hold on Lebanon.** At first, the **United States and France joined forces in a diplomatic effort**, finally expressed on September 2, 2004 in **UN Security Council Resolution 1559**. The resolution firmly endorses Lebanese sovereignty and independence, calls for the **withdrawal of non-Lebanese forces** (i.e., the Syrian army and the Iranian Revolutionary Guards) and the **disbanding of the militias, Lebanese** (i.e., Hezbollah) and **non-Lebanese** (i.e., the Palestinian terrorist organizations in the refugee camps).

- The changes of recent years **eroded Syrian strength in Lebanon, initiating processes which culminated dramatically in the assassination of Rafik Hariri.** That was followed by an unprecedented **popular outcry** which began in Beirut (the “independence intifada”) and in which **anti-Syrian solidarity was shown by**

all the involved parties: Christians, Druze and Sunni Muslims.¹⁸ Tens of thousands of demonstrators poured into the streets of Beirut and appeared before Lebanese and international media, for the **first time daring to openly** demand that the Syrian army leave Lebanon and that the Syrian intelligence apparatus and the Syrian proxies in the government be removed.



A mass pro-Syrian demonstration in Beirut organized by Hezbollah to show the power of Syria's supporters in Lebanon (March 8, 2005).

■ **Conspicuously absent from the anti-Syrian demonstration were Shiite Muslims, the largest Muslim sect in Lebanon,** from which Hezbollah grew. Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah took upon himself to unite and lead Syrian supporters at a massive rally in Beirut on March 8, 2005, whose attendance was estimated at 200,000. **The rally -- and that of the anti-Syrian opposition which took place on March 14 and also brought hundreds of thousands into the streets – are a clear indication of what the depth of internal Lebanese disagreement and the explosive potential of Lebanon's internal politics will be once the Syrians withdraw their forces.** The checks and balances existing in Lebanese society and politics along with the still-fresh memories of the civil war form the heart of the renewed Lebanese crisis during the post-Taif period and demand extraordinary caution from all sides, including Hezbollah.

¹⁸ There are still pro-Syrian elements in the Christian camp and among the Druze and the Sunni Muslims. They proved their strength on March 8, 2005, when they turned out in massive numbers at a Hezbollah-led demonstration in Beirut.



The father (Hafez Assad), the son (Bashar Assad) and the Hezbollah leader (Hassan Nasrallah) at the pro-Syrian mass demonstrations organized by Hezbollah (March 8, 2005).

■ The combination of internal Lebanese and international pressures along with Syria's continued isolation motivated Bashar Assad to deliver a speech to the Syrian parliament in which he committed himself to withdrawing Syrian forces from the Lebanon Valley in accordance with the **Taif Agreement**. In response, the United States and France **made it clear that that was insufficient** and demanded **full Syrian withdrawal** in accordance with Security Council Resolution 1559. In the face of rising international pressure, Bashar Assad has recently fully withdrawn the Syrian army and security and intelligence forces from the regions of Beirut and Tripoli. Some of them were transferred to the Lebanon Valley and some were even sent back into Syria. However, it would seem that the Syrian presence in Lebanon, certainly in its current format, is about to **end**.

■ Nevertheless, it must be stressed that a Syrian withdrawal of forces from Lebanon **it does not signal the surrender of Syrian influence in Lebanon**, where Syrian interests are deep and long-standing. **Beyond** open military force the Syrians have other forms of influence. Important individuals, groups and institutions in Lebanon, centering around Emil Lahoud's government and Hezbollah in its updated form, serve as important agents for Syrian policy, through which the Syrians will try to advance their interests in the new era.

■ However, it would seem that in that new era, Syrian intervention will be far less dominant and obvious. **The Syrians will apparently adopt a more sophisticated**

and complex pattern of influence based on less visibility and control through its proxies behind the scenes. On the other hand, the rival Lebanese parties – Syria’s Lebanese opponents and supporters – may feel themselves stronger and **freer to act.** Therein lies the possibility for undermining the relative stability Lebanon achieved through the Taif Agreement and for putting another Lebanese crisis on the local and international agendas. Those developments in Lebanon will have, in our assessment, consequences for Bashar Assad’s régime.

Appendix

A broken statue of Hafez Assad in the Shiite village of Qana in south Lebanon: symbol of the end of the Taif régime.

- A statue of Hafez Assad at the entrance to Shiite village of Qana in south Lebanon which was vandalized on the night of February 26, 2005, two weeks after Rafik Hariri was assassinated.¹⁹ On the statue's pedestal appear the Lebanese and Syrian flags and the inscription "Under the sponsorship of his Excellency the President of the Lebanese Republic, Lieutenant-General Emil Lahoud, represented by his honor the Lebanese Minister of Information Ghazi al-'Aridhi and in the presence of 'Ednan 'Umran, the Syrian Minister of Information, this monument [in honor] of the late leader Hafez al-Assad was unveiled. A tree was [also] planted in his honor and a street was named after him. Qana **June 13, 2002.**"



- Acts of vandalism to statues and pictures of the Assad family **spread** during March and April 2005 to **other places** in Lebanon. For example:
 - In the **Sunni** village of **Al-Marj** in the Beka'a Valley the corner stone of a building was broken. The building was a cultural, sport and social project named after **Bassel al-Assad**, Hafez Assad's son (three years Bashar's

¹⁹ Agence France Presse (in Arabic), February 27, 2005. Picture: Kuwaiti newspaper Al-Rai Al-Aam, February 27, 2005; the picture appeared in other Arab media.

senior) who was killed in a car accident. According to other accounts unnamed individuals tore up a large poster of Hafez and Bassel which was hanging there (**Al-Sharq Al-Awsat**, March 18, 2005).

- In the Ghosheh neighborhood near Beirut two giant-sized pictures of Hafez and Bashar Assad were torn down while a crowd of dozens of youths applauded (the **French News Agency** reporting from **Rashiyya**, March 17, 2005).
- Near **Al-‘Abda** in the ‘Akar area (north Lebanon) the pictures of Hafez Assad, his sons Bashar and Bassel, and President Lahoud were taken down from a bridge over the main highway to Tripoli (Lebanese daily **Al-Mustaqbal** March 21, 2005).
- In a public park in the village of **Rashayya** plaques commemorating Bassel al-Assad were vandalized. They were painted black and “The Beka’a [Valley] is ours” was inscribed on them (the **French News Agency** reporting from **Rashayya**, March 21, 2005).
- Anonymous individuals burned a giant-sized picture of Hafez Assad and his sons Bashar and Bassel which had been hung on a post at the Jubb Jannin-Ghaza- Kamed al-Louz junction in the western Beka’a Valley (Lebanese daily **Al-Safir**, March 29, 2005).