

History of Lebanon Part 2

By far the most famous dispute in Lebanese history is their civil war fought between 1975 and 1990, yet ones that are equally as important and much less known were also fought between 1948 and 1975, creating the foundation for the conflict in 1975. Despite these conflicts, Lebanon would continue to upkeep and maintain the jewel of its country, the city of Beirut, which through the 50's, 60's, and 70's was considered the economic and social capital of the region. It would rival its European and American counterparts, which granted its nickname: The Paris of the Middle East. Beirut granted the country a new level of hope, where cultural and religious divides would be unified through a new-found nationalism and economic prosperity. Yet there would always be thorns in Lebanon's side; extremist religious and political officials that would advocate for the strict separation of Muslim and Christians. From the 1940's to the turn of the millennium, Lebanon has been a country of facades, of alliances and arguments; it was, through this era, both the gateway and the barrier for the West to enter the East.

In 1952, General Nasser propelled his uprising in Egypt into a region-wide movement, ultimately resulting in the Six Day War against Israel, which would force Lebanon and its neighbors into a embarrassing loss. Nasser's movement in Egypt in 1952 caught the attention of the rest of the Middle East, especially the poor, and propelled Lebanon into a sort of Marxist uprising between the poor and the rich and the Sunnis and the Maronites. At the same time, Lebanon's president, Camille Chamoun, was a leader who flirted with the rules of Lebanese politics and was heavily criticized by both Maronites and Sunnis. (61, Mackay [mirror]) Chamoun was ultimately threatened by the rising power of Nasser and signed the Eisenhower Doctrine, protecting Lebanon from Egypt by forging a defensive alliance with the United States. (62, Mackay [mirror]) By the summer of 1958, Chamoun pursued a second term in office, something against Islamic principles and Lebanese law. Almost instantly a rebellion started and Chamoun was forced call for help from the Americans, who dropped 15,000 marines and ended the conflict in halting the Nasserist Sunnis. (336, Cleveland) Leadership would shift in

September of 1958 from Chamoun to the Lebanese military commander Fuad Shihab, who planned to fuse both the rich and poor and Muslims and Christians together into a unified state. Shihab's leadership would set up a foundation for the next twenty years, generating Lebanon's short lived golden age.

Despite its name, the Golden Age of Lebanon was hardly a period of peace and prosperity for the Lebanese; instead it simply highlights the period of time when Lebanon was not completely embroiled in conflicts. With the highlight being the Six Day War in 1967, the Lebanese were continuously involved in a handful of minor conflicts (especially its minor civil war in 1958) despite Beirut's economic and political success. It was through Beirut that the West saw the Middle East; a town filled with French pastry shops and hotels, coupled with exotic Arabic food and drink; casinos and beaches next to Lebanese music and culture. A tourist attraction in every definition of the phrase, Lebanon was "not an Arab city. It was a city caught in a cataclysmic division between its Arab roots and its Western patina. A façade maintained by Beirut's political and economic establishment, who themselves had consciously rejected their Arab roots, choosing instead to copy the West." (5, Mackay [House]) It was a city that perfectly hid and personified the issues surrounding the conflicts of Lebanon; of Chamoun's choice to side with America, on the conflicts between Christians and Muslims. A façade to the conflict broiling within, and as with all facades, the one Beirut held was one that neglected the troubles resulting in Lebanon's explosion.

It was, however, named the "Golden Age" for a reason; "in a part of the world where people were rapidly losing their liberties, Lebanese freedom became proverbial and provided the basis for genuine stability...[and democracy]." (Khalif, 155) Unlike its counterparts, Beirut did find itself to become extremely profitable and attractive to the West; it was a unique city that generated wealth, despite its location and despite the political stirrings and troubles surrounding it. Keeping in mind that movements from Nasser in Egypt and Mossadeq in Iran often led to violence and foreign intervention (such as various invasions by the West into the Sinai, or the handful of wars against Israel), the zuama of Lebanon were able to keep a lid on political and cultural bickering, maintaining relative peace through the positives of confessionalism, because "at the peak of the Golden Age...Lebanon's political system [was] more riddled by tribalism than

ever before. It was a tribute to the negotiating skills of the zuama who kept it all together” (138, Mackay House)

Still, in the same way that confessionalism remains both the safest hope for stability and greatest source of violence for Lebanon, the economic prosperity for Lebanon in its golden age was a double-edged sword. “The Lebanese economy...was largely shaped by external fortuitous events such as the Arab-Israeli conflict...the nationalization of Arab economics... While such exogenous factors account for Lebanon’s momentary and lopsided prosperity, they made it vulnerable to external shocks.” (155, Khalif) Post World War II Lebanon sought to recreate itself through conflict within its neighbors, utilizing rare partnerships between Sunni and Maronite merchants to create an open and service based laissez-faire economy; it was a chance to see a conflicting Arab world while sitting on sunny beaches sipping umbrella drinks. (156, Khalif) It isn’t to say that Lebanon profited off conflict intentionally; there was conflict with Lebanon itself. It simply represents the fact that the zuama were able to reach political agreements from 1958 to 1975 to settle political matters for the greater good of Lebanon. It is through this time that we see in Lebanese history that nationalism takes a legitimate form in policies. However, while the zuama were able to unify save confessionalist politics, the poor that the zuama represented saw only the rich reap the economic benefits. (156, Khalif) By 1975, a combination of economic disparity, brewing cultural hatred, and international affairs had transformed paradise into hell.

The Lebanese Civil War is perhaps one of the most confusing and complex conflicts in all of history. While most wars fought in the 20th century were fought between two clear-cut sides, Lebanon’s war was fought by multiple sides and the entire conflict was split in four segments, with four different periods of peace and two treaties signed and one major UN resolution passed. While 1975 represents the pinnacle of cultural hatred and economic disparity within the borders of Lebanon, it is the international pressure outside of Lebanon that pushes the conflict into a full fledged civil war. The war technically starts on Black Saturday, December 6th, 1975, when four Maronite Christian officials were assassinated; which ultimately resulted in the shutting down of Beirut, but really was built up from 1967. Following the Six Day War of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in 1967, many Palestinians moved to Jordan, which set up the

foundation for Black September, which was a conflict between Jordanian citizens and displaced Palestinians. Black September resulted in Yassar Arafat and his Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) moving 300,000 refugees into Lebanon, the only place they had left to go. (383, Cleveland) The PLO's presence meant that in Southern Lebanon was constantly attacked by Israel and that Palestinians in Lebanon constantly attacked Israel. While the Maronites attempted to do what the Jordanians did in kicking out the Palestinians, the Lebanese Sunnis had a different view of their Palestinians compatriots. When assassinations of major Palestinian officials in Beirut came up, the Sunnis exploded violently in support of the Palestinians, drawing the clear lines between cultural differences created by confessionalist politics, splitting the country for good. (383, Cleveland) When the Israelis invaded and crossed Lebanese borders, Lebanon was not unified enough to put out an effective counter-attack; essentially, Lebanon was just a playground for troops from the PLO and Israel. (90, Mackay (Mirror))

The Palestinians movement into Lebanon sparked a revolutionary mindset into many different groups. The Sunnis followed the PLO, recognizing their religious unity with the Palestinians. The Shias created their own groups, which would later spawn into Hezbollah with Syrian and Iranian support in the 80's. The Maronites would fight for their own autonomy, and perhaps the only group that fought, or believed for the matter, of a national, Lebanese identity. The Druze had their own revolutionary and independent aspirations, taking up arms against all other groups, which were rounded off by the secularists; who ultimately served the interests of sectarian groups through small alliances. By the spring of 1984, there were no fewer than 186 warring factions in Lebanon, each with different ideologies and motivations for fighting an armed struggle. (240, Khalif) By December of 1975, the PLO had begun to fight with Maronites, only to end the conflict by June, just to see the Maronites began to fight Lebanese Sunni's. (385, Cleveland) The war was devastating, especially to the Christians, who were now the clear minorities and by May of 1976 the Maronites asked Christian president Suleiman Frangieh to request for Syrian aide (Fisk, 81). Syrian intervention of 40,000 troops ultimately led to the signing of the first treaty, splitting Lebanon into three different sections, the South of Lebanon and the West of Beirut left for Muslims and Sunnis. The

East of Beirut and Mount Lebanon led by the Christians and the Syrians in control the East of Lebanon.

By March 11th, 1978, violence had erupted again when the Palestinian political party Fatah attacked Israelis in Tel Aviv. Operation Litani, launched by the Israelis, had one purpose, to drive the Palestinians back further into Lebanon. By this time, Ariel Sharon; the leader of the Israeli Army, had found allies in the SLA, or the South Lebanese Army, a militia of Christians created out of the fragment of the disbanded Lebanese Army who allied themselves to the Israelis out of convenience and because they had the same enemy. In the north, the Syrian Army would clash with the Phalanges, Maronites led by Bashir Gemayel; the man Ariel Sharon mandated to be President after a peace accord was signed between the Israelis and Palestinians. (274, Fisk) Eight days after Fatah's attack, the UN would pass resolution 425, ordering Israel out of Lebanon and placing their own troops by the 23rd (169, Mackay (Mirror), which would spark violence between the SLA in place of the Israelis and the UN troops. (138, Fisk) Conflicts and assassinations would continue, with many Palestinian extremists assassinating Israeli officials, resulting in counter attack of the PLO in Lebanon; or if there were attacks on Maronite officials; it would be coupled by a massive Sunni attack on the Christians. All the while, Beirut was split by districts, where soldiers would fight for individual streets and waypoints, hoping to avoid bombs and artillery dropped by the Israelis and their allies. Once a city of prominence rivaling in beauty with the likes of Paris and the economics of New York, Beirut had essentially been torn down, a refugee camp for Shia's escaping from their torn up homes in the south, and a battle ground for a conflict hardly native to Lebanon's own interest. On May 17th 1983, Israel, Lebanon, and the United States finally signed the May 17 Agreement, hoping to forge a peace.

The May 17 Agreement was seen by the Muslim world as an agreement forced upon the Sunnis within the region; it forced the Syrians out to the north, stopping the fighting with the Maronites, but not for the Israelis in the south. It was seen as move inspired by the West, especially with the presence of Americans. The conflict only got worse afterwards; with the development of Hezbollah of the Shias, increasingly violent and dominant Druze positions, and the complete collapse of the Lebanese Army and American Marines, the situation seemed doomed to fail. By 1988, Michel Aoun, a

Christian, was taken in to be Prime Minister, a position supposed to be held by the Sunnis according to the National Pact. Aoun would ultimately be backed by Saddam Hussein who wanted to fight off the Iranian supported Hezbollah. (135, Mackay (Mirrors) In 1989, the Taif Agreement, largely looked upon as the treaty that ended the Lebanese conflict, was created by a group of Arab nations and recognized by the Lebanese Parliament. Besides disbanding the majority of militias, the Taif did major things to restructure Lebanese politics, the most important being the shift of having a majority of Maronites in the Parliament to a 1 to 1 ratio of Christians and Muslims, and gave more power to the Sunni Prime Minister. (138-140, Mackay (mirrors)) While most Lebanese officials seemed to accept the agreement, Michel Aoun would not, and would be put into a power struggle until he was dropped by Saddam Hussein and ultimately defeated by the Syrians. The fighting was hardly at an end in Lebanon and the Syrian, Palestinian and Israeli presence could still be felt, however the infighting between various sectarian groups had stopped by 1990, and Syria was able to maintain a peace over most sectarian violence.