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Where is
“The Truth”?

April 13th 2005 will mark the 30th anniversary of the start of Lebanon's 15 year civil war. With memories of the conflict years still fresh, many Lebanese still grapple with fears, and for some, the ongoing political turmoil which has engulfed the country since February remind them of the pre-war tensions the country witnessed. They try in vain to find answers to questions that haunt them. Some contemplate emigrating to escape the memories, as well as the animosity they view as persisting among the Lebanese.

The Sparks Which Triggered the Conflict

The First Event:

On the morning of Wednesday February 27 1975, a demonstration of fishermen, workers and leftwing political parties was held in Sidon to protest the permit granted to the Protein Company to fish on the Sidon seashore, which threatened the fishermen's livelihood. Sidon MP Nazih Bizri and former MP Maarouf Saad led the protest. The demonstrators began to shout slogans against the government in front of the municipality which was surrounded by a heavy contingent of armed forces. The demonstration resulted in clashes and shooting, which led to one casualty and several injured, including Saad. Later a dynamite stick was thrown at a passing military patrol, killing one soldier and wounding others. From there on, acts of violence multiplied, especially after Saad's death on March 6, 1975.

The Second Event:

At 11 a.m. on April 13 1975, a speeding Volkswagen with an armed Palestinian inside drove past the opening of a church in Pierre Jemayel Street. An armed man from the crowd shot at him and the wounded Palestinian had to be sent to hospital.

At 1 p.m., a group of armed Palestinians in a Fiat followed by a bus transporting 30 Palestinian civilians back to Tel Al Zaatar from a celebration held in the memory of Al Khalsa martyrs exchanged gunfire with a group of armed men. The clash led to the death of 21 Palestinian and Lebanese. Until this day, the identity of the assailants remains unknown.

However both Saad's death and the "Aain Al Rimmaneh bus" incident were but mere sparks which triggered the outbreak of the war. The real underlying causes of it are to be found within the Lebanese society.

The Real Reasons

The establishment of Lebanon as a country in 1920 (Decision No. 299 dated August 3, 1920) by expanding Mount Lebanon, which is dominated by Christians, to include the 4 Cazas of Hasbayya, Rachaya, Bekaa and Baalbeck, which were populated in majority by Muslims, carried the seeds of conflict in it. The decision was based on sectarian considerations, which later caused wars and occupations during the rule of the Maaniyeen, the Shehabists, and during the Qaim Maqamiyatain and the Mutasarafiyyah systems.

The system of sects that was used in building the state under the French mandate was reinforced after the country gained its independence. Consecutive governments since then have ensured the strengthening of sectarianism through everyday practices, as well as through the constitution elaborated and the laws passed, under the slogan of Lebanon's independence and sovereignty. Thus every Lebanese citizen was forced to follow his sect of origin or choice, in order to obtain his civil rights.

The Lebanese population was divided into 18 sects: Maronites, Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholics, Armenian Gregorian Orthodox, Armenian Catholics, Syriac Catholics, Syriac Orthodox, Assyrian Orthodox, Kaldanians, Latins, Evangelical, Coptic Orthodox, Sunni, Shiites, Druze, Alawites, Ismaalites, and Jews.

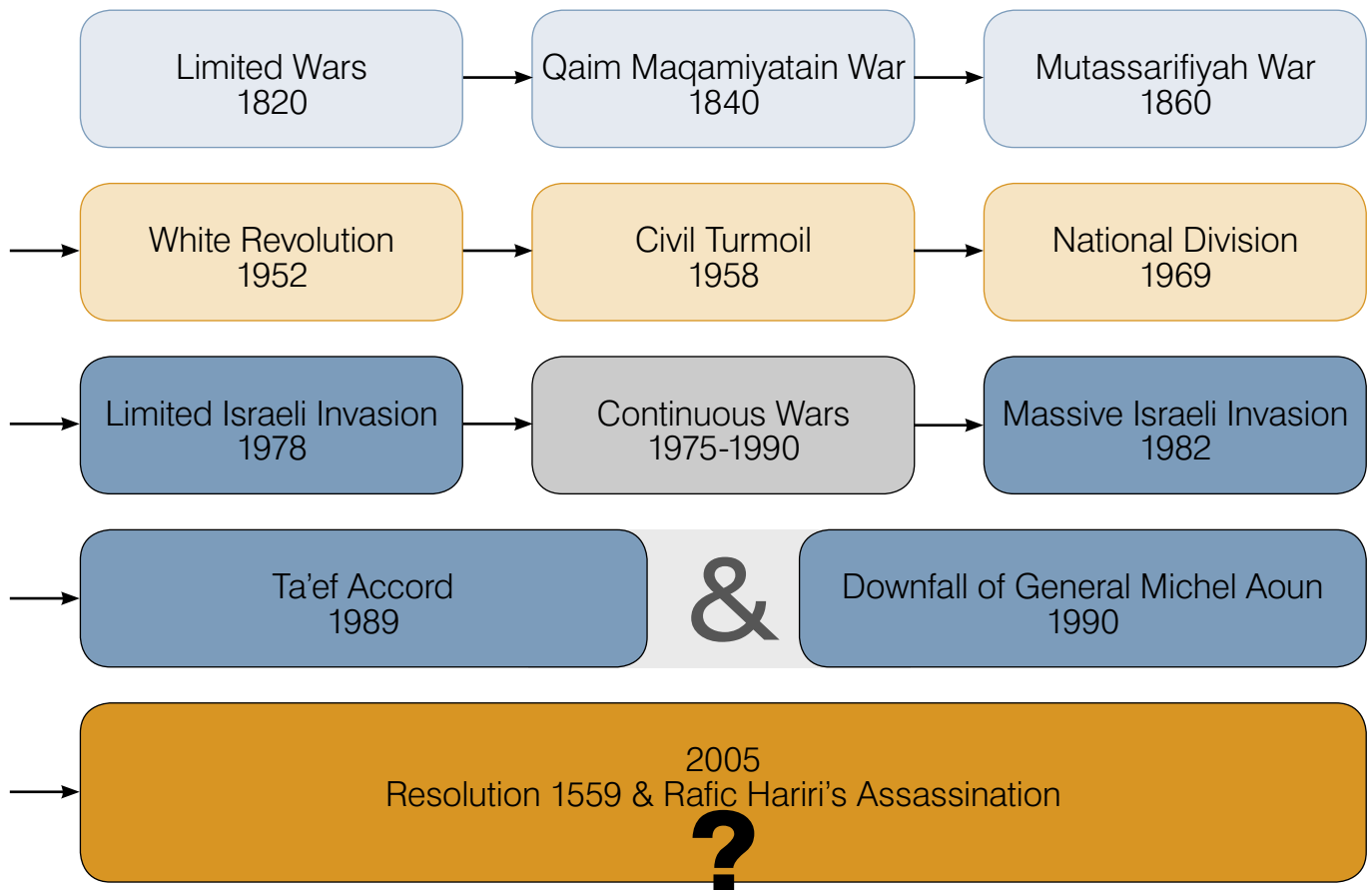
The National Pact, which the independence was based upon, is a gentleman's agreement between the Christians and the Muslims. It sets the main principles for the cooperation between the two factions: sovereignty and independence from all countries, acknowledging the Arab heritage of Lebanon while taking into consideration the Christian sentiments and respecting each sect. These sectarian divisions formed the basis for the 1958 conflict, spurred by regional events in which

The Lebanese Wars: Relics of the Past?

Lebanon found itself implicated (the Baghdad pact backed by England and the United States confronting the Egyptian-Syrian coalition led by Jamal Abdel Nasser and backed by the Russians). However, as tensions on the international scene dropped, so did the violence on the Lebanese arena. Yet the 1958 crisis did increase the nation's sectarian problem and deepened the societal divide, especially with the addition of the Palestinians into the equation, who were backed by some members of the Lebanese society, but rejected by others.

The Palestinian militias established themselves in Lebanon with the partial support of some Lebanese factions and the full support of the Arab countries. The Cairo agreement of 1969, which it is said the Lebanese were pressured into signing, enabled the Palestinian resistance to launch their military operations against Israel from Lebanon. These operations, and the weakness of the Lebanese military, created an element of instability, and the Palestinian resistance became a "state

within the state". Some actions and speeches made by the Palestinian leaders stirred up Christian animosity towards them. Christian factions began stocking up weapons, fearing that the Palestinians would eventually expulse them from their country and make Lebanon theirs. One famous saying of a prominent Palestinian leader was "the road to Qods passes through Jounieh". The combination of the divisive sectarian issue with the regional conflicts in which Lebanon became embroiled resulted in the outbreak of the war in 1975 and fueled it for 15 years, during which time the country witnessed a Syrian invasion (supported by the international community) to limit the power of Palestinian militias and the damage inflicted upon the country. That was followed by an Israeli invasion in 1978 and 1982. The Israeli invasion opened the door for Iran to become involved in the conflict, with Syria's blessings. As a result, the various Lebanese sects fought each other out under the sponsorship of different foreign powers. The following diagram represents the Lebanese disputes and wars:



Results of the war

Before the war

The war resulted in massive human losses and destruction, and hit the economy hard. Prior to the war, the Lebanese economy displayed the following indicators:

- ⦿ A high annual growth rate, averaging 6%
- ⦿ A low inflation rate, averaging 3% annually
- ⦿ An income per capita of \$1,800 in 1974
- ⦿ Financial and monetary stability due to political stability, a large balance of payments surplus and an exchange rate of LBP 2.25 to the dollar
- ⦿ Surplus in the public budget and low government debts
- ⦿ Basic health and educational services provided to the majority of the citizens

During the war

The heavy toll of the war read as follows:

- ⦿ An estimated 170-200,000 casualties
- ⦿ An estimated 300,000 wounded, of which 50,000 were partially disabled and 12,000 completely disabled
- ⦿ Several tens of thousands of people estimated missing
- ⦿ More than 1 million people displaced, half of which remained displaced until 1995
- ⦿ Massive emigration, estimated to exceed half a million
- ⦿ Collapse of the value of the Lebanese Pound, with the exchange rate reaching LBP 3,000 to the dollar in 1992
- ⦿ An income per capita of \$4,000, however once adjusted to the inflation rate, this added up to \$1,000 or less
- ⦿ An inflation rate of 65%
- ⦿ An accumulated budget deficit, which led to public debt soaring up to \$35 billion
- ⦿ Damage to property estimated at over \$30 billion: over 10,000 houses completely destroyed; 30,000 houses partially destroyed; 100,000 houses damaged; 13,400 offices and shops destroyed
- ⦿ An estimated number of 40,000 cars burned and damaged, and another 70,000 partially damaged
- ⦿ A drop in forestation from 11% to 6%
- ⦿ Transgressions on public property, including marine property, causing several billions of dollars in losses

The Ta'ef Accord

As many of the regional circumstances which had led to the civil war faded away and most of the Palestinian forces withdrew from Lebanon, limiting their presence to the refugee camps, the post-war picture of the country became clearer. Lebanese parliament members met, under Arab and international sponsorship, in the Saudi city of Ta'ef on October 22, 1989 and agreed to end the war (even though they were neither participants nor leaders in the war). They agreed upon the accord, which included several political, economic, military, and administrative reforms, after finalizing Lebanon's identity as an Arab one - a long-lasting point of dispute.

Although setting the destruction of political sectarianism as a national goal, the accord only stipulated that this had to be done in stages, and essentially reinforced the country's sectarian foundations. It also stressed the importance of maintaining close relations with Syria due to the common ancestry, history, and interests of the two countries. It also declared that Syria was to withdraw its troops from Lebanon after a maximum of 2 years following the signing of the Ta'ef Accord, once a president had been elected, a national union government formed, and the political reforms constitutionally ratified. At this stage, a Syrian-Lebanese military council would convene to decide on the relocation of the troops in the area of the Bekaa, the entrance of west Bekaa at Dahr El Baydar until Hemmana- El Mdayrej- Aain Dara road, and possibly other locations if deemed necessary. The two governments were also called upon to agree on the size of the Syrian troops in Lebanon and the duration of their stay in the various regions, as well as on the nature of the relations between these troops and the Lebanese authorities.

Some of these issues were achieved while others remained on paper for many reasons, primarily due to the lack of regional and international sponsorship of the Accord and to internal Lebanese divisions, which came in the way of carrying certain reforms out.

Today, with the issuance of UN Resolution 1559 that demands the Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon and the disarmament of Hizbullah's and other non-Lebanese militias, specters of the war reappear in the minds of some.

Are there any foundations for these fears? Of course upon hearing the speeches of the politicians and the sentiments they are arousing in the streets among the different sects and parties, one could be discouraged and fear the possibility of a new conflict breaking out. However, the chances of this happening are slim. Both the seeds of war and of unity are present in our society, yet for the former to come to fruition, external factors must also intervene. The factors which could do so no longer seem present, and the firm international desire to prevent any Lebanese instability from breaking out again so as not to pour oil over the fires in Palestine and Iraq, make an even stronger case for this.

If the seeds of conflict and war can still be found within us and in our society, forcing us to think of and fear war and worry about the future, why then, can't we transform these into channels of communication and dialogue that could result in a permanent formula for progress and development? This would strengthen our country in the face of wars and conflicts, the consequences of which we are still paying for. Any serious dialogue should take into consideration the evils of sectarianism, as well as of foreign intervention. Otherwise, Gibran Khalil Gibran words will forever ring true: "Pity the nation that is divided into parts, and each part claims to be a nation on its own".

Will it return & when?

In a poll conducted by Information International in January 2005 concerning the fear of the Lebanese from the return of the war, 19.8% of persons polled agreed that it will return, 63% indicated it will not, and 17.2% answered that they don't know. When those who expect the war will return were asked about the timing of the war, 35.5% answered it would be in the coming two years, 47.9% answered between 5-10 years, 12.6% answered after 10 years, and 4.2 said that they don't know.

1975-1976:

Kamal Jumblatt – Pierre El Gemayel

- ⦿ May 30, 1975: Kamal Jumblatt insists on excluding the Phalanges Party from the government, and speaks of an American-Israeli plan for a civil war in Lebanon.
- ⦿ January 6, 1975: Sheikh Pierre El Gemayel accepts President Hafez El Assad's invitation to visit Syria and declares that the Syrian-Lebanese cooperation is a security valve for both countries. President El Assad informs Yafi, who was visiting Damascus, that the Phalangists gave the guarantees, and that they were keen on cooperating with Karami and Franjeh.
- ⦿ January 8, 1976: Sheikh Pierre Gemayel says: "we will fight until the last man, but we do not doubt the intentions of Assad and Khaddam."
- ⦿ April 2, 1976: Sheikh Pierre Gemayel asks for a Syrian intervention to insure the halt of gunfire, and praises Syria "the neighbor and sister that extended a sincere and honest hand. Every fair and loyal person shall remember this noble stand".
- ⦿ June 7, 1976: Sheikh Pierre Gemayel declares that the Syrian initiative is a result of Syria's understanding of the Lebanese reality. Kamal Jumblatt sends a letter in the name of the national and progressive parties and forces to the Arab Foreign Ministers asking them to, "stop the invasion so that we can solve our problems with the help of a joint Arab initiative."
- ⦿ June 14, 1976: Sheikh Pierre El Gemayel declares in a press conference: "the Syrian stand forced Lebanon to refuse any foreign protection."
- ⦿ September 13, 1976: Kamal Jumblatt gives a speech in which he attacks Islamic and non Islamic forces visiting Damascus and describes them as "crawlers".

6 & 6 Repeated

The phrase "6 and 6 repeated" is a recurrent one in Lebanese discussions on the roots of the country's sectarianism and the allocation of jobs on a confessional basis. What is the origin of this phrase and what does it mean?

Origin

The Lebanese President in 1936, Emile Eddeh, exchanged 2 letters with the French high commissioner De Martel. The first letter was numbered "6" and the second letter was numbered "6 repeated".

Content

Letter number 6

"From the President of the Lebanese Republic
To the French High Commissioner:

It gives me great honor to reassure you that the government is ready to provide equal civil and political rights to all of its citizens without any discrimination.

It is also ready to ensure fair political representation to all of the various citizens of the country at the government level.

The Lebanese government will be careful to distribute fairly the expenses for public purposes among the different regions."

Letter number 6 repeated

"From the President of the Lebanese Republic
To the French High Commissioner:

It gives me great honor to reassure you that, in reference to the content of our letter number 6, the government hereby notifies you that it will start working on unifying the taxation system as soon as possible, and before the expiration of the treaty.

Similarly, the government also declares its intention to implement a reformed system that covers all of Lebanon and includes:

1. Granting municipalities more power
2. Establishing councils for the Cazas qualified to study the local issues

The above-mentioned councils have the right to give their opinion, or to take the final decision concerning issues that are presented to them, according to each issue's importance.

If the council takes a final decision, this decision may or may not be submitted to the central government's approval, depending on conditions which will be determined at a later stage. These councils will be consulted especially concerning the budget that the treasury allocates to the Cazas".

The French High Commissioner received the two letters and was informed of their content.

Almost 70 years have passed since these letters were written, during which time Lebanon witnessed development, wars, changes, and legal and constitutional amendments. However, the spirit of these two letters is still applied to this day when it comes to governmental recruitment, which is made on the basis of fair representation of "the country's different citizens" rather than on qualifications. As for granting municipalities more power and establishing councils for the Cazas, Lebanon is still waiting for this to happen, just as it awaits "equality in civil and political rights for all its citizens without any discrimination."

Lebanese-Syrian relations have for many centuries been a basic pillar in the region, as well as a factor of internal tension in Lebanon. Most of the time, internal issues dominated relations between the Prince of Mount Lebanon and Damascus' "Wali". These relations had their "ups-and-downs", translated by the occasional closing of the border at times and full cooperation and coordination at others. The 1976 Syrian invasion of Lebanon, followed by the signature of the Ta'ef Accord in 1989, turned a new page in this cooperation. The Ta'ef Accord clearly stated, with regards to Lebanese-Syrian relationship, that:

"Lebanon, which is of Arab belonging and identity, has fraternal and honest relations with all of the Arab countries, while a special relationship links it with Syria and this relationship attains its strength from its roots, being family relationships, history and common interest, on which cooperation and coordination is built and agreements will be signed in different sectors...Lebanon must not be a threat to Syria's security nor Syria to Lebanon's."

In accordance with the Ta'ef Accord, officials from both countries signed 120 protocols and agreements since 1990.

Fraternity, Cooperation & Coordination Treaty

The Fraternity, Cooperation and Coordination Treaty constituted the first agreement signed between Lebanon and Syria on May 22, 1991 and

it was authorized by the Lebanese Parliament in accordance with law No. 57, issued on May 5, 1991.

The treaty states that: "the two states shall work on reaching the highest degrees of cooperation and coordination between them in all political, economic, security, cultural, scientific and other fields, in a way that would ensure both brotherly states' interests within the framework of each state's sovereignty and independence, and in a way that would enable them to use their political, economic and security as well as expand and reinforce their common interests, in confirmation of their fraternal relations and as a guarantee of their common destiny."

The treaty called for the establishment of specialized bodies to accomplish the goals set: the higher council, the follow-up and coordination commission, the foreign affairs committee, the committee for economic and social affairs, the committee for defense and security affairs and the general secretariat. So far 40 treaties and 80 protocols emerged as a result of the above-mentioned treaty.

Treaties, Protocols, Memorandums, & Programs

The two states signed 35 treaties pertaining to different areas, some of which were ratified a few weeks after their signature (the defense and security treaty), while others were ratified only years after their signing (the scientific research treaty has yet to be ratified). The following table lists the treaties signed:

A. Treaties Signed between Lebanon and Syria

Name of the Treaty	Date Signed	Law signed in Lebanon
Fraternity, Cooperation and Coordination Treaty	22/5/1991	57 issued on 30/5/1991
Defense and Security Agreement	1/9/1991	96 issued on 26/9/1991
Social and Economic Cooperation and Coordination Accord	16/9/1993	298 issued on 10/3/1994
Health Accord	16/9/1993	298 issued on 10/3/1994
Mobility and Transportation of Goods Regulation Accord	16/9/1993	298 issued on 10/3/1994
Agricultural Field Coordination and Cooperation Accord	16/9/1993	298 issued on 10/3/1994
Higher Education and Scientific Research Accord	4/5/1994	400 issued on 19/1/1995
Cultural Accord	19/9/1994	
Accord Concerning the Distribution of the Orontes Waters Originating in the Lebanese Territory	20/9/1994	464 issued on 19/12/2002
Supplement to the Accord Concerning the Distribution of the Orontes Waters Originating in the Lebanese Territory	11/1/1997	465 issued on 19/12/2002
Labour Bilateral Agreement	18/10/1994	442 issued on 24/08/1995
Education, Sports and Youth Cooperation and Coordination Accord	30/4/1995	578 issued on 8/8/1996
Scientific Research Accord	19/3/1995	
Vocational and Technical Education Cooperation Accord	2/6/1996	617 issued on 20/3/1997
Judicial Accord of 1951	25/2/1951	630 issued on 8/5/1997
Agreement for Avoiding Dual Taxation and Tax Evasion Concerning Income Tax	12/1/1997	658 issued on 31/7/1997
Investments Promotion and Protection Accord	12/1/1997	657 issued on 31/7/1997
Establishment of Joint Border Offices Agreement	12/1/1997	65 issued on 13/4/1999
Commercial Maritime Navigation Accord	22/2/1999	114 issued on 3/11/1999

Name of the Treaty	Date Signed	Law signed in Lebanon
Social Affairs Bilateral Agreement	11/9/2000	256 issued on 2/1/2001
Agreement Concerning the Principles of Delivery and Sales of Crude Gas Between Syria and Lebanon	11/5/2001	
Bilateral Agreement for electric connectivity (400 kv)	19/7/2001	
Establishment of Air Services Accord	8/8/2001	405 issued on 13/6/2002
Agreement for Gas Sales and the Proceedings of Meeting of the Joint Commission for Gas and Oil on 27/11/2002	8/12/2001	
Cooperation Protocol for the Exchange of Medical and Pharmaceutical Products	16/3/2002	498 issued on 16/7/2003
Agreement for Sharing the Water of South River and for Building a Common Dam	20/4/2002	458 issued on 5/9/2002
Agreement Regarding the Unification of Principles for the Authorization and Import of Veterinary Drugs and Vaccines	2/7/2003	
Cooperation Accord Between the two Ministries of Justice	12/11/2003	
Customs mutual administrative cooperation accord	14/1/2004	
Bilateral accord concerning the exchange of direct postal orders	14/4/2004	
Exchange of international express mail accord	14/4/2004	
Implementation regulation for the exchange of international express mail accord	14/4/2004	
Air Transport Mutual Tariff Exemption Accord	1/12/2004	
Agreement in the Area of Facilities to Establish Common Maritime Private Companies	1/12/2004	
Establishment Agreement of the Syrian Lebanese Company for Tobaccos Industry	31/1/2005	

B. Protocols, Memorandums, & Programs

Name of the Protocol/Memorandum/Program	Date Signed
Cooperation to combat drugs	27/4/1993
Industrial cooperation protocol	4/12/1993
Vegetable & animal agricultural cooperation protocol	7/4/1994
Veterinarian quarantines & protection of animal resources cooperation protocol	7/4/1994
Protocol regarding agricultural quarantines & plant protection	7/4/1994
Protocol for scientific & technical cooperation in the fields of quality control specifications	1994
Memorandum of understanding between the general organization of remote sensing in Syria & the National Council for Scientific Research in Lebanon	28/12/1994
Memorandum of understanding regarding the implementation of the maritime cable project (Berytar)	25/1/1995
Agreement project for the use of land & maritime connectors for the passage of communications lines between the two countries	25/1/1995
Contract for supplying the Lebanese village of Tufayl with electricity	10/4/1995
Memorandum of understanding concerning scientific cooperation between Damascus University & the Lebanese University	19/4/1995
Accord for the establishment of a Syrian Lebanese Businessmen Council	17/5/1995
Protocol regarding the postal service	10/8/1995
Scientific cooperation program between the Faculty of Education in Damascus University & the Faculty of Education in the Lebanese University	9/6/1996

Source: www.syrleb.org

Name of the Protocol/Memorandum/Program	Date Signed
Memorandum of understanding between the Atomic Energy Commission in Syria & the National Council for Scientific Research in Lebanon	22/7/1996
Memorandum of understanding regarding cooperation in the area of communications	17/12/1996
Memorandum of understanding between the Ministry of Irrigation & the National Council for Scientific Research with an executive annex	9/7/1997
Memorandum of understanding between the National Council for Scientific Research in Lebanon & the National Information Center in Syria	9/7/1997
Contract between the National Council for Scientific Research & the General Organization of Remote Sensing & Stilmford Trading Ltd Institute	16/7/1997
Joint work accord regarding the study project of fresh water sources in the sea	26/8/1997
Scientific cooperation accord between Al-Baath University & the Lebanese University	19/10/1997
Memorandum of understanding between Pharmaceutical Unions in both Syria & Lebanon	1/3/1998
An agreement to purchase electricity from Syria	29/4/1998
An agreement to purchase electricity from Syria	21/5/1998
Joint cooperation accord between the Chamber of Industry in Damascus, Chamber of Industry in Aleppo & the Association of Lebanese Industrial Entrepreneurs	15/5/1998
Executive agreement about horses & horse races	25/10/1998

Lebanese Syrian Agreements

Name of the Protocol/Memorandum/Program	Date Signed
Scientific cooperation accord between Tishrin University & the Lebanese University	1/11/1998
Joint research project for the study of the Orontes River environment	25/2/1999
Cooperation accord in the area of cable & wireless communications	14/3/1999
Contract for the geological & hydro-geological study of the sources of fresh water in the sea in Lebanon	26/5/1999
Memorandum of understanding between Dentists Unions in both Syria & Lebanon	3/9/1999
Memorandum of understanding between The Syrian Arab Airlines & the Middle East Airlines	11/9/1999
Memorandum of understanding between The Syrian Arab Airlines & Trans Mediterranean Airways	11/9/1999
Contract regarding the network maintenance of the Lebanese village of Tufayl	22/9/1999
Coordination & cooperation accord between the Artists Union in Syria & the Union of Lebanese Artists Associations	10/10/1999
Unified form of agricultural quarantines between Syria & Lebanon	12/10/1999
Executive program for cooperation in the field of tourism for the years 1999-2000-2001	12/10/1999
Contract for servicing 70 telephone lines in the Lebanese village of Tufayl	16/2/2000
Contract for investing in Syrian telephone lines in the Lebanese village of Tufayl	16/2/2000
Memorandum of understanding & cooperation in environmental areas	24/2/2000
Transportation agreement between The Syrian Arab Airlines & Trans Mediterranean Airways	1/8/2000
Media cooperation program	29/9/2000
Accord regarding the approval of certificates between the two Ministries of Industry	2/10/2000
Program of cooperation between the Association of Fine Arts in Syria & the Lebanese Artists Association for Drawing & Sculpture	25/2/2001
Protocol for the unification of rules & traffic procedures of Jordanian, Syrian & Lebanese vehicles	9/4/2001
Cooperation agreement in the areas of animal health & veterinarian quarantines	11/4/2001
Unified form for the import & supervision of agricultural pesticides between Syria & Lebanon	11/4/2001
Syrian Lebanese scientific research cooperation program	1/8/2001
Broadcasting cooperation program between the Syrian Radio & the Lebanese Radio	9/9/2001
Information cooperation program between the Syrian Television & the Lebanese Television	9/9/2001
Cooperation & exchange of news program between the Lebanese National News Agency & the Syrian Arab News Agency	9/9/2001
Technical cooperation protocol between the Syrian Petroleum Company & the Lebanese Industrial Research Institute	1/12/2001
Fraternity & cooperation agreement between Tartus & Tripoli ports	12/5/2002

Name of the Protocol/Memorandum/Program	Date Signed
Fraternity & cooperation agreement between Lattakia & Beirut ports	13/5/2002
Fraternity & cooperation agreement between Damascus & Beirut cities	15/7/2002
Memorandum of understanding regarding the unification of transport of goods principles of the Lebanese, Syrian & Jordanian trucks	22/10/2002
Cooperation protocol for the exploration of petroleum & gas	27/11/2002
Sports cooperation protocol between the two basketball unions	29/4/2003
Memorandum of understanding between the Lebanese & Syrian Parliaments	26/10/2003
Memorandum of scientific cooperation between the General Establishment Of Geology & Mineral Resource & National Council for Scientific Research	16/12/2003
Scientific & Cultural Cooperation Accord between Faculty of Architecture in the Baath University & the Institute of Fine Arts in the Lebanese University	3/3/2004
Memorandum of understanding between Pharmacists Unions in both Syria & Lebanon	24/3/2004
Sports cooperation accord between the Lebanese Special Olympics & the Syrian Special Olympics	26/3/2004
Information cooperation program between the Ministries of Information in Syria & Lebanon for the years 2004-2005-2006	7/4/2004
Memorandum of cooperation & news exchange between the Lebanese National News Agency & the Syrian Arab News Agency	7/4/2004
Information cooperation program between the Syrian Television & the Lebanese Television	7/4/2004
Development of broadcasting cooperation program between the Syrian National Radio & the Lebanese National Radio	7/4/2004
Joint cooperation accord between the Lebanese University & the General Organization for Remote Sensing in Syria	21/4/2004
Cooperation agreement between the National Institute for Administration in Lebanon & the National Institute for General Administration in Syria	28/4/2004
Agreement between Bekaa Province & Damascus Rif Province	1/6/2004
Memorandum of understanding between The Syrian Arab Airlines & the Middle East Airlines	19/7/2004
Memorandum of understanding between the Lebanese Tobacco Monopoly & the Tobacco Public Institution in Syria	20/8/2004
Memorandum of Understanding Between the Middle East Airlines Co. - The Lebanese Airlines & The Syrian Arab Airlines	1/12/2004
Training & Maintenance Agreement between the Syrian Arab Airlines & the Middle East Airlines	1/12/2004
Memorandum of Understanding on the Methods to Treat the Obstacles from the Front of the Working Procedure in the Area of the Protection of the Commercial & Industrial Properties	8/12/2004
Program of Implementation of the Touristic Cooperation Accord for the years 2005-2006-2007	12/1/2005
Memorandum of Understanding for Mutual Cooperation in the Field of International Exhibitions & Markets	31/1/2005

2004 Facts & numbers

(Part 2 of 2)

Public Finance

The budgetary law for 2004 estimated national expenditures at LBP 9,400 billion (\$6.24 billion) and revenues at LBP 6,400 billion (\$4.25 billion), thereby resulting in an anticipated deficit of LBP 3,000 billion, or a ratio of 31.9%. Primary estimates indicate that the revenues for the year 2004 amounted to LBP 7,075 billion (\$4.69 billion), although some believe this to be an exaggerated number. The expenditure in the same year amounted to LBP 10,540 billion (\$6.99 billion). As a result, the national deficit reached LBP 3,465 billion (\$2.3 billion), a reduction from 37.2% in 2003 to 32.8%. It is also worth noting the significant decrease in public debt, which has been reduced from LBP 4,874 billion (\$3.23 billion) to LBP 4,021 billion (\$2.67 billion).

Public Debt

The public debt reached almost LBP 54,068 billion (\$35.9 billion) by the end of 2004 compared to LBP 50,305 billion (\$33.4 billion) at the end of 2003, representing an increase of LBP 3,763 billion (7.5%). The net public debt amounted to LBP 49,807 billion (\$33.05 billion) in 2004 compared to LBP 47,287 billion (\$31.38 billion) in 2003, representing an increase of LBP 2,520 billion (5.3%).

By the end of 2004, the domestic public debt represented 48.8% and the external debt represented 51.2%, compared to respectively 53.5% and 46.5% in 2003. The Lebanese Central Bank's portion of the public domestic debt reached LBP 10,652 billion (40.2%) compared to LBP 8,938 billion (33.3%) in 2003.

Central Bank Reserves

The foreign assets of the central bank decreased from LBP 18,363 billion (\$12.2 billion) to LBP 17,310 billion (\$11.5 billion), while the deposits of the financial sector amounted to LBP 32,645 billion (\$21.6 billion) compared to LBP 31,352 billion (\$20.8 billion) by the end of 2003.

Growth and Inflation

The governor of the central bank estimated Lebanon's GDP growth for 2004 at 5%, which increased the size of GDP to \$20 billion. The inflation rate reached 4%, compared to 2.5% the previous year. The main reason behind the increase was the hike in the value of the Euro compared to that of the U.S. Dollar and the Lebanese Pound. This led to an increase in prices of consumer products, as Lebanon is highly dependant on imports from Europe. The increase in the international prices of fuel was also a contributing factor to the inflation.

Checks Exchanged

The year 2004 witnessed an exchange of 10,978,335 checks worth a total of LBP 49,323 billion (\$32.73 billion) in Lebanese Pounds and foreign currency, compared to 10,675,872 checks in 2003 worth LBP 44,644 billion (\$29.62 billion), thus registering an increase of 302,463 checks worth LBP 4,679 billion. The checks are divided between national and foreign currency as follows:

- ⊙ **Checks in Lebanese Pounds:** the number of exchanged checks in Lebanese Pounds amounted to 3,655,624 checks (33.3% of total checks), at a value of LBP 13,719 billion (27.8% of the total value of exchanged checks)
- ⊙ **Checks in foreign currency:** the number of exchanged checks in foreign currency amounted to 7,322,711 checks (66.7% of total checks), at a value of \$23,610 million (72.2% of the value of all the checks)
- ⊙ **Bounced checks:** the number of bounced checks amounted to 253,000 checks with a value of LBP 1,000 billion (\$0.66 billion) compared to 283,000 checks worth LBP 12.6 billion (\$8 million). This is an indication of the efficiency of the procedures at the Risk Center.

Banking Sector

Bank deposits

The bank deposits reached LBP 84,171 billion (\$55.9 billion) by the end of 2004 compared to LBP 74,780 billion (\$49.62 billion) in 2003, showing an increase of LBP 9,391 billion (\$6.23 billion), i.e. 12.5%, in comparison to a 14.7% growth rate in 2003. Deposits in foreign currency represented 70.5% of total deposits compared to 66.2% in 2003.

Bank loans

Bank loans issued to the private sector reached LBP 24,020 billion (\$15.94 billion) by the end of 2004, compared to LBP 22,827 billion (\$15.15 billion) in 2003, representing an increase of LBP 1,193 billion (5.2%). This growth in bank deposits comes after a dip that reached 0.4% in 2003.

Bank loans issued to the public sector increased from LBP 21,006 billion (\$13.94 billion) in 2003 to LBP 24,155 billion (\$16.03 billion) by the end of 2004, representing an increase of LBP 3,149 billion (15%), compared to a decrease of 21.5% in 2003. This increase was caused by Paris II loans to the Lebanese government

Some banks witnessed an increase in profits (USD million) Source: Statements issued by the depicted banks

Sector	2004 Profits	2003 Profits	Percentage Increase
BLOM	91.1	88.3	3.2%
Audi Bank	71.3	54	31.5%
Byblos Bank	53.6	46.6	15.6%
Bank of Beirut	32	25	28%

“ii Monthly” Meets with Merchants: Drop in Income and a Possible Closure

The commercial activities slumped during the past month after the assassination of former Prime Minister Hariri last February. To trace the economic losses and assess the different steps and actions undertaken, “ii” staff interviewed 350 merchants, between 21 and 25 March 2005, distributed upon the following commercial areas: Hamra, Verdun, Downtown, Barbour, Furn El-Chebak, Achrafieh, and Mar Elias.

The majority of respondents (42.3%) declared that their income, in the period ranging between February 14 and March 20, dropped by 60-80% compared to regular days, while 17.7% said there was a 50% decrease, 14.6% stated that their income decreased 100%, 10.3% said the decline was 30-40%, 6% announced a 90% decrease while the remaining percentages were distributed among different answers. (Graph 1)

Due to the economical situation in Lebanon after the February 14 assassination, ii Monthly's administration decided to publish this survey, with the intent to publish the last part of “The Puffers & The Tolerants” in the next issue.

Around one third of the respondents (31.7%) perceived the date of the parliamentary elections as a date declaring the amelioration of the situation, while 15.7% thought that this would happen in the summer, 11.4% did not see things getting better, whereas 10.3% had hope that things will change upon the formation of the new government. The remaining percentages were distributed between answers such as, sometime in April-May (9.1%), next year (1.7%), upon the Syrian withdrawal (1.1%), upon the election of a new president (0.9%), and 15.4% did not specify.

Around one quarter of the respondents (25.9%) indicated “security” as the main concern regarding the new government, followed by the reduction of fees and taxes (22.1%), preserving the stability of the currency (17.4%), decreasing the cost of electricity, telephone and water (12.7%), promoting Lebanon abroad (9.8%), requesting banks to re-schedule their debts (3.5%), while the remaining 8.6% were distributed among other answers.

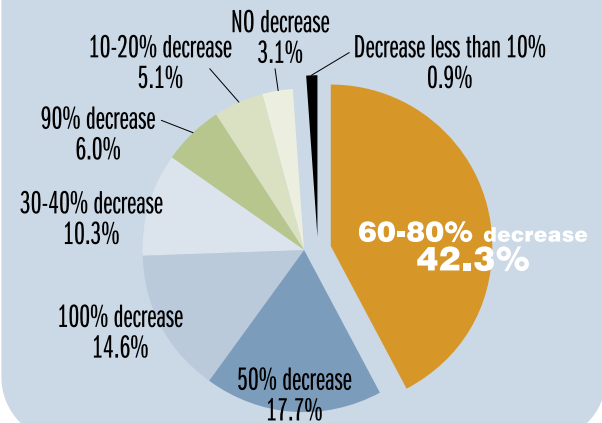
While asking about the merchants' major fears these days, security was also described as the main concern (55.7%), followed by the ability to continue in one's field of work (26.9%), the stability of the Lebanese currency (11.1%), building the country (0.9%), while 2.6% did not specify an answer, and the remaining 2.8% were distributed among other options.

However, this overall illustration of the situation may vary when we zoom into different areas answers and percentages may differ. Accordingly a detailed account of each area is presented hereunder.

Barbour

The income of 84% of the respondents in Barbour fell more than 50%, whereby 32% of the merchants indicated that their income fell 60-80%, 20% said the decrease in income reached 100%, 18% stated there was a 50% drop, 14% revealed a 90% plunge, while 8% did not trace a decrease in their income, 4% indicated a 10-20% drop and another 4% stated a 30-40% reduction, and . In an attempt to increase sales and decrease expenditures, 44.6% of the merchants decreased prices of their goods, 4.3% increased working hours, another 4.3% reduced the number of employees, while 38.3% did nothing, and the remaining 8.5% are distributed among different responses.

G1 | From February 14 & until March 20, your institution's income regressed by ...% compared to the same period last year. All the areas



As for the expected actions that will be taken in the event the situation continues badly, the majority of the respondents (37.3%) indicated that they would permanently close their shops, 18.9% will do nothing, 11.3% will continue to decrease their prices, while 5.7% will launch promotion campaigns and ads, whereas 5.7% did not specify what they will do with their shop, but said they will personally travel. The remaining answers were distributed among: temporary closure of shops (2%), changing the field of work (3.8%), changing the location of work (2%), cutting down expenditures (2%), while 11.3% did not specify an answer.

Hamra

The income of 76% of the respondents in Hamra fell more than 50%, whereby the income of around half the merchants (52%) fell 60-80%, 16% indicated a 50% decrease, 6% stated their income plummeted 100%, 2% said it dropped 90%, while the income of 10% of the respondents decreased by 10-20%, 12% revealed there was a 30-40% reduction, and 2% indicated there was no decline in their income.

The steps taken in Hamra, in order to increase sales and decrease expenditures, were pretty much similar to those taken in Barbour, even in frequency. The majority (42.6%) of the merchants decreased prices of their goods, 11.1% increased working hours, 3.6% reduced the number of

“ii Monthly” Meets with Merchants: Drop in Income and a Possible Closure

employees, while 38.9% did nothing, and the remaining 3.8% were distributed among different answers.

As for the actions the merchants expect to take in case the bad situation continues, the majority of the respondents (40.4%) announced that they would do nothing, 33.3% will continue to decrease their prices, while 10.5% will decrease salaries of their employees, 5.3% will fire some of their employees, 3.5% will close their shops permanently, 3.5% will change their occupation, while the remaining 3.5% were distributed between different options.

Verdun

The income of 86% of the respondents in Verdun fell more than 50%, whereby the income of around half the merchants (48%) fell 60-80%, 26% stated a 50% drop, 12% revealed a 100% plunge in income, while 10% indicated a 30-40% decrease and 4% said they faced a 10-20% decline.

The majority of merchants in Verdun (70.6%) did not take any action in order to increase sales and decrease expenditures, while 23.5% of them decreased prices of their goods, 3.9% reduced the number of employees, and 2% gave facilities in payment.

As for the actions to be taken in case the bad situation continues, the majority of the respondents (68%) announced that they would do nothing, 12% will permanently close their shops, while 8% will continue decreasing prices of their goods, 6% will change the location of their shops, and the remaining 2% will either decrease salaries of their employees or fire some of them or cut down expenses.

Downtown

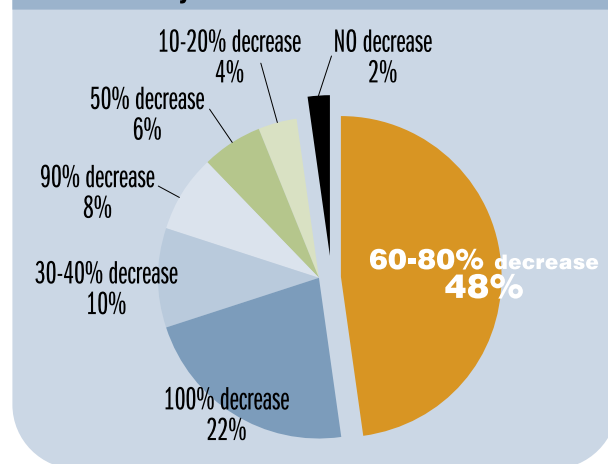
The income of 84% of the respondents in Downtown fell more than 50%, whereby the income of around half the merchants (48%) fell 60-80%, 22% stated a 100% plunge, 8% revealed a 90% drop, 6% specified a 50% decline, while 10% indicated a 30-40% decrease, 4% said their income dropped 10-20% and 2% stated their income did not decrease. (Graph 2)

Around half the merchants in Downtown (49.1%) did not take any action in order to increase sales and decrease expenditures, while 17% of them decreased prices of their goods, 9.4% decreased working hours, 5.7% reduced the number of employees, 5.7% increased promo-

tion campaigns, 5.7% gave their employees their annual leaves, 3.8% cut down expenses, 1.8% increased working hours and 1.8% decreased salaries.

As for the actions to be taken in case the bad situation continues, the majority of the respondents (46%) announced that they would do nothing, 26% will permanently close their shops, 10% will dismiss some of their employees, while 4% will change the location of their shops, 2% will reduce salaries, 2% will change their occupation, 2% will increase promotion campaigns, while 8% did not specify an answer.

G2 | From February 14 & until March 20, your institution's income regressed by ...% compared to the same period last year. Downtown Area.



Achrafieh

The decline in income among Achrafieh merchants was not as severe as that encountered by merchants in other commercial areas visited, whereby the income of around 62% fell more than 50%. The income of 30% of the merchants fell 60-80%, 16% specified a 50% decline, 12% revealed a 100% plunge, 4% stated a 90% drop, while 20% indicated a 30-40% regression, 10% said they are facing a 10-20% decline, 6% stated less than 10% drop and 2% indicated that their income did not decrease.

The majority of the merchants in Achrafieh (61.5%) did not take any action in order to increase sales and decrease expenditures, while 17.3% of them decreased the prices of their goods, 9.7% reduced the number of employees, 3.9% gave their employees their annual leaves, 1.9% reduced salaries, 1.9% increased promotion

“ii Monthly” Meets with Merchants: Drop in Income and a Possible Closure

campaigns, 1.9% are looking for a new market and the remaining 1.9% gave different answers.

As for the actions to be taken in case the bad situation continues, the majority of the respondents (54.5%) announced that they would do nothing, 12.8% will permanently close their shops, 7.3% will dismiss some of their employees, 7.3% will reduce salaries, 5.5% will continue decreasing prices of their goods, 1.8% will change the location of their shops, while the remaining 9% proposed different answers.

Furn Al Chebak

The income of 84% of the respondents in Furn Al Chebak fell more than 50%, whereby the income of 34% of the merchants fell 50%, 32% indicated a 60-80% decline, 14% revealed a 100% plunge, 4% stated they are facing a 90% drop, while the income of 10% fell 30-40%, and 6% said their income did not decrease.

The majority of the merchants in Furn Al Chebak (65.4%) did not take any action in order to increase sales and decrease expenditures, while 18.4% of them decreased prices of their goods, 4.1% reduced the number of employees, 4.1% cut down expenditures, 2% increased promotion campaigns, 2% participated in demonstrations, 2% are looking for a new market, and 2% reduced working hours.

As for the actions to be taken in case the bad situation continues, the majority of the respondents (46%) announced they would do nothing, 32% will permanently close their shops, 10% will dismiss some of their employees, 4% will give offers and discounts, 2% will change their occupation, while the remaining 6% did not specify an answer.

Mar Elias

The income of 88% of respondents in Mar Elias fell more than 50%: the income of 54% of the merchants fell 60-80%, 16% reported a 100% decline, 10% stated a 90% decrease, 8% said there was a 50% reduction, while the income of 6% fell 30-40%, 4% indicated a 10-20% drop, and 2% said their incomes were not affected.

The majority of the merchants in Mar Elias (55.8%) decreased the prices of their goods in order to increase sales and decrease expenditures, while 30.8% of them did nothing, 3.8% reduced the number of employees, 3.8% increased promotion campaigns, 1.9% decreased salaries, 3.8% cut down expenses, 1.9% are preparing to close, and 1.9% are facilitating payment procedures for customers.

As for the actions to be taken in case the bad situation continues, the majority of the respondents (44%) announced that they would do nothing, 24% will permanently close their shops, 14% will continue decreasing their prices, 4% will decrease salaries, another 4% will dismiss some of their employees, 4% will temporarily close, 2% will change their location, while the remaining 4% did not specify an answer.

Slump in Accordance with Commercial Activities

The survey showed a plummet in income and sales activities in the above mentioned commercial areas. This fallback was very evident in gifts, clothes, accessories, and jewelry shops and less evident in grocery stores and restaurants. Table 1 illustrates declining rates in major economic activities.

The survey revealed that the income of most shops (81%) fell more than 50% and that these shops have taken several actions in an attempt to combat the decrease in sales and they will continue to take such actions in the future. The most drastic action is permanently closing down (18.2%).

The majority of those who declared that they would close their shops if the bad situation continued were in Barbour (37.3%), followed by merchants from Furn Al Chebak (32%), and Downtown (26%), while the lowest percentages were in Hamra (3.5%) and Mar Elias (4%).

Declining income in major economic activities

Type of Activity	Decrease Percentage>>	90to100%	60to80%	30to50%	less than 30%	No Decrease
Clothes		25.2	46.1	25.2	2.6	0.9
Jewelry & accessories		20	54	22	2	2
Shoes		18.4	47.4	23.6	5.3	5.3
Restaurants		7.1	32.1	35.7	17.9	7.2
Grocery shops		15.8	26.4	36.8	10.5	10.5
Beauty institutes		6.3	50	37.4	6.3	0
Handicrafts & gifts		46.7	20	26.6	0	6.7
Stationary		28.6	35.7	28.6	7.1	0
Cafés		0	50	20	30	0
Electrical appliances		22.2	22.2	33.4	11.1	11.1

Table 1

Iraq Reconstruction: Between Foreign Aid and Local Resources

The reconstruction of Iraq was included in the initial phases of planning the war. President Bush and his cabinet promised the full reconstruction of Iraq's vital sectors to assist the "democratization" of the country after a quick "cakewalk victory". What is the status of the rebuilding of the country 2 years after its invasion?

Resolution 1483: a Mandate for Reconstruction

The UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1483 on May 22, 2003. This Resolution conferred on the United States and its coalition partners (UK) the status of an "occupying power", which became known as the "Authority". However it granted them more power than that authorized by the Fourth Convention and The Hague (which mainly confers responsibilities to the occupying forces so as to ensure the security and provision of humanitarian assistance to the civilians of the defeated country). The resolution created a Development Fund for Iraq which receives all the oil revenues of the country and is managed by the Central Bank of Iraq. The Fund's resources are only disbursed upon approval of the Authority for purposes of humanitarian assistance and reconstruction, thus granting the United States full control over Iraq's oil revenues.

Cost of Reconstruction

The UN and the World Bank assessed Iraq's reconstruction needs at \$35.8 billion (Table 1) till 2007. Infrastructure ranks as the most costly component of the reconstruction, totaling \$24.2 billion. Sectors not covered by the assessment of Iraq's needs were covered by the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA). The cost of reconstruction in those sectors reached \$19.4 billion, with the oil sector ranking highest at \$8 billion, followed by security and police at \$5 billion, environment at \$3.5 billion, culture at \$940 million, and \$2 billion for human rights, foreign affairs, religious affairs, science and technology, and youth and sport. Thus the total cost for reconstruction is estimated at \$55.2 billion.

Who is Paying the Bill?

At the October 2003 Madrid conference, 37 countries pledged over \$32.1 billion combined, with the U.S. being the biggest contributor at \$18.4 billion. The pledged amount is part of the \$87 billion approved by U.S. Congress for the war on Iraq. The second biggest contributor was Japan, pledging \$4.9 billion, followed by Saudi Arabia and Kuwait each pledging \$500 million, and the UK pledging \$452 million.

However the pace of reconstruction has been much slower than expected. According to the U.S. government, by September 2004, only \$1.2 billion of the money allocated had been spent, with \$623 million (over half) spent on security related measures. Moreover, \$3.4 billion previously allocated to the rebuilding of the water and power infrastructure was channeled towards security measures and job creation. Furthermore, only \$1 billion was released by other countries who had pledged a total

amount of \$13.5 billion by May 2004. At present, only 73 construction projects are underway in Iraq, which is less than 4% of the 2000 rebuilding projects the Coalition had promised would be in progress (according to Project Management Office of the CPA). Moreover, less than 1% of the workforce employed for the reconstruction projects are Iraqis.

One of the main reasons behind this delay is the Coalition and the CPA's inability to ensure security and to stabilize the country. Acts such as kidnapping of contractors and construction workers and continued attacks on infrastructure are hampering progress.

Can Iraq Afford It

The Congressional Budget office (CBO) proposed three different strategies for the reconstruction of Iraq between 2004 and 2007: (i) to fully fund immediate (2004) and medium term (2005-2007) needs at a total cost of \$55,259 billion; (ii) to fund immediate and some medium term needs at a total cost of \$34-40 billion; (iii) to solely fund immediate needs, at \$17.5 billion. The CBO envisaged two scenarios for the Iraqi government's budget: a low budget where income amounted to \$83 billion and expenditures to \$94 billion, and a higher budget where income reached \$128 billion and expenditures \$160 billion. The main variable in the estimated income was the oil revenues, which ranged between \$44 billion and \$89 billion. The main variables when it came to expenditures were the cost of reconstruction, which ranged between \$18 billion and \$55 billion, and international obligations, which varied between \$4 billion and \$33 billion.

So far, the reconstruction costs are expected to amount to or exceed \$55 billion, while the international obligations, such as debts, are predicted to decrease as there is a general tendency to cancel them (the Paris Club agreed to cancel 80% of the debt, while the United States cancelled them all). Thus the main factors that will determine whether Iraq will be able to afford the cost of reconstruction are the oil revenues and the ability to stabilize the country.

Iraq's human resources and its possession of the world's second largest oil reserves provide it with the potential for a strong economy. Whether it will be able to reach this potential however, will depend on its ability to install security, freedom, and democracy.

Cumulative Iraq Reconstruction Needs by sector (USD million)			Table 1
Sector	2004	2005-2007	Total
Government Institutions, Civil Society, Rule of Law, Media	99	288	387
Health, Education, Employment Creation	1,880	5,310	7,190
Infrastructure	5,836	18,368	24,204
Agriculture and Water Resources	1,230	1,797	3,027
Private Sector Development	176	601	777
Mine Action	80	154	234
Total	9,301	26,518	35,819

Source: The UN & World Bank report 2003

Etymology

The village name comes from the Syriac language and means the supervisor on a farm or workshop that has 30 workers. In all likelihood it was named for the functionality of its geographic location.

Geographical Characteristics

Robb Thalatheen is situated in the Caza of Marjaayoun in the Nabatiyeh Mohafaza. The village, located at 630m above sea level, covers an area of 525 hectares and is located 103km away from Beirut and 22km away from Nabatiyeh. It can be reached via:

Nabatiyeh- Khardali- Adeisseh- Robb Thalatheen.

Population

The approximate number of registered inhabitants is 3,400, mostly Shiites. However, only 400-500 people permanently reside in the village due to the Israeli occupation of it which lasted over 25 years.

Voters

The approximate number of voters in 2004 was 1,715 compared to 1,432 voters in 2000, thus experiencing an increase of 20% and revealing that the village is inhabited by many young citizens.

The voters are distributed among the following families:

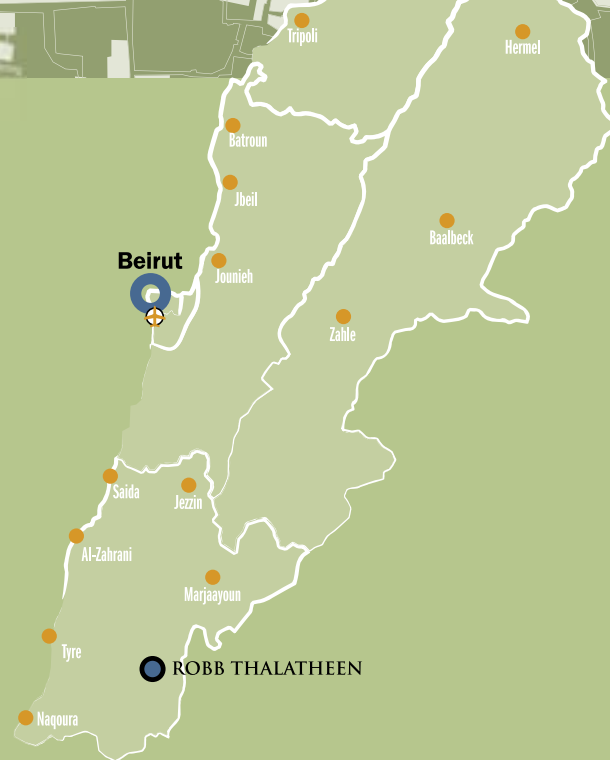
- | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| ○ Barakat: 597 voters | ○ Abdallah: 30 voters |
| ○ Fakih: 325 voters | ○ Shomar: 27 voters |
| ○ Hammoud: 312 voters | ○ Khalil: 16 voters |
| ○ Hachem: 252 voters | ○ Asmar: 10 voters |
| ○ Shawki: 82 voters | ○ Shehadeh: 7 voters |
| ○ Jawad: 51 voters | ○ Rachid: 6 voters |

Local Authorities

The village municipal council is made up of 12 members and headed by Mr. Ali Baraket. The municipality was established in accordance with Decision No. 779, issued on December 22, 2003, upon a request made by the community on December 18, 2003. The revenues of the municipal council coming from the independent municipal fund for the year 2002 were LBP 110.5 million. There are 2 Moukhtars and a mayoral council made up of three members.

Educational Institutions

Robb Thalatheen has one public elementary school, which provides only kindergarten education and has 27 students, while around 120-130 students go to Taybeh and Markaba for their schooling.



Economic Activities

Due to the heavy displacements suffered by the inhabitants of Robb Thalatheen, the village lacks economic activities, except for a small shop that meets parts of the residents' needs. Some of the residents live off agriculture (mainly olive, and tobacco). The tobacco plantations span 123,000m² and the olive plantations 250,000m².

Projects

The village faced many difficulties as a result of the Israeli occupation, with only a few projects led by the Council of the South successfully implemented:

- Constructing a big water tank (100m³) and a water network (1,910m long) in 1996.
- Building 211 electric poles, two transfer units, and electric lines 7,000m long in 1995 and 2000.
- Building supporting walls 45m long in 1997.

Archeological Sites

Robb Thalatheen boasts several archeological sites, such as tombs, rare metal pieces and metal saddles curved with crosses, thus indicating that it dates back to the era of the Crusades.

The village survived population displacements and occupation and is now in dire need for reconstruction and development. Furthermore, it requires the return of its inhabitants, to contribute to its revival.

Lebanese-Syrian relations, institutionalized by dozens of agreements and protocols, have played a significant role in the lives of both countries' people during the past fifteen years. One of the organizations established to oversee and manage the implementation of the bilateral agreements is the Lebanese Syrian Higher Council. "ii Monthly" met with Mr. Nasri Khoury, the General Secretary of the Council, to discuss the future of Lebanese-Syrian relations, taking into consideration recent political developments.

? What are some of the treaties that were signed but not executed? What are the reasons for this delay?

Lebanese-Syrian treaties can be categorized according to four major groups: socio-economic; educational and cultural; political and security; and judicial. Between 1950 and 1990, meetings between Lebanon and Syria were frozen, which resulted in the two countries pursuing divergent economic strategies. Accordingly, many legislative items were drastically different and thus hindered the implementation of several treaties. This process was further hampered by bureaucratic and legislative obstacles, and sometimes by specific individuals. For example, the treaty dealing with the establishment of a free trade zone between the two countries, which paved the way for industrial and agricultural trade (protecting more than 20 agricultural products) and reduced customs fees, was not fully implemented until the execution of exchange treaties in 2005 and the elimination of all the above-mentioned obstacles.

? What can you tell us about smuggling between Lebanon and Syria, and what actions are taken to stop such activities?

Since the beginning of the treaties, Lebanese exports to Syria increased significantly, totaling \$145 million in 2004. The total value of all Syrian exports to Lebanon however, which are predominantly oil related (50%), decreased from \$300 million in 2000 to \$225 million in 2004. Going back to the question, I admit that the numbers are much bigger than that, due to smuggling between the two countries, which takes place in order to avoid customs and fees. "Strategic" material supported by the government such as gasoline and turbine gas is smuggled from Syria to Lebanon, which costs the Syrian government around 1 billions dollars and deprives the Lebanese treasury from huge amounts of money too. As for goods smuggled from Lebanon to Syria, they are mostly foreign goods which are banned in Syria.

We are working on stopping these activities by taking several actions such as closing down routes used by smugglers (we have closed 300 routes so far) and establishing a unified customs system, and customs fees.

? Among the most prominent problems between the two countries are the issues of Syrian workers in Lebanon and the "Al-Assi" River. What is your view on these problems?

There is a large degree of understanding regarding these

issues, both pertaining to their positive and negative aspects. The number of Syrian workers in Lebanon does not exceed 300,000, although this number increases or decreases according to the different seasons, as most of the labor is seasonal workers working in the productive sectors (industries and agriculture). There are two major points that are not taken into consideration by those criticizing the presence of these workers:

○ **Firstly**, the productivity of the Syrian workers in Lebanon: critics only look at the wages they earn (\$8 or \$10/day) without taking into account the value of their production (\$20/day), especially when it comes to workers in the productive sectors. At the last gathering of the Lebanese-Syrian Council for Businessmen (March 2005), the Lebanese members indicated that their country's economic machinery has ground to a halt due to the number of big factories which have stopped production after losing their Syrian workers who fled the country following the recent events. These members, moreover, asked their Syrian counterparts to work on reinforcing economic activities between the two countries and promote tourism activities, and they appealed to Syrian investors not to withdraw their deposits from Lebanese banks.

○ **Secondly**, we rarely hear anyone mention the number of Lebanese workers in Syria, who mostly hold very high posts and get paid the highest salaries, as they are employed in the most prominent sectors (telecommunications, IT, banking, higher education and private educational institutions). Bare in mind that out of the six private banks in Syria, 4 are Lebanese.

As for the "Assi River" issue, I must point out that Lebanon acquired a share bigger than that allocated to it in 1950, and that Syria lived up to the obligations it agreed to in the treaty pertaining to the issue. The Lebanese on the contrary, did not, due to problems between the Lebanese Ministry of Power and Water and the local authorities in the Hermel region, where the dam was to be constructed.

? Do you think the withdrawal of the Syrian army will affect the implementation of the bilateral agreements?

Lebanese-Syria relations go back to thousands of years and are bound by strong ties, so a division cannot occur between the two countries, despite recent and continuous Western efforts aiming at fermenting this division between the two peoples. I am pretty sure that Lebanon will make it through this stage with great wisdom.

A Lesson to be Learnt

Stats&#

LBP 618 billion is the total value of the additional credit accounts opened by the 2004 budget to cover various expenditures. The accounts were insured by Treasury bills, thereby leading to an increase in the country's public debt.

362 different medals for various grades and accomplishments are expected to be awarded in 2005. In 2004, this figure lay at 303. Moreover 136 medal holders are expected to be upgraded, an increase by 2 medals from 2004. The main increase was in the medals granted in the National Legion of Cedars Knight Rank.

LBP 67 million is the total amount of monthly compensations given to the President and the four members of the Organizing Committee for Telecommunications in Lebanon. The President is paid LBP 15 million and each member is paid LBP 13.5 million.

LBP 520 billion is the estimated value of the real estate that belongs to the government in Ain el Mreiseh. In addition, LBP 25.3 billion were paid for the purchase of 3 adjacent properties. This is the value of the land which was initially allocated for the construction of the Culture and Conferences Palace before the project was cancelled by the Council of Ministers in the beginning of 2005.

History provides lessons which decision-makers and citizens can benefit from, so as to learn from mistakes past and think about the future. Thus, we have chosen to investigate the events of 1840 and 1976, might it be of assistance to the Lebanese in attempting to avoid slipping into turmoil once again.

“...the downfall of Bashir the Second in 1840 was a result of the crystallization of the conflict between the Maronites, who advocated his return, and the Druze, who would not forget the ruler's wrongdoings. The spark which ignited the conflict was the shooting of a partridge in Baaqline, on the land of a Druze sheikh from the Abi Nakad family, by a Maronite hunter from Deir El Qamar.

This mundane event, which occurred on the 13th of October 1841, angered the Abi Nakad clan, who joined forces with the Al Jumblatts and Al Imads, and attacked Deir El Qamar, burning the village down. This conflict spread to encompass the areas of Chouf and Jezzine, and within a few days went on to include Al Damour and Al Naameh on the coastal line, and specifically targeted Al Shehab properties in Baabda and Hadath. Simultaneously, Shibly Al Iryan, a Druze sheikh from Howran, attacked the town of Zahle, even though its Roman Catholic townsmen played a minor role compared to the Maronites under the rule of the Egyptians. Chaos and war between the Druze and the Maronites soon spread to the different areas of Mount Lebanon, which forced the residents of Deir al Qamar to ask for the protection of the European consulates, who in turn requested a Turkish intervention. So Salim Basha, the Ottoman Wali in Beirut, and his troops invaded Mount Lebanon and took over the strategic locations, to control the situation.”

(From the book The Historic Political and Constitutional Formation of Lebanon, Part I, written by Edmond Rbatt).

“Gunfire erupted at quarter to nine from Martyrs' Square, and was countered by shots from the Riyad Al Solh area. People panicked and started running in opposite directions. Rumors of kidnappings and killings circulated and the streets of the capital were emptied of people and cars. The radio requested that all citizens stay in their houses until further notice. At 10:30 a.m. it was announced that fix and mobile military checkpoints had arrested around 150 people, whose names were given to the conjunction committees. At 1 p.m., security forces started collecting bodies from the streets. It found 16 bodies in a Peugeot garage, but the conjunction committees were not able to determine the number of people killed or abducted. Later that night when the co-ordination committees convened they were informed that the number of casualties in Beirut and its suburbs amounted to 41, a number which subsequently increased to 56. It was also informed that the number of people abducted was at least 300, of which 120 were released. (An-Nahar, Sunday, December 7, 1975- events of Black Saturday).

Armed battles spread throughout Beirut from the hotel axis to Martyrs' Square, towards Bshar Al Khoury Street, and several areas nearby. Meanwhile, violent confrontations were taking place in the Ras El Nabe'- Sodeco - Achrafieh - Mathaf - Mohammad El Hout - Hay El Syrian - Al Burjawi area. Gun battles returned to the Chayah Aain El Rimmaneh front, and the areas of Matahen Abd Al Karim Khalil- Mar Maroun - Ghandour- Al Mazda (Al Nahar, Wednesday, December 10, 1975).



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