

The United States and Lebanon: A Meddlesome History

By Stephen Zunes | April 26, 2006

While the withdrawal of Syrian forces from Lebanon one year ago was certainly a positive development, claims by the Bush administration and its supporters that the United States deserves credit are badly misplaced. On the first anniversary of the ousting of Syrian forces by a popular nonviolent movement, it is important to recognize that American calls in recent years for greater Lebanese freedom and sovereignty from Syrian domination have been viewed by most Lebanese as crass opportunism. Indeed, few Americans are aware that for decades the United States pursued policies which seriously undermined Lebanon's freedom and sovereignty.

Due to such misunderstanding, a brief review of the history of the U.S. role in Lebanon is in order:

The First U.S. Incursion

In 1926, France carved Lebanon out of Syria—which it had seized from the Ottoman Turks at the end of World War I—for the very purpose of creating a pro-Western enclave in the eastern Mediterranean. In 1943, France granted the country independence, leaving behind a unique governing system where the most powerful position of president would always go to a Maronite Christian and the second most powerful position, that of prime minister, would always go to a Sunni Muslim. The post of National Assembly speaker would go to a Shiite Muslim and on down through the country's smaller ethnic communities such as Druzes, Orthodox Christians, and others. Seats in the National Assembly would be apportioned based upon religious affiliation according to a 1932 French census. This was designed to keep Lebanon under the domination of the Maronite Christians, the country's largest single religious group, who were far more pro-Western and less prone to support radical Arab nationalists than most Lebanese and other Arabs. Indeed, Lebanon's very existence

as a separate state was predicated on Maronite domination.

One part of maintaining this balance of power was limiting the Lebanese president to one six-year term. In 1958, a crisis was sparked by efforts to push through constitutional changes that would allow the pro-Western president Camille Chamoun to seek re-election. Though Chamoun backed down, Arab nationalist forces threatened to topple the archaic neocolonial electoral system imposed by the French. The United States responded by sending Marines briefly into Lebanon to suppress the incipient rebellion.

Palestinian Refugees and the Outbreak of Civil War

Internal cleavages in Lebanon were compounded by the presence of hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees who had been driven from their homes during Israel's war of independence in 1948 and were denied Lebanese citizenship or any representation in the political system. The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO)—which essentially served as the Palestinians' government-in-exile but was denied recognition by the United States—had



taken advantage of the relatively weak central government in Beirut to establish Lebanon as its principal military, administrative, and diplomatic base of operations after being forced out of the Kingdom of Jordan by the Hashemite monarchy in that country's 1970-71 civil war.

Despite these tensions, the Republic of Lebanon—without a monarch or military dictator—enjoyed more political freedom than any other Arab country. The Lebanese capital of Beirut became a popular destination for American and European tourists and investors and became known as “the Paris of the Orient.”

At the same time, the confessional representation system effectively kept elites from various Lebanese clans in control of the country and, while relatively prosperous compared to other non-oil producing states in the region, the government's laissez-faire economic policies exacerbated the huge gap between the country's rich and poor. By the 1970s, as a result of demographic changes, the Maronites had long since lost their status as the largest religious community while Shiite Muslims—who were allocated the least political power of the three major religious communities—had become the largest as well as the poorest.

Tensions grew as rival Lebanese factions began forming heavily-armed militias. A full-scale civil war broke out in April 1975 between Maronite Christians and other supporters of the status quo and their predominantly Muslim opponents.

The “Muslim” side of the conflict during its first phase was actually a largely secular coalition known as the Lebanese National Movement (LNM) which, while consisting primarily of Sunnis and Druzes, also included leftists and nationalists from virtually all of Lebanon's religious and ethnic

communities. The LNM in many respects spearheaded an attempt to have Lebanon join the ranks of the other left-leaning Arab nationalist governments which had come to power over the previous 25 years.

Seeking to block the establishment of such a government that would likely enact policies less sympathetic with the West, the United States—along with the French and Israelis—clandestinely supported the Maronites and their Phalangist militia, the largest armed group among the Maronites and their allies. The far right-wing Phalangist Party was founded by Pierre Gemayel during the 1930s, who modeled his party after the fascist movements then on the ascendancy in Europe.

By the end of 1975, armed units of the PLO—based in Palestinian refugee camps throughout the western part of Lebanon—joined forces with the LNM. There were widespread killings of civilians by both sides, particularly by the Phalangists, and the cosmopolitan city of Beirut became a war zone. By the spring of 1976, the Phalangists and other rightist forces were on the defensive. At that point, some pro-Western elements of the Lebanese government—with the endorsement of the Arab League and the quiet support of the United States—invited Syrian forces into the country to block the LNM's incipient victory, eventually pushing back PLO and LNM forces out of the central, northern, and eastern parts of Lebanon.

The 1982 Israeli Invasion

Beginning in the early 1970s, as the PLO expanded its presence in Lebanon, the Israelis engaged in frequent air strikes against both military and civilian targets, ostensibly in retaliation for terrorist attacks against Israelis by exiled Palestinian groups based in that country. Despite the high civilian death toll

and damage to Lebanon's economy, particularly in the largely Shiite southern part of the country, the United States defended Israeli actions. Meanwhile, with the collapse of the central government and the disintegration of the country's armed forces into various armed factions with the outbreak of the civil war, fighters from the various PLO factions—particularly those of the PLO's Palestine Liberation Army and guerrillas of the dominant Fatah movement—came to control much of southern Lebanon.

In March 1978, in retaliation for an amphibious Palestinian terrorist attack that killed dozens of Israeli civilians on a coastal highway north of Tel Aviv, Israel launched a major incursion into southern Lebanon, resulting in large-scale devastation and deaths of hundreds of Palestinian and Lebanese civilians. The United States voted with the rest of the UN Security Council in support of Security Council Resolution 425, which called upon Israel to cease all military action and withdraw immediately. U.S. President Jimmy Carter threatened to suspend some U.S. aid if Israel did not pull back its forces, resulting in a partial withdrawal to what Israel later referred to as a "security zone," a 12- to 20-mile strip of Lebanese territory along Israel's northern border. A United Nations peacekeeping force (UNIFIL) was brought into Lebanon to separate the two sides. Within the Israeli-occupied territory, the Israelis allied with renegade Lebanese General Sa'ad Haddad to form the South Lebanese Army (SLA), which effectively became a foreign regiment of the Israeli armed forces. Nine subsequent UN Security Council resolutions over the next several years reiterated the demand that Israel withdraw completely and unconditionally from Lebanese territory, but the United States blocked the UN Security Council from enforcing them.

Throughout the late 1970s and into the early 1980s, Israel and the SLA periodically bombed and shelled Palestinian military positions as well as civilian areas in southern Lebanon. Palestinian militia would then lob shells into northern Israel, resulting in scores of civilian casualties. Israel, with its vastly superior firepower, tended to inflict a lot more damage. In June 1981, following a particularly heavy series of Israeli air strikes in a crowded Beirut neighborhood that resulted in hundreds of civilian casualties, an envoy from U.S. President Ronald Reagan successfully brokered a cease-fire.

Despite the fact that the PLO largely honored this cease-fire during the subsequent year, right-wing Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin ordered a full-scale invasion of Lebanon in early June 1982 under the leadership of his Defense Minister General Ariel Sharon. Within weeks, Israel occupied nearly half the country and began laying siege to Beirut. Meanwhile, Israel bombed Syrian positions in eastern Lebanon and shot down dozens of Syrian military aircraft. The United States vetoed a series of UN Security Council resolutions demanding an Israeli withdrawal; subsequent resolutions simply calling for a cease-fire were also blocked from passage by U.S. vetoes.

In less than two months, heavy Israeli bombardment of residential areas of Beirut and other cities killed as many as 12,000 Lebanese and Palestinian citizens, the overwhelming majority of whom were civilians. Despite the level of carnage and Israel's violations of international law, Lebanese sovereignty, and U.S. law which prohibits the use of its weapons for non-defensive purposes, the Reagan administration and Congressional leaders of both parties vigorously defended the Israeli invasion and increased military support for the rightist Israeli government.

U.S. Forces Return to Lebanon

In late August 1982, the United States brokered an agreement whereby the PLO would evacuate its fighters and political offices from Beirut to Tunis, capital of the North African country of Tunisia, 1500 miles to the west. In return, Israel pledged not to overrun the city. The agreement included the deployment of a U.S.-led peacekeeping force to oversee the evacuation of Palestinian fighters.

Regarding the safety of the now-disarmed Palestinian refugee population, the agreement stated that, along with the government of Lebanon, the “United States will provide appropriate guarantees of safety.” Of particular concern to Palestinian civilians was the Phalangist militia, which had engaged in a series of attacks against Palestinian civilians during the first phase of the civil war, the most infamous being the 1976 massacre of as many as 2,000 Palestinians at the Tal al-Zaatar refugee camp in East Beirut.

Three days following the signing of the August 20 agreement, a rump Lebanese national assembly—under the gaze of Israeli artillery in nearby hills—met to choose a new president. Despite the Phalangist movement’s fascist leanings and its history of atrocities, Bachir Gemayel—the Phalangist militia leader and younger son of the movement’s founder—was chosen as president.

Within two weeks, U.S. forces withdrew from Lebanon, far earlier than anticipated. Three days later, President-elect Gemayel was assassinated in a bombing of Phalangist headquarters, which many have since blamed on Syrian intelligence operatives. Israel used the assassination as an excuse to break its pledge by ordering its armed forces to occupy Beirut. Though this was the first time since World War II that the capital of an independent state had been conquered by a foreign army, the Reagan

administration issued only a mild rebuke. The Israelis then sent Phalangist militiamen into Sabra and Shatila, two Palestinian refugee camps on the southern outskirts of the city. There, the Phalangists massacred over 1,000 civilians under the watch of Israeli occupation forces, who did nothing to stop the ongoing atrocity and even launched flares into the camps so to allow the Phalangists to continue their assaults into the night.

In Israel, the growing popular opposition to their right-wing government’s invasion and occupation of Lebanon greatly intensified when Israeli complicity in the massacres became apparent, prompting massive demonstrations calling for a withdrawal of Israeli forces and accountability for Israelis responsible. (An independent Israeli commission, in a February 1983 report, singled out General Sharon for responsibility and his political career at that point was thought to be over. However, he later served as Israeli prime minister from 2001 until his debilitating stroke early this year with the strong support and praise by both President George W. Bush and Congressional leaders of both parties.)

Also controversial was the premature U.S. withdrawal which left the defenseless Palestinian refugee camps vulnerable to the Israeli-backed Phalangist massacre. Secretary of State George Schultz acknowledged to colleagues, “The brutal fact is we are partially responsible.” Deputy National Security Adviser Robert C. McFarlane went as far as to privately claim that the early departure of U.S. forces was “criminally irresponsible.”

Joined by smaller contingents of French and Italian forces, U.S. troops returned to Beirut by the end of September and Israeli forces withdrew to positions just south of the Lebanese capital. Bachir

Gemayel's older brother Amin, the political leader of the Phalangists, assumed power as president and was soon faced with a popular uprising against his far right-wing government. While France saw its military presence as part of "a mission of maintaining peace and protecting the civil population," the United States insisted that its troops were there to "provide an interposition force" and to provide the military presence "requested by the Lebanese Government to assist it and the Lebanese Armed Forces."

By that fall, it became apparent that the United States hoped to use its military presence to pressure the Lebanese government to negotiate a permanent peace agreement with Israel in return for an Israeli withdrawal and to force the withdrawal of Syrian forces in the eastern part of the country as well as the remnants of armed Palestinian groups in the northwest. The Reagan administration even pledged that U.S. forces would remain until the Lebanese army had reconstituted itself and foreign forces withdrew.

Lingering resentment at the U.S. support for the devastating Israeli invasion that summer compounded by anger at the increased military role of U.S. forces in the country resulted in a terrorist backlash: In April 1983, suicide bombers struck the U.S. Embassy in Beirut, killing 63 people.

Under heavy U.S. pressure and with Israeli forces still occupying much of the central and southern parts of the country, the Phalangist-led Lebanese government signed a peace treaty with Israel the following month. The agreement was never ratified, however, due to popular opposition and was formally canceled soon thereafter.

By the end of the summer of 1983, as popular resistance to the country's Phalangist leadership

installed under Israeli guns gained ground, U.S. forces began intervening more directly in support of the rightist government, exchanging fire with Shiite rebels in suburban Beirut slums and bombing and shelling Druze villages supportive of the Socialist-led resistance in the Shouf Mountains. The American air strikes and the utilization of big guns from the battleship *New Jersey* resulted in large-scale civilian casualties. Despite concerns by peace and human rights groups in the United States, the Democratic-controlled House of Representatives joined with the Republican-controlled Senate to authorize the continued presence of U.S. forces in Lebanon for an additional 18 months.

Fighting between U.S. forces and the Lebanese resistance continued into the fall, resulting in scores of American and hundreds of Lebanese casualties. In October, a suicide bomber attacked a Marine barracks near the Beirut Airport, killing 241 servicemen.

Fighting escalated still further in the winter months, with U.S. warplanes bombing Syrian positions in eastern Lebanon. Using rhetoric similar to that now being used to justify the ongoing U.S. war in Iraq, administration officials insisted in the face of growing anti-war sentiment in the United States that a withdrawal of American forces from Lebanon would threaten the peace and stability of the entire region and would be seen as victory for terrorists.

By early 1984, however, as a result of growing opposition within the United States to a counter-insurgency war which appeared to be creating more terrorism and instability than it was suppressing, the United States finally withdrew its forces from Lebanon.

The damage to America's reputation had been done, however. As a result of U.S. support for the Israeli invasion and its subsequent intervention on behalf of what was widely seen as an illegitimate right-wing minority government, Lebanon had evolved from being perhaps the most pro-American country in the Arab world to, by the mid-1980s, perhaps the most anti-American country in the Arab world.

Ongoing Anti-American Terrorism

The rebuilt U.S. embassy was blown up again in September 1984, killing 54 people. What had once been one of the safest Middle Eastern countries in which Americans could travel became the most dangerous. Despite almost all American residents of Lebanon departing the country, several fell victim to assassinations and nearly a dozen others were kidnapped and held hostage. Reagan administration efforts to buy Iranian influence to pressure the Lebanese hostage-takers to release their American captives led to the arms-for-hostages deals which later came to light during the Iran-Contra scandal.

Despite the enormous attention given to the American hostages, and much to the consternation of human rights groups, the U.S. government expressed little concern regarding the fate of thousands of young Lebanese and Palestinian men seized by Israeli occupation forces and sent to prisons in Israel and Israeli-occupied southern Lebanon. Hundreds were held without charge for more than 15 years and many later reported they had been routinely tortured.

Another U.S. response to Lebanese terrorism was counter-terrorism, including the formation of a CIA-backed Lebanese intelligence unit designed to target suspected Shiite radicals. In March of 1985,

in an unsuccessful effort to assassinate the anti-American Sheikh Mohammed Hussein Fadlallah, this U.S.-trained and -funded hit squad planted a bomb in a working class Beirut neighborhood which killed 80 civilians.

In June of 1985, Lebanese hijackers—including a man whose family had been killed by shells launched from the battleship *New Jersey*—seized a TWA airliner and forced it to Beirut, holding the passengers and crew hostage on the airport tarmac for 17 days. A U.S. Navy officer on board was executed.

In an interview with the *New York Times*, former President Jimmy Carter observed, in regard to Lebanon, “We bombed and shelled and unmercifully killed totally innocent villagers, women and children and farmers and housewives, in those villages around Beirut. As a result, we have become a kind of Satan in the minds of those who are deeply resentful. That is what precipitated the taking of hostages and that is what has precipitated some terrorist attacks.”

The Rise of Hizbullah

By the summer of 1985, guerrilla warfare by Lebanese Communists, the Lebanese Shiite Amal militia, some Palestinian factions, and other guerrilla movements forced the Israelis to withdraw their occupation forces from central Lebanon back into the far southern part of the country originally seized in 1978. Meanwhile, Syrian forces—which still controlled most of the eastern part of the country—were turning their guns against Maronite strongholds in the east and in mountain regions of the north, shelling a number of Christian towns and villages.

The Lebanese terrorists who had targeted Americans included both Sunni and Shiite

extremists. Many of the latter coalesced into the Hizbullah (Party of God), developed with the assistance of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard. Much the movement's support was drawn from the hundreds of thousands of Shiites who, following years of Israeli attacks, were forced from southern Lebanon into the shanty towns on the southern outskirts of Beirut. In the wake of the forced departure of the PLO and the destruction of the LNM by successive interventions from Syria, Israel, and the United States, Hizbullah and older Shiite militias like Amal rose to fill the vacuum.

In the parts of southern Lebanon north of the Israeli-occupied sector, Hizbullah came to exercise almost full control and began an armed struggle against the remaining Israeli occupation forces. Israel, with American military, financial, and diplomatic support, continued its defiance of the UN Security Council by maintaining its occupation of the southernmost strip of Lebanon, now claiming it was necessary to protect Israelis from the Hizbullah. Yet this threat from Hizbullah was very much an outgrowth of U.S. and Israeli policy: the group did not even exist until a full four years after Israel began its occupation of southern Lebanon.

Through the remainder of the 1980s, Lebanon remained under the control of the Syrian army, the Israeli army, and a myriad of Lebanese militias. With Lebanon's central government, which had still not re-formed a standing army, unable to challenge the Israeli occupation, the Hizbullah—despite its radical brand of Shiite Islamic ideology—was thereby able to take the lead in the nationalist resistance to the Israeli occupation.

The End of the Civil War

In 1989, an agreement was signed in the Saudi Arabian city of Ta'if which would end the civil war

by disarming the militias and revising the French-imposed Constitutional structure to lessen Maronite dominance. The settlement was initially blocked by General Michel Aoun, who had been serving as interim prime minister since September 1988 of one of two rival Lebanese governments which had been set up at the end of President Gemayel's term. In March 1989, he had declared a "war of liberation" against the Syrian presence in his country. Aoun was supported by Iraq, one of the few Arab governments to speak out against the ongoing Syrian military presence in Lebanon. (When Iraq invaded Kuwait in August 1990, Saddam Hussein declared that Iraqi forces would not leave that occupied emirate unless Syria also withdrew its forces from Lebanon.)

In October of 1990, Syrian forces in Beirut led an attack on Aoun's stronghold, ousting the general and finally ending Lebanon's 15-year civil war. The senior Bush administration backed the Syrian attack against Saddam's most regionally important ally, with State Department officials acknowledging that the assault and resulting Syrian domination of subsequent Lebanese governments would not have been possible without the U.S. government's support. (Ironically, despite his earlier alliance with Saddam Hussein and his role in a number of notorious massacres, General Aoun has been widely feted and praised by both Republicans and Democrats on Capitol Hill as a hero for his anti-Syrian stance.)

During the early 1990s, a revived central Lebanese government and its Syrian backers disarmed most of the militias that had once carved up much of the country. Due to the ongoing Israeli occupation in the south, however, the Israeli-backed SLA remained intact, as did Hizbullah, whose low-level guerrilla warfare against Israeli occupation forces had strengthened its popular support. Despite

Lebanese participation in the U.S.-organized Madrid peace conference in 1991, it became apparent that an Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon was not a high priority for the United States.

With the U.S. veto power preventing the United Nations from enforcing its resolutions calling for an Israeli withdrawal, the UN was largely powerless to deal with the situation. Even on the ground, the UN's role was limited: Israel had long refused to allow United Nations peacekeeping forces, initially dispatched to Lebanon in 1978, to take up positions on the Lebanese side of the Israeli-Lebanese border as the Security Council demanded, so they were forced to patrol a "no man's land" just north of the Israeli-occupied zone between Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) and the SLA on one side and Hizbullah on the other side. Caught in the cross-fire, scores of UN soldiers—with only side-arms at their disposal—were killed, primarily by the SLA.

Hizbullah and the Balance of Power

Through most of the 1990s, Hizbullah periodically fired shells into northern Israel, killing and injuring a number of civilians. Hizbullah claimed it was in retaliation for Israeli attacks against civilian areas in southern Lebanon which had taken a far greater number of civilian lives and pledged to cease such shelling once Israel ended its occupation.

Meanwhile, the United States condemned Hizbullah not just for its occasional attacks inside Israel but also for its armed resistance against Israeli soldiers within Lebanon, despite the fact that international law recognizes the right of armed resistance against foreign occupation forces. The United States was apparently hoping that enough Israeli pressure against Lebanon would force the Lebanese to ratify a separate peace treaty with Israel and thereby isolate the Syrians. Similarly, the Syrians saw an advantage of allowing Hizbullah to fight

Israel in Lebanon as a means to pressure Israel to withdraw from the Golan region of Syria, which had been seized by the Israelis in the 1967 war and had been under Israeli military occupation ever since.

In an effort to discredit Hizbullah's efforts to free Lebanon from foreign military occupation, U.S. officials began to portray the populist Shiite movement as simply a proxy of the Syrians. In reality, Syria had originally backed Amal, a more moderate Shiite movement which had previously clashed with Hizbullah. As Hizbullah, despite its fundamentalist ideology, gained in popularity among the Lebanese as a result of leading the resistance against the Israeli occupation, Syria increased its support as well, though more through allowing them freedom of action than through substantial military or financial support.

Throughout this period, much of the ordinance and delivery systems used by the Israeli forces against Hizbullah and civilian targets in Lebanon were from the United States, part of the more than two billion dollars of taxpayer-funded military assistance sent annually to the Israeli government. Successive U.S. administrations rejected demands by human rights groups that such military aid be made conditional on an end to Israeli attacks on civilian areas.

The United States repeatedly defended the Israeli assaults, vetoing UN Security Council resolutions condemning the violence as well as questioning the credibility of human rights groups and UN agencies that exposed the extent of the humanitarian tragedy. To cite one notable case from 1996, the Israelis launched a mortar attack against a UN compound near the Lebanese village of Qana that was sheltering refugees from nearby villages which had been under Israeli assault for several days,

killing more than 100 civilians. Reports by the United Nations, Amnesty International, and other investigators all indicated that the bombardment was probably intentional. However, despite the failure of the Clinton administration to provide any evidence to challenge these findings, the United States insisted that it was an accident. Some reports have indicated that the U.S. decision to veto the UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali's re-election the following year was related to his refusal to suppress or tone down the UN's findings on the Israeli assault on Qana.

By the late 1990s, increasing casualties among Israeli soldiers in occupied Lebanon led to growing dissent within Israel. In response to public opinion polls showing that the vast majority of Israelis wanted their forces to pull out of Lebanon, Martin Indyk, President Bill Clinton's ambassador to Israel who had also served as his assistant secretary of state for the Middle East, publicly encouraged Israel to keep its occupation forces in Lebanon indefinitely. In other words, the United States was encouraging Israel—against the better judgment of the majority of its citizens—to defy longstanding UN Security Council resolutions that called for Israel's unconditional withdrawal. When veteran White House reporter Helen Thomas asked about his ambassador's comments at a press conference the following day, President Clinton replied, "I believe it is imperative that Israel maintain the security of its northern border and therefore I have believed that the United States should be somewhat deferential under these circumstances." Given the Clinton administration's demands during that period that the United Nations impose strict sanctions against Arab countries like Iraq, Libya, and Sudan for their violations of UN Security Council resolutions, President Clinton's public defense of Israel's ongoing violations of UN

Security Council resolutions reinforced the widespread perceptions in the Middle East and elsewhere of rampant American double standards in its approach to international law.

The Israeli Withdrawal

In May 2000, ongoing attacks by Hizbullah against the IDF and SLA forced the Israelis and their proxy force to make a hasty retreat out of Lebanese territory. In the wake of the failure of those advocating a diplomatic solution to end the Israeli occupation, this perceived military victory by the Hizbullah greatly enhanced the status of the movement among the Shiites and others. Many cite the failure of the United States to allow diplomatic means to succeed in ending the occupation, either through the U.S.-led peace process or through the United Nations system, as a key factor in convincing many Palestinians that the only way to end Israeli occupation of their lands was through armed struggle led by radical Islamists. Indeed, the violent Palestinian uprising against the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip began just four months later.

Since then, except for a few minor incidents, the Israeli-Lebanese border has been quiet. The small number of shelling incidents from the Lebanese side appears to have come from small leftist and Sunni groups, not from Hizbullah. There has been periodic fighting, however, between Hizbullah militia and Israeli occupation forces in the disputed Shebaa Farms area along Lebanon's border with the Israeli-occupied Golan in southwestern Syria.

Though Israel has continued to violate Lebanese air space in violation of UN Security Council resolution 425 and related resolutions—actions which Secretary General Kofi Annan has labeled as "provocative" and "at variance" with what was

required of Israel by these Security Council mandates—a nearly-unanimous 2003 Congressional resolution praised Israel’s “full compliance” with the resolution.

Hizbullah never disarmed its militia as required and neither did the Lebanese government nor the Syrians attempted to force them to do so. However, since Israeli forces were withdrawn and the SLA disbanded in 2000, the numbers of Hizbullah fighters are down to around 1,000. The movement functions today primarily as a political party with elected representatives serving in the Lebanese parliament. A detailed report published in July 2003 by the International Crisis Group, an independent organization with close ties to the U.S. foreign policy establishment, described the Hizbullah of today as “maintaining the rhetoric and armed capability of a militant organization but few of its concrete manifestations.” Despite the fact that Hizbullah had not been implicated in any terrorist attacks for more than a decade, the Bush administration’s insistence that they should be treated as a “terrorist group” rather than a political party was therefore greeted with widespread skepticism in Europe and elsewhere.

A Hizbullah-sponsored rally in Beirut on March 8 of last year in opposition to Western pressure against the Syrian and Lebanese governments forced Bush administration officials to acknowledge that they are indeed a powerful force in Lebanese politics which could not be simply dismissed as a band of terrorists. In response, despite reports from the State Department and Congressional Research Service which confirmed the absence of any terrorist attacks by Hizbullah over the past dozen years, the U.S. House of Representatives six days later passed a resolution by an overwhelming 380-3 margin condemning “the

continuous terrorist attacks perpetrated by Hezbollah.”

In Lebanese parliamentary elections that May, a slate led by Hezbollah won 80% of the vote in southern Lebanon and ended up with approximately 25 seats in the 128-member national assembly.

The Syria Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act

In a 2003 bill signed by President Bush and passed with only eight dissenting votes in both houses of Congress, the United States strengthened sanctions against Syria. The legislation cited, as one of its key grievances against Damascus, the ongoing Syrian violation of UN Security Council resolution 520, passed in September of 1982, which called for “strict respect of the sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity, and political independence of Lebanon under the sole and exclusive authority of the Government of Lebanon through the Lebanese Army throughout Lebanon.” A reading of the full text on the UN resolution, however, reveals that it was primarily directed not toward Syria but at Israel, which had launched a major invasion of Lebanon three months earlier and at that point held nearly half of the country, including the capital of Beirut, under its military occupation. Indeed, while one could certainly make the case that this resolution also applied to Syria, Israel was the only outside power mentioned by name in the resolution.

It is interesting to note that none of the supporters of the Syrian Accountability Act had ever called upon Israel to abide by UN Security Council resolution 520, much less called for sanctions against Israel in order to enforce it. Indeed, virtually all of the backers of this resolution who were then in

office voted in support of unconditional military and economic aid to the Israeli government during this period when Israel was in violation of this very same resolution for which they later voted to impose sanctions on Syria for violating. Annual U.S. aid to Israel went from \$1.7 billion at the time Israel began its occupation of southern Lebanon in 1978 to \$4.1 billion in 2000, the final year of Israel's 22-year occupation, effectively rewarding Israel for its violation of Lebanese sovereignty and international law.

The Syrian Accountability Act and Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act did not give Syria any incentive to withdraw from Lebanon since the bill required that sanctions be maintained even if Syria completely pulled out of Lebanon due to other policy differences. The bill also imposed sanctions on Syria until the Syrian government agreed to a series of additional demands which most international observers found unreasonable, such as the insistence that Syria unilaterally disarm itself of certain weapons and delivery systems that hostile neighbors such as Israel and Turkey were allowed to maintain.

The Final Chapter

In September 2004—nine months after the sanctions bill against Syria was signed into law—the United States and France pushed resolution 1559 through the UN Security Council, which reiterated the call for all remaining foreign forces to withdraw from Lebanon. Syria's violations of these two resolutions were frequently cited by President Bush, the mainstream media, and Congressional leaders of both parties to highlight Syria's status as an international outlaw. However, given the U.S. tolerance of the Israeli government's violations of UNSC resolution 520, 425, and eight other resolutions during Israel's 22-year occupation of southern Lebanon

calling for Israel's withdrawal—as well as the U.S. veto of several other resolutions challenging Israel's occupation of and attacks against Lebanon—it again raised questions regarding the sincerity of the United States' commitment to the Lebanese people's right of self-determination.

Popular Lebanese anger at the continued Syrian presence in their country and the widespread belief that Syrian intelligence operatives were responsible for the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri in February 2005 led to a series of massive nonviolent protests in Beirut—nicknamed the “Cedar Revolution”—which compelled Syrian forces to finally leave Lebanon at the end of April. Elections in June led to a victory by an anti-Syrian coalition and the overbearing influence on the Lebanese government long wielded by Syrian intelligence has waned considerably.

Though the Bush administration expressed its enthusiastic support for last year's popular anti-Syrian uprising, efforts by the United States to portray itself as a champion of Lebanese freedom and sovereignty are disingenuous in the extreme. For nearly a half century, the United States—like the French, the Syrians, the Palestinians, and the Israelis—has used Lebanon to advance its own perceived strategic interests largely at the detriment of the Lebanese people themselves.

As a result, it is unlikely that the widespread anti-American sentiment in Lebanon and elsewhere in the Arab world will change as long as U.S. demands that principles of self-determination, human rights, and international law be respected only when the violator of these principles is not allied with the United States.

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