7 From Playground to Battleground: Preludes to Civil Strife

"When the ox falls butchers abound"
— Lebanese Proverb

"My friends, because my horse is stolen, you have hastened one and all to tell me my faults and shortcomings. But strange, not one word of reproach have you uttered about the man who stole my horse."
— Khalil Gibran, *The Forerunner* (1920).

"And each of the factions was able to enlist some outside power on its behalf. All this turned Lebanon into a miniature model of all the Middle East conflicts rather than, as it had been historically, a symbol of their resolution."
— Henry Kissinger, *Years of Renewal* (1999)

". . . . Reprisals as vital lymph. . . . they help maintain a high tension among our population and army. . . . The long chain of false incidents and hostilities we have invented. . . . The many clashes we have provoked.
— *Sharett's Diary* (1955)

Throughout its checkered history, Lebanon's enigmatic, Janus-like character has never ceased to baffle. It has been a source of bewilderment, as we have seen, to both its detractors and admirers. A few of those struck by its perplexities have been candid enough to caution against facile analysis and hasty inferences. Two veteran observers, separated by more than two decades of eventful history, advance almost the same sobering caveats. Writing in 1963, to account for the "seeming vitality and durability of the country's confessional democracy," J. C. Hurewitz prefaces his essay by stating that Lebanon by then was already an "oddity, not in the Arab lands alone, where representative government has almost vanished, but among the world's democracies. It beggars summary analysis" (Hurewitz 1963: 487).

Two decades later, William Quandt accounts for the trials and errors of American policy in Lebanon: "Lebanon is a harsh teacher. Those who try to ignore its complex realities, whether Israeli grand strategists, ill-informed optimists sitting in Washington, or ambitious Lebanese politicians usually end up paying a high price." (Quandt 1984: 237).

Lebanon's peculiarities, both enabling and disabling, have aroused the relentless curiosity of seasoned scholars, diplomats, and travelers. Leading humanists of all shades and persuasions have been equally perplexed. To many, in fact, Lebanon has been more than just a "harsh teacher." Successive Generations of writers, essayists, poets, artists, and intellectuals, who have at times evoked more poignant imagery than the predominantly dispassionate treatment of scholars, have discovered their voice and honed their literary imagination by elucidating its distinct features and multilayered history.

Two decades of free-floating hostility and treacherous bloodletting has inevitably transformed the nature and tone of their writing. It is in this existential sense that Lebanon has been much more than a scabrous and humbling tutor. Lebanon's literary output has always been imbued with a strong and enduring romantic tradition sustained by an idealization of the country's scenic beauty and captivating natural endowments. This idyllic pastoral image did not only find expression in nostalgic reveries, popular culture, artistic byproducts and artifacts. Much of the country's folklore, as well as its national icons, and historic identity, are also suffused with such imagery. Peasant village life, with its emblematic values of simplicity, integrity, genuine caring, and neighborliness, are treated as paragons of virtue. Indeed, in dark times such romanticization becomes understandably pronounced. It serves as final refuge and sources of reenchantment.

Lebanon's most prolific and creative talents have, off and on, continued to dip into this seemingly undepletable legacy as sources of renewed inspiration and national consciousness. Of course to Khalil Gibran, Mikhail Naimy, Amin Rihani, Charles Corm, and other successive generations of those who struggled with the pathos of exile and diaspora, such writing was elevated into an accomplished art form. It became the undisputed canon consecrated in national textbooks and high school anthologies. For a while, generations of students were exposed to little else.[1]

In post-independence, as Lebanon started to grapple with some of the unsettling manifestations of uneven development and socioeconomic transformations, a generation of writers broke away from such romanticized visions and started to expose (often dramatize) symptoms of injustice, confessionalism, corruption, and poverty. Even urbanization and city life were

perceived as threats to the sublime authenticity inherent in pastoral Lebanon. Lebanon, in other words, was being "denatured," hence the longing to preserve, if not return, to such an idyllic or imagined past, became much more pronounced.[2]

By the 1950s and 1960s Lebanon was being "denatured" by a new set of threatening incursions and "borrowed" ideologies: Baathist, Socialist, Arabist, and Islamist. Of course, while such ideologies were not uniformly perceived as threatening or borrowed, they nevertheless altered the nature and character of the discourse. This was also happening at a time when Lebanon, and especially Beirut, was quickly becoming a vibrant cultural and intellectual epicenter, an open publishing house or forum for experimentation, and a permissive haven for political dissidents. The radicalization of Arab politics was bound to reverberate within such a setting. While welcomed by some, this political Arabization of Lebanon was dreaded by other Lebanese "Essentialists" and diehards who saw in it a precurser to the foreboding prospects of rendering their country more vulnerable to such zealous and impassioned radicalization. Christian minorities in particular harbored apprehensions of becoming increasingly marginalized, if not besieged, and outnumbered by their Muslim compatriots who entertained broader allegiances to pan-Arab nationalist sentiments.

Reactions to such apprehensions, at least intellectually, were manifold. Three are perhaps the most visible. First, the fear of being engulfed or marginalized led, naturally, to some extreme essentialist views often assuming (as in the writings of Said Akl, Charles Malik, Kamal al-Hajj, and their political offshoots) a regression into putative and self-defensive parochial forms of territorial and communal identities. Here, all forms of "Maronism" and "Lebanism" harked back to the historic mystique of their unique heritage in Mount Lebanon, pregnant with all symbolism and rituals of religious and communal solidarities. Second, and not necessarily essentialist, this reimagining of the Lebanese identity began to assume a "folklarized" character, particularly in popular music, folk dance, musicals, and dramatic performances that reenacted village squabbles, heroic affrays, and brawls or else commemorated national and seasonal events. Presentations were always in colorful idiom employing vernacular and colloquial expressions and rendered romantically and lyrically. The Rahbbani-Feiruz duo emerged as mentors and role models to a nascent but talented coterie of popular artists. This "folklorization" of popular entertainment evolved into a transcending and homogenizing national pastime. It cut across ideological and communal divisions and served to coalesce the Lebanese. The products, in fact, became major cultural exports often overtaking the popularity of Egyptian produc-

tions. Thirdly, at the level of high culture, this same transcending feature was apparent in the experimental and inventive intellectual output of a growing circle of gifted writers. A decentered and avant-garde literary and aesthetic imagination in art, poetry, theatre found a receptive and engaging audience. The writers, at least initially, skirted ideological and polemical discourse. They also avoided the idealized and folklorized pastoral image of Lebanon so rampant at the time. Instead, their main concern was to carve a new role to safeguard uncensored venues through which their creative energies could best capture the spirits of the modern age.[3]

The outbreak of hostility in 1975 quickly changed the character and tone of writing. Of course the stunning defeat of the Arabs in 1967 and the deplorable plight of uprooted Palestinian refugees had already released a barrage of acrimonious and indignant writing decrying the complicity of the Arab regimes for the *Nakba*. To such disinherited liberals Beirut became the last sanctuary, the only cultivated outpost in a desolate wilderness. To Adonis, the disgraceful defeat was symptomatic of the "sterility of a senile and collapsing sand-culture" (al-Udhari 1986: 64). The war in Lebanon, particularly after the Israeli invasion and the siege of Beirut in 1982, provided another shameful context. Once the nerve center of Arab creativity and cosmopolitanism, Beirut was being overrun by shibboleth and banality. By then, as Alcalay put it, "what was cultivated reverts to wilderness: the desert finally overruns the city, paradoxically making an end to growth and a return to the primal place of purification" (Alcalay: 1993: 99).

When Beirut fell, its ugly fate, treacherous as it was, seemed deserving. At least this is how the outcome was viewed by those keen on establishing a link between the internal dislocations and the city's downfall. Rather than treating Lebanese as a victim of regional and global rivalries, they were much too eager to assign blame to its internal foibles. The country became, as it were, fair game for assault and heedless bashing, much like the fate of the aggrieved villager in Gibran's *The Forerunner* cited in the epigraph at the opening of this chapter.

This tension between the vibrant Beirut of old and its foreboding descent into anomie invited some of the most compelling and graphic queries. Some were perplexed by the dual and alternating character, the "flourishing/suffering" component of Beirut's composite profile. Cooke employed the "Bitch/Godess" metaphor to highlight the city's downfall from the "jewel of the Mediterranean" to a shameless center of debauchery and prostitution (Cooke 1988: 15–16). Alcalay speaks of the "Poetics of Disaster" to catalogue how a cultivated city is overrun by the wilderness of a desert culture (Alcalay 1993: 99). To Liza Manganoro (1998) it is akin to a "Hannibal Lecter war:

beauty and civility turned monster." Others, probed into the criminal/victim paradox to assign culpability and vindicate the blameless. Nizar Qabbani, the gifted Syrian poet, talked about the destruction of society from within. Shamefully he decried:

> *Our enemies did not cross our borders*
> *they crept through our weaknesses like ants.*
>
> <div align="right">(Qabbani 1986: 98).</div>

The answer to Qabbani, such aspersions aside, remained ambivalent. While he confesses to the guilt of partaking in the process of violating Beirut, the city remains nonetheless a scapegoat:

> *Beirut, Queen of the world*
> *Who sold your bracelets inlaid with sapphire?*
> *Who seized your magic ring, and cut your golden nails?*
> *Who sacrificed the joy sleeping in your green eyes?*
> *Who slashed your face with a knife, and threw fire water on your luscious*
>   *lips?*
> *Who poisoned the water of the sea, and sprinkled hate on the pink*
>   *shores?*
> *We've come to apologize . . . to confess*
> *That we were the ones who, in tribal spirit, opened fire on you*
> *And we killed a woman . . . called Freedom*
> *Whence come your harshness, Beirut . . . you were once as gentle as a*
>   *houri?*
> *How did the gentle bird become a wild night cat?*
> *How did you forget God, and return to idols . . .*
>
> <div align="right">(Qabbani 1994: 498–99).</div>

Poetic license aside, "how did the gentle bird become a wild night cat?" One might restate this by invoking a less poetic but more pedantic and heuristic metaphor? How did Lebanon's "playground" become a "battleground"?

This is not, clearly, so trifling a query. Those of us who had witnessed the early rounds of the war were baffled by what seemed to us then as a sudden outpouring of hordes of "wild cats" striking havoc in the streets of Beirut. Perhaps we had only seen the "gentle birds" and were amazed that they had turned into voracious wild cats overnight? Nor could we have imagined how these seemingly benign outbursts could beget such relentless outbreaks of murderous destructiveness and reckless brutalities.

Were they not there? How could we not have seen them? What kind and whose playground was it? At what point did the playground become a battleground? Were we not, as Qabbani is confessing, the ones who, incited by our own bigoted tribalism, had "sprinkled hate on its pink shores . . . and killed its freedom?" Or, and perhaps more likely, could it not be that some of the forces which were incensed by the "playground" had exacerbated its own abuse and demise, thereby expediting its transformation into a "battleground"? A proxy playground is more likely, after all, to beget its own proxy battleground.

The chapter, more explicitly, will address three related dimensions by way of elucidating the connection between the divisions within society and how they were being compounded by salient socioeconomic and political transformation and how, in turn, these find expression in social protest and varying forms of collective violence: (1) What dislocations and disparities, both vertically and horizontally, were exacerbated by the changes Lebanon was undergoing during its golden/gilded epoch? What social strata, communities, regions stood to benefit or suffer the most from these inequalities? (2) What were the issues and grievances that aroused public discontent and mobilized groups in movements of collective protest? What specific forms did such mobilization assume within the various communities? How and why do they differ? Was the protest consistent with the socioeconomic grievances or was it politically and ideologically mobilized by concerns unrelated to indigenous sources of unrest, perceptions of neglect, and relative deprivation? (3) Finally, when and why did grievances and social unrest take more belligerent manifestations? When and why, in other words, did civil violence begin to degenerate into incivility?

To answer these questions is, by any measure, a tall order. They have all been explored and fully documented, from various perspectives, by the prodigious volume of writing Lebanon continues to invite. The intention here is not to provide yet another such comprehensive analysis. Instead, the effort is much more succinct and eclectic — to focus on those features which can best elucidate some of the leading premises of this exploration; namely, surrogate victimization, the reassertion of communalism, and the drift into uncivil violence.

I have been suggesting all along that Lebanon's bloody history with collective strife is largely a reflection of the destabilizing interplay between internal divisions and external dislocations. The internal divisions are naturally a by-product of deep cultural cleavages inherent in sharp communal, confessional, and other primordial and segmental loyalties. Juxtaposed to these are the uneven socioeconomic and cultural transformations which

have had a differential impact on the relative standing of the various strata and/or communities.

The external sources are also discordant and divisive in two respects: Unresolved regional conflict, incited by ideological rifts and personal rivalries, will always find receptive grounds among disenfranchised and neglected groups. These are often used as wedges or sources of political patronage or leverage. Impetuous ideological shifts in adjacent regimes, be they pan-Arabist, Ba'thist, Socialist, Islamist or the resurgence of Palestinian resistance reinforced communal and sectarian cleavages. They also served, as we shall see, as proxy platforms for the radicalization of discontent and social unrest. More penetrable, perhaps, are the global transformations engendered by the proliferation of long-distance interconnectedness, media technologies, and the diffusion of life styles, ideas, migrant labor and monolithic and irresistible marketing and consumerism. Here, as well, local groups markedly differ in their resistance or adaptation to such threatening incursions.

The discordant elements of these inside/outside dialectics have always accentuated the asymmetry within society and threatened its tenuous balance. Accordingly, successive governments, despite commendable efforts, have been in varying degrees ineffective in coping with the mounting tensions and imbalances generated by such inevitable dislocations. There is nothing unusual in this kind of problematic interplay. Lebanon, as we have been suggesting, has always fallen victim to some of its disruptive consequences. Three such defining elements stand out: The resilience and tenacity of Lebanon's primordialism, inveterate foreign incursions, and heightened belligerency. By elucidating first the origin, survival, and changing character of such cleavages, one can better gauge or assess their interplay with the other two defining elements; namely, foreign patronage and uncivil violence.

Radicalization of Discontent and Fear

Incipient and early symptoms of radicalization of grievances were doubtlessly associated with the tumultuous political changes in neighboring Arab states. A fateful watershed was 1963, when radical Ba'thist regimes had gained power in Iraq and Syria. Nasser's charisma, though tarnished by the collapse of the UAR, still retained much of its luster. Prominent Muslim leaders, partly to capture the appeals Nasser continued to inspire among disillusioned masses, were still paying homage by seeking his audience in

deference to the hopes the Egyptian leader espoused on behalf of Arabism and Arab unity.

Except for the abortive coup of the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP) on New Year Eve of 1961, incidences of political unrest and collective protest until 1969 were infrequent, relatively nonbelligerent, and generally not symptomatic of internal socioeconomic disparities or grievances. It is interesting to observe that the highest incidence of political violations (about 22) during that 10-year interlude involved the suspension or confiscation of newspapers or the arrest of editors. Virtually all of these occurred between 1961 and 1963. By then Lebanon was already serving as a refuge for political, largely left-wing, dissidents fleeing oppressive regimes in Syria and Iraq. Its fairly open and liberal press became a vehicle for mobilizing dissent. Hence, the bulk of the charges and indictments against the press involved arresting or suspending newspapers and editors for publishing material deemed injurious to adjacent regimes or detrimental to relations with them. For example, *an-Nahar* was suspended for ten days on May 3, 1961 for publishing a cartoon depicting Lebanon as a Syrian Province. *Al-Hawadith* was suspended on July 22, 1963 for publishing an offending caricature of an Arab State. Newspapers and their editors were also targets of direct hostility. Seven of all fourteen explosions during the decade of the sixties were directed against their premises and headquarters. One of the two political assassinations during this same period was that of Kamel Mroueh (May 16, 1966), editor of *al-Hayat.*

Strikes were the second-largest category of political unrest. Almost half of the 20 recorded strikes were organized by students and dealt with or were incited by political regional issues. For example, American University of Beirut's (AUB) students called for a strike (December 18, 1960) in protest of the suspension of thirteen of their colleagues for participating in a demonstration commemorating the anniversary of Algeria's independence. Likewise, their strike of February 22, 1961 was to observe the UAR anniversary. As early as March 13, 1963, AUB students were already protesting violations of the sanctity of Palestinian camps. Only one student strike (organized by Lebanese University students on February 16, 1965) dealt with purely academic issues. Protesting students were demanding a single building to house all proposed five faculties.

The bulk of labor strikes involved government and public-sector employees such as dockyard workers, public school teachers, judicial assistants, and telephone operators in protest of low wages, poor work conditions, or dismissal for union organizing. IPC workers and Lebanese University teachers

resorted to a hunger strike in protest of arbitrary dismissal. Student demonstrations were also generally benign and nonconfrontational during this period. Two were nonideological, calling for reform of school syllabi in Tyre or in support of teachers' demands for wage increases. The remaining five were political in character, such as those in support of Palestinian commandos or to protest the visit of the Sixth Fleet or a proposed visit of the American Ambassador (Dwight Porter) to Tyre on May 7, 1967.

The incidence and intensity of armed clashes were also infrequent in number and moderate in magnitude. Of the dozen reported by internal security, seven were tribal in character involving factional rivalries or local feuds in regions of the Beqa', Baalback, and Akkar. All the remaining five were political or ideological clashes. Of these only two — those between the Kataib and PPS in the wake of the latter's aborted coup — reflected internal political disputes. The rest were militant confrontations between Nasserites and their adversaries among Baathists and Communist coalitions. One in particular, a telling precursor of other such episodes, took place in Kahalé on March 5, 1961. A convoy to vehicles on route of Damascus to congratulate Nasser on the third anniversary of the UAR was attacked as it drove through the Maronite village.

All other manifestations of political unrest during the early 1960s were associated with fallouts from the aborted attempt of the PPS to seize power. Hence 1962 witnessed successive efforts by security forces to pursue, arrest, and disarm fugitives, to dissolve illegal political parties, and to deport dissident groups suspected of being involved in the coup.

The stunning defeat of the Arabs in the Six Day War of 1967 more, perhaps, than any other event was instrumental in reshaping the character and consequences of the local, regional, and global dialectics. Israel emerged as the dominant single power in the East Mediterranean. The U.S.-Egyptian power-balance, which had dominated the region, was profoundly redrawn. Since the U.S., unlike the role it played in the Suez Crisis of 1996, was not directly involved in the outcome of the fighting, it could now pose as a more neutral arbiter in the ensuing postwar debacle. Nasser's resounding defeat and the humiliation of the regular armies that the Egyptian and Syrian regimes had been building up for more than a decade, left a gaping sense of dishonor and bitterness. The resurgent popular enthusiasm, incited by Palestinian resistance as an emancipatory movement, received an added spur. To embittered masses, the purity and idealism of armed struggle as a purging and rejuvenating source of insurgency, seemed like a timely antidote to national defeat and humiliation.

The soul-searching weeks and months following the *nakba* witnessed a surge of popular support for the spirit of armed struggle and the sacred rights of return to one's homeland. While the Lebanese in general were unanimous in their support of such rights, they differed markedly on the issue of how armed resistance can be "regulated" without compromising the sovereignty and security of the state. Maronites, in particular, even at a time when the enthusiasm for emancipatory and nationalist consciousness was at its height, expressed serious reservations about Palestinian militancy. Indeed, the initial euphoria the movement inspired as a popular "street" phenomenon, must have provoked the added fears of the traditional Maronite establishment. No such hesitation, at least initially, was visible among large segments of the Muslim communities. As we shall see, it was not until late in the 1970s, when destabilizing consequences of Israeli reprisals became much too disruptive, that Shi'ites in the South started to veer away from the initial solidarity and support they had displayed for the guerrilla movement.

Within such a setting, the Palestinian issue was not only destined to wreak havoc on the country's political system, it was also instrumental in radicalizing sources of discontent and ultimately transforming the country into a proxy war zone. In the late 1960s, the government was already embroiled in a relentless series of Palestinian-related crises at the very time manifestations of socioeconomic unrest and mobilization were becoming more visible. From then on, as Helena Cobban has persuasively argued, the Palestinian and internal Lebanese issues became "inextricably intertwined" (Cobban 1985: 106). When radical students at the American University of Beirut were protesting tuition increases or Henry Kissinger's visit in connection with the proposed Arab-Israeli peace settlement, they employed Palestinian tactics. Indeed many of the students at the time were supporters of the newly emerged Rejection Front. Likewise, when factory workers were protesting inflation and cost of living increases, they too raised Palestinian rhetoric. Finally, Shi'ite villagers invoked Palestinian slogans to mobilize their outrage against the savage Israeli onslaughts in the South.

As will be shown later, the South and subsequently the southern urban fringe of Beirut proved to be a particularly propitious site for nurturing progressive and radical mobilization among ravaged shi'ites. Of course, symptoms of heightened politicization had appeared much earlier in the South. The Communist Party, for example, had by the early 1940s already made inroads in villages such as Bint Jbeil, Nabatieh, and Marjayoun (for further derails see Shararah 1996). The rising tide of Arab Nationalism, Socialism, and Ba'th, during the 1950s and 1960s, found receptive grounds for party

recruits in the urban quarters of Sidon and Sour. Marouf Saad and Mussa al Sadr drew upon this same pool of disgruntled but listless masses to sustain their political leadership and nascent social movements late in the 1960s. (see Ajami 1986; Norton 1987; Halawi 1992). It was, however, the emancipatory ethos whipped up by Palestinian resistance movements that resonated most ardently with the profound feelings of neglect and dispossession Shi'ites were suffering at the time. At least initially their political strategies converged.

This interplay between growing internal tensions and outside pressures was, by the early 1970s, becoming more pointed, even contentious. Internal tensions were first apparent in the growing rifts within the ranks of Franjieh's government. It was more though than just a reflection of commonplace fractious and petulant cabinet politics. The President's feudal and clientetistic political leanings and predispositions made him, at times, unreceptive to some of the progressive and liberal reforms of his "youthful" cabinet.[4] Manifestations of economic prosperity, particularly the construction boom and increase in the growing imports of luxury products, were marred by rising inflation and heightened economic woes of the underclass.

On their own these would not have amounted to much had they not been exacerbated by mounting external pressures. Three, in particular, were becoming more grievous. First, adjacent Arab regimes, in the throes of 1967 *nakba*, were getting more boisterous and radicalized. Second, the fledgling PLO was still basking in the afterglow and idealism of an emancipatory movement. Hence, its appeals among disenfranchised strata, disgruntled politicians and growing mass of agitated students were becoming more strident. Finally, and as usual, the most onerous pressures came from the South. Israeli reprisals to commando operations (always much more immense and disproportionate in scale) devastated the southern regions and heightened the exodus of villagers. Makeshift shelters in Beirut's urban fringe swelled with displaced refugees. Early in 1970, the official report of the regional governor estimated the number of refugees from southern borders at about 23,000. It is then that the gap between the privileged few and the masses became more stark.

It is not within the scope of this study to explore the full impact of the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 on the destabilization of Lebanese society or its direct involvement in inciting and exacerbating the magnitude of hostility and warfare in the region. This has been ably and amply done elsewhere.[5] I only wish to underscore in passing the magnitude of Israel's avowed expansionist strategies, particularly how it managed to establish and

stockpile one of the most sophisticated technologies of human destruction, reinforced by the glorification of terror and revenge as the moral and sacred values of its national identity. Aggression in Israel has always been rationalized as "reprisal operations" vital for the national security and survival of the state. In Israel virtually everything and anything is justified on the basis of Jewish survival and security. Israel's policies, from ethnic dominance and outright discrimination and violation of human rights of Arabs and other minorities to campaigns of terror and provoked aggression, are legitimized on such pretexts. Sharett, one of its many military heroes, was forthright and unequivocal in this regard. He felt no need to restrain or mince his words when he recorded the following in his Diary: "Reprisals are the vital lymph. . . . they help us maintain a high tension among our population and army. . . . the long chain of false incidents and hostilities we have invented. . . . the many clashes we have provoked (As cited in Rokach 1980: 7). He goes further to spell out the threefold purpose of such deliberate and unprovoked aggression — namely to push weak Arab states into confrontations, to demoralize their population, and to disperse Palestinians.

The very establishment of the state of Israel has been predicated and sustained by the victimization of others. It began its existence by cutting all links between northern Palestine and the rest of the Arab world, blocking economic and trade routes with Arab Africa, and devastating the economy of South Lebanon. Its expansionism has also involved ruthless measures for annexing and appropriating entire villages. In the process up to 1.2 million Palestinians have been uprooted, evicted, and displaced from their homes. In 1948 close to 900,000 Palestinians were living in the territory that became Israel. Of these, it is estimated that 750,000 were expelled (Masalla 1997: 21). In 1949, 17,000 bedouins from the Negev area were expelled to Egypt. Another 2,700, a year later, were uprooted to Gaza. During the 1967 war, 340,000 were uprooted. Another 12,500 were expelled shortly after by Israel (for these and other estimates see Harris 1956: 109; Zureik 1997: 24–30). The UN partition plan had allotted the Jewish state 5,500 square miles. By the end of 1955 it had expanded to about 8,000. After the 1967 war the number leaped to 30,000 (Petran 1987: 66).

Lebanon, of course, stands in stark contrast to virtually everything epitomized by Israel as a confessional, exclusionary, and highly militarized state. Lebanon's consociationalism condoned pluralism and was much more open and tolerant of coexistence between religious communities. As such, Lebanon was an irritant, especially to Israel. Michel Chiha was, perhaps, among the first Lebanese intellectuals to caution how Lebanon's very existence has

always stood as a threat to Israel. (Chiha 1964: 124). At least, Israel's justification for its own exclusionary ethnicity — that coexistence between different confessional groups is impossible — becomes unsupportable.

Throughout its history, as we have seen, Lebanon served as a refuge and asylum to a wide spectrum of itinerant and dissident groups. Its fairly open liberal democracy, laissez faire economy and uncensored press were both envied and feared by all its neighboring monolithic regimes. Above all, Lebanon pursued a pacifist national security policy and was clearly the least militarized. Its essentially professional army of about 19,000 — with not more than 100 tanks and 150 artillery and anti-aircraft guns, an air force of 24 fighter aircraft, and a navy of 5 patrol boats — was symbolic and could not pose a threat to anyone (see Hanf 1993: 161).

In this regard, Lebanon is antithetical to Israel's glorification of military might or soldiering as a vector for national identity or political resocialization. Prewar Lebanon had no mandatory program of conscription or military service. Members of the military claimed little status or social prestige and clearly not role models for aspiring adolescents or enterprising college graduates eager to entertain unconventional career options. A military career has never been highly coveted. Indeed, the bulk of the volunteers were drawn from the least privileged strata of society.

So enamored were some Lebanese with their country's neutrality and pacifist overtures that Lebanon's "weakness" was, at times, transformed into "strength"; a ploy for diplomatic posturing and preserving the country's defenseless borders. During much of its checkered history, the diplomatic guarantees for Lebanon's neutrality appeared to work. At least until the mid-1960s, Israel's border with Lebanon was its most peaceful, because it regarded Lebanon as its least hostile neighbor. The Arab states also respected Lebanon's decision not to participate militarily in the struggle against Israel. This is at least what came to pass at the 1964 summit conference of the Arab League in Cairo. The Khartoum summit, three years later, had also reconfirmed this by deciding that Palestinian guerrilla activities could be launched only from Jordan, Syria, and Egypt. Lebanon was expressly excluded.

Israel's expansionist strategies and deliberate efforts to destabilize and provoke confrontations with vulnerable and bickering confrontation states changed all this. Lebanon was inescapably drawn into the fray. The Cairo Accord of 1969 had of course stipulated general guidelines and spelled out strict limits on military operations. It required, for example, that PLO military command should "co-ordinate" with the Lebanese Army "without compromising the overall sovereignty of Lebanon." The guidelines, like all their subsequent attempts to impose any restraints on their freedom of operations,

were at best rhetorical. Given the nascent emancipatory mood, Palestinians felt, as Helena Cobban (1985:109) put it "exuberantly free to express their nationalist sentiments." A collision course with the Lebanese Army or security forces became inevitable.

The first such episode occurred in 1964 when the Deuxième Bureau arrested guerrillas before they could infiltrate into Israel. One of the suspects (Jalal Ka'wash, a resident of Ein el-Hilweh camp near Sidon) died under detention. Security forces claimed that Ka'wash had committed suicide. Palestinians and the growing mass of Lebanese sympathizers rejected, of course, such allegations. Government was accused of torturing detainees and a string of boisterous demonstrations were staged in protest. Shortly after Yassir Arafat and some of his closest associates were held for forty days on the grounds they had provoked confrontations between Lebanon and Israel because of unrestrained Fatah activities. From 1965 on, such contentious and explosive episodes became more frequent and volatile. There is no need here to provide another chronicle of the pattern and escalation of such belligerent encounters.[6] Two overriding realities, however, need to be emphasized. The efforts of Palestinians to extend and consolidate the base of their operations in Lebanon, and the spiraling character and magnitude of Israel's reprisals.

Once again the Six-Day War stands out as a critical threshold. Until then the bulk of operations of Fatah within Lebanon consisted of transporting guerrilla commandos through on route from Syria to Israel. After 1968, when Palestinian resistance broke down in the occupied territories, the PLO shifted the base of their operations to southeast Lebanon. Because of the influx of armed Palestinians into the Arkoub district, the area swiftly acquired the label of "Fatah Land." The adjoining mountain tracks, through which reinforcements and supplies filtered, was dubbed "the Arafat Trail" in a reference to the notorious "Ho-chi-Minh Trail." The cycle of violence, from then on, became relentless.

As usual, Israeli reprisals, provoked or otherwise, were always infinitely more savaging in their impact. When commandos shelled a Kibbutz close to the border, Israel retaliated by devastating entire villages with heavy artillery. On December 28 1968, guerrillas lobbed rockets at an Israeli plane on a runway in Athens. The Israelis responded by landing commando units at Beirut's International Airport, blew up oil-tanks and destroyed virtually the entire fleet of Middle East Airlines planes on the airport tarmac.

Of course in this, as in other subsequent reprisals, the intention was to compel the indisposed and reluctant Lebanese government to clamp down on the growing freedom of Palestinians to mount terrorist attacks from Leb-

anon. The outcome was always the opposite. By their indiscriminate assault on civil targets and innocent villages, Israeli incursions only served to arouse public uproar, stir up waves of solidarity with the Palestinians, and provoke a chain of cabinet crises.

In the spring of 1969 the Lebanese army tried, but without success, to force the Palestinians to withdraw from the border villages so as not to give Israel further pretexts for retaliations. Doubtlessly the Palestinians' resistance was made possible by the timely support they received from Syrian-backed Saiqa troops. In repeated clashes with the Lebanese Army they prevailed and were able to secure their hold on refugee camps. More compelling, the alliance between the Palestinians (particularly Habach's Popular Front) and the Lebanese left proved astonishingly effective in soliciting the political support of recalcitrant Muslim politicians. It must be noted here that Kamal Jumblat, as Minister of Interior during the final months of Charles Hilu's troubled presidency, announced in December 1969, that the Parti Populaire Syrien (PPS), the Community Party, the Arab Nationalist Movement (ANM), the Ba'th Socialist Party, and the Armenian Tashnak and Hentshak, could resume operations. All these suspended parties became hefty fodder for mobilization.

It was also then that the popularity of the Palestinian resistance, as a source for reclaiming damaged national identities and correcting social injustices, was growing. At a time when other Pan-Arab, ideological and party loyalties were being undermined, the idealism inherent in selfless nationalist struggle and sacrifice emerged as a source of collective euphoria. Most striking was the transformation in the standing and public image of the refugee. The camp subculture, which in the past had festered with muted hostility and bitterness, received a rehabilitative jolt. The lethargic youth of the camps, who more perhaps than other hapless refugees had suffered all the pathos and indignities of dereliction and marginalization, now found themselves catapulted into enviable role models. Once meek and fearful, treated with a mixture of contempt and pity, they now brandished their newfound powers with assertiveness, often bordering on arrogance.

Since refugee camps dotted strategic locations and points of intersection along the urban sprawl, they could easily disrupt daily routines and become sources of fear, lawlessness. and public disorder. This they did, often with abandon and total disregard for the havoc they wreaked on the host country which had been very sympathetic and accommodating in nurturing the aspirations as well as the organizational and logistical demands of a revolutionary movement. Their violations were abusive and intimidating. They

imposed roadblocks, detained, abducted, and kidnapped arbitrarily on the pretexts that suspects posed a threat to the ideals of the revolution. They occupied, seized, appropriated property, illegally levied impositions, and breached ordinary human rights of innocent citizens.

Carefree and peripatetic Lebanese, averse to such treatment by legitimate forces of law and order, were more than incensed that they had to succumb to the intimidations of Palestinian refugees. Maronites, in particular, and other communities already outraged by the stipulations of the Cairo Accord, felt all the more infuriated and deceived. If the state could not ensure the security of its own citizens, they felt justified to take over such responsibilities, let alone safeguarding their country's violated integrity and national sovereignty. Much like the Palestinians, they were left with no choice but to shape their destiny with their own hands. In no time private militias and paramilitary organizations became, as we shall see, a regular appendage to political aspirants and communal leaders.

During 1971 and 1972, violations committed by Palestinian organizations, as reported by the Lebanese Army Intelligence Unit, reached as high as 787 episodes. As shown in table 7.1, carrying arms and explosives, kidnapping civilians and imposing checkpoints and roadblocks, witnessed the sharpest increases.

Late in the 1960s the incidence and form of violence started to change. Parallel to, perhaps associated with the above, the pattern of violence contrary to what Winslow asserts was becoming more focused and directed rather than random and sporadic (see Winslow 1996: 172). For example tribal clashes, common in the early sixties, disappeared by the late sixties. All armed clashes between civilians and security forces were either a by-product of attempts by security forces to impose controls on Palestinian commandos or a direct response to protests against such restrictions. Such confrontations were also not confined to Beirut and its suburbs but extended to other regions.

Armed clashes between security forces and Palestinian commandos reached their peak by the late sixties. In 1969 alone, 33 such confrontations occurred. The clashes, if measured by the growing incidence of casualties, were definitely becoming much more belligerent. They also displayed evidence of outside incitement and provocation. Even seemingly peaceful demonstrations protesting government restrictions on guerrilla operations were deflected into violent confrontations. On April 23 and 24 simultaneous demonstrations in Tripoli, Saida, Baalback, Sour, Mt. Hermon, and Nabatieh resulted in more than fifteen casualties and many injuries. Funeral proces-

TABLE 7.1 Violations Committed by Palestinian Organizations 1971–1972

Type of Violation	1971	1972	Total
Carrying unlicensed Weapons and Explosives	44	85	129
Shooting and gun fire on different occasions	49	54	103
Attacks and Threats to kill civilians	30	30	69
Rocket attacks on Israel from Lebanese Territory	30	34	64
Infiltration into restricted military areas	30	31	61
Attacks on Army and Internal Security	23	30	53
Training and arming of Lebanese Citizens	28	23	51
Arrests and Kidnapping of Civilians	17	33	50
Public display of Weapons	20	23	43
Armed Robberies	27	9	36
Shooting at Lebanese Military Targets	8	18	26
Establishing Checkpoints and searching cars	3	16	19
Premeditated Killing of Civilians and Military	9	9	18
Refusal to stop at army checkpoints	9	4	13
Occupying houses by force	5	7	12
Unlicensed buildings	6	4	10
Collecting contributions by force	7	2	9
Attacks on Lebanese government authorities	—	8	8
Bombing and use of explosive devices	—	—	3
TOTAL	345	442	787

Source: Lebanese Army Intelligence Report, dated 3–7–1973

sions of fallen victims always provoked added violence and heightened public tension. A state of emergency was imposed, schools suspended, and public demonstrations prohibited. On May 5, 1969 more than 200 Ba'athists were deported because of their presumed guilt in participating in the disturbances. Infighting between and among the various splinter commando organizations started to surface.

By 1973 the more radical wings of the PLO began to display their powers with greater aplomb and bravado; thereby disclosing the impotence and vulnerability of the government. The political disarray in Lebanon, particularly at a time when border villages in the South were relatively quiet and the economy was fairly prosperous, must have become apparent to Israel. On April 10, 1973 without any overt provocation, Israeli commandos conducted their second adventurous raid into Lebanon during which three prominent Palestinian leaders were assassinated. This embarrassing assault,

much more than the relentless ground invasions the Israeli Army had already launched in 1972, provoked a flurry of incriminations, mayhem, street agitation and, as expected, a succession of government crises.

Outraged Palestinians displayed their fury with greater arrogance and disregard of state security and low and order. They were not only avenging their fallen leaders but also becoming increasingly apprehensive about the dread of being "liquidated." The inaction of the Lebanese Army, the silence of their Arab "brethren," and the complicity of foreign powers only served to compound their fears of that impending threat. By then, particularly after the Black September in Jordan (1970), Lebanon was the only site from which they could operate (protected by Cairo Accord and the Melkart Protocol) with some measure of freedom and autonomy.[7]

Palestinians were naturally keen on consolidating their position in Lebanon, which had become their last remaining stronghold. Their defeat in Jordan coincided with two other changes. The Assad regime in Syria was subjecting the PLO to more stringent controls and Sadat in Egypt was already embarking on his policy of reconciliation with Israel. In Lebanon, on the other hand, the sociopolitical setting seemed considerably more favorable. The emancipatory activism heralded by Palestinians was receptive, as we have seen, to the emergent spirit of dissent taking root among at least three rather vociferous segments of society: the displaced and unemployed, a radicalized student movement, and those spirited portions of the middle-class and intelligentsia, who were driven by public and social consciousness but barred from full political participation in the political system.

Indeed, Lebanon at the time was not only the Palestinian's bastion of last resort, it was an ideal terrain for the kind of base support the PLO was trying to cultivate. Their notorious camps, situated at strategic locations in nearly all major cities, were granted by the Cairo Accord's quasi-extraterritorial rights. Because of the sympathies, reliable allies, and public enthusiasm they managed to cultivate among segments of the society, they were able to translate this into more substantial autonomy and freedom of operations. Lebanon's fairly advanced and open communication and diplomatic networks were also exploited effectively. Even Edward Said, who normally is not very charitable in his assessment of Lebanon's political culture, described Beirut as a "substitute for Palestine" and went further to single out the Lebanese period in the history of the Palestine national movement as the "first truly independent period of Palestinian national history" (Said 1983: 5–8).

To consolidate their position, the PLO reached out to align itself with those strident segments of society. More decisive, they were able to extend

their cover of the Cairo Accord to other radical groups. In effect, this meant that all militia organizations in Lebanon could now employ the same pretext to arm themselves. From then on, as Kamal Salibi put it, Lebanon was thus "transformed into a powder keg with a fuse attached" (1976: 69). Such dreaded portents of militancy were, in fact, visible in the steady escalation of clashes between Palestinians and the Lebanese Army. What was more ominous, they unleashed a campaign of terror of its own.

The first serious clash between Palestinians and armed Christian militias took place in March 1970 in the Maronite village of Kahhalè on the main highway to Damascus. The episode, clearly an outcome of the highly charged atmosphere, came to epitomize many other such seemingly unprovoked confrontations. A Palestinian convoy, escorting the body of a fallen guerrilla killed by hashish smugglers, was caught in a traffic jam as they drove through the village. Somehow, a clash ensued with the villagers and the army, leaving two dead and a score of wounded on both sides. On its return trip from Damascus the convoy fired into the air as it drove through the village. The firing, intended as a gesture of defiance, was mistaken for an attack by the vigilant villagers. After the first episode, rumors were rife that such an attack was imminent. The watchful villagers shot back, killing ten Palestinians. Heavy fighting broke out between Palestinian and Kata'ib commandos which, for the first time, was extended to involve the Tel al-Za'tar camp and the predominantly Maronite suburb of Dekwaneh. It was then that Bashir Gemayyel the younger son of the veteran Kata'ib leader, was kidnapped and held in Tel al-Za'tar. Though released after a ten-hour captivity, the episode provoked a week of heavy fighting. It ended with the intervention of the Egyptian and Libyan envoy but left in its trail a mood of deep suspicion and hostility.[8]

Two critical byproducts are worth noting. First, the radicalization and growing militancy of the Palestinians was beginning to create internal divisions and widen rifts within society. Second, there was a profound change in the character and magnitude of violence. Fairly restrained and ordinary forms of collective protest often turned into contentious confrontations. Street demonstrations, personal squabbles, and clan feuds were deflected into confessional and communal hostility. As early as March 1970, evidence of sharp polarization among the governing elite became more visible. While the Kata'ib and their traditional allies were demanding that Palestinians observe restrictions demanded by the Cairo Accord, many of the Sunni Muslim leaders, along with Kamal Jumblat and his left-wing coalitions, were reluctant to impose any such restraints on commando activities. The Kata'ib were

legitimately alarmed by the heightened militarization of Palestinians. Successive consignments of heavy armaments, via Libya, Syria, and Iraq, had, in effect, transformed refugee camps into full-fledged military bases. With the tacit support of the Lebanese Security Forces and the Deuxième Bureau, the Kata'ib stepped up the level of confrontation with the Commandos.

I dwell briefly on this episode because, in several recognizable features, it prefigured what was to become a recurrent scenario: A volatile political setting provokes a confrontation which almost always is followed by contradictory accounts as to how and why the fighting started. In this case, Palestinians claimed they were victims of a deliberate ambush while the Kata'ib argued that they had simply fired back in self-defense. Those uninvolved in the fighting attribute the episodes to mysterious or unidentified parties (agents provocateurs). If groups from among the fighters are held suspect, they are dismissed as "uncontrolled" or "unrestrained" elements. Either way, casualties on either side provoke a round of bloodier and more widespread fighting. Foreign intervention manages to arrange a cease-fire which turns out to be no more than a brief respite for combatants to brace themselves for another round of vengeful bloodletting.

From then on the incidence and intensity of tension and violence, at virtually all levels of society, rose sharply. As Palestinians sustained their guerrilla operations, Israeli reprisals became more savage, thereby pressuring the Lebanese Army to clamp down on them. As early as 1965, incidents between the Lebanese Army and the guerrillas were already becoming frequent. From the very beginning the resources of the army and security forces, let alone their will to do so, seemed much too deficient to monitor the long Syrian–Lebanese borders or to impose effective controls on their operations within the camps or across the southern borders. Even restrictions demanded by the Cairo Accord could not be enforced, given the sharp schisms and rifts within the movement. For example, the government in May 1970 had prohibited the PLO from firing rockets from Lebanese Territory or from bearing arms in towns and villages. Fatah and Saiqa complied with such expectations. The Popular Front, however, which had rejected the Cairo Accord, refused to comply. More grievous, even if the Lebanese government was willing and able to rightfully protect its sovereignty, it was restrained by the mounting pressures from Arab states with radical and more conservative regimes alike.

The test of wills between the army and the Palestinians did not always end up in favor of the former. President Franjieh's resolute determination was tested early in his term (October 5, 1970) before he even had formed

his first cabinet. A plane with a contingent of Arab Liberation Front guerrillas from Baghdad landed at Beirut airport. The Cairo Accord prohibits air entry. Guerrillas are allowed to travel only by overland routes through Syria. Accordingly, they were not permitted to disembark. After some heady and tense negotiations, the plane was forced to return to Baghdad. It was clear though that in such ensuing encounters the government might be hard pressed to uphold its legitimate rights. Indeed, all subsequent attempts to tame Palestinians (by force or through diplomatic accords), proved inconclusive. All military confrontations and showdowns between them became humiliating as the failure of the Lebanese Army was more demonstrable.

As several observers have recognized, Lebanon was trapped between two inherently contradictory logics: the natural rights of Palestinian struggle could not be reconciled with the concerns for sovereignty of the Lebanese state. Any attempt to accommodate the two, as John Cooley (1979) put it, is as futile as squaring the circle.

As state powers continued to erode, the incidence and magnitude of unrest was bound to deteriorate further. As noted earlier episodes of major conflict were already increasing in the early seventies. After the Yom Kippur war of 1973 and the stunning Israeli raid on Beirut, the number increased to 23. By 1975 it leaped to 83, and by the outbreak of hostilities it escalated further to 171 (see Winslow 1996: 175–78 for further substantiation). Even manifestations of seemingly benign socioeconomic tensions grew fiercer and more unmanageable. Students went on strike over issues of tuition, while academic programs were deflected into sporadic agitation and aimless turmoil.

In December 1973, radical students with the tacit support of the Rejection Front, organized a strike to protest the first visit in Henry Kissinger's shuttle diplomacy on behalf of the flawed Arab-Israeli peace process. A strike in Tripoli by students protesting the high cost of living escalated into a bloody confrontation with the police. Like other such episodes, the event sparked off a quick succession of violent street demonstrations. Kissinger's second visit (February 1974) provoked more combative and radical flare-ups. The student strike organized for that purpose was transformed into sporadic rioting and bloody clashes with security forces. The same disruptive fate befell other student protests. For example, the general strike they called for reforming and upgrading the academic standards of the Lebanese University also ended up in bloody clashes with security forces.

Similarly, labor protest over wages, cost of living, working conditions, and amendments in labor legislation were politicized and derailed into confron-

tation with security forces. Most symptomatic of the change in the character of violence was the appearance of acts of terror largely unrelated to internal tension. Associated with this was the proliferation of clandestine organizations and undercover splinter groups who often claimed responsibility for the terror. For example, on October 18, 1973, explosions off the Lebanese coast damaged the underwater cable network between Beirut and Marseille, thereby cutting off communications with Europe and the U.S. On the same day, a group of gunmen, members of a so-called Arab Communist Organization, raided the Bank of America and held customers and staff hostage. They demanded, among other things, the payment of $10 million in support of the Arab war effort.

In the fall of 1974, as the security situation deteriorated further, public disorder became more rampant. Bomb explosions, vandalism, robberies, abductions became almost daily events. Most striking were the abductions and political assassinations of Arab rather than Lebanese political figures. For example, all five successful or attempted assassinations that took place in 1972 involved dissident Arab politicians (e.g. Umar Suhayri, Tunisian opposition leader; Muhammad Umran, former Syrian Deputy Premier) or Palestinian activists (e.g Ghassan Kanafani, leader of PELP; Anis Sayegh, director of Palestine Research Center; or Bassam Abu Sharif, Sayegh's Successor). Gangs of local thugs and their henchmen rose to assert control over urban quarters and remote regions, thereby challenging state authority and the powers of traditional political *zu'ama*. In Tripoli, for example, Ahmad al Qaddour took control of the city's old quarter and terrorized the entire city. Likewise in Akkar, the Ba'rinis in al-Funaydiq challenged the powers of the traditional feudal clan. Other such factional rivalries erupted elsewhere and sparked off a succession of armed clashes and street brawls, particularly in Beirut and Saida. In July 1974, a series of squabbles flared up between smugglers, and this escalated into armed confrontations between the hostile suburbs of Beirut; namely, Tel-al-Za'tar and Dekwaneh.

The most disruptive, of course, were the escalating clashes between the Palestinians and the army and, eventually, between the Palestinians and Christian militias. After the 1973 October war, the PLO was under pressure to suspend their commando operations. They sustained nonetheless their militant struggle within the occupied territories. This only served to compound Israel's massive reprisals thereby heightening tension in the southern villages and Beirut's teeming suburbs, where most of the uprooted refugees ended. As the pressure mounted—both because of the ferociousness of Israeli reprisals and the anarchy incited by the unrestrained behavior of dis-

sident Palestinian groups and their radical allies — political polarization within society became sharper and more boisterous. The Kata'ib and Chamoun's National Liberation Party called for a referendum on the presence of Palestinians in Lebanon. Muslims and their left coalitions denounced the government, particularly the repressive strategies of the army, in foiling the Palestinian struggle.

Increasingly, Lebanon found itself caught between two treacherous options: Destroy the armed presence of PLO and risk the grim prospects of Christian–Muslim confrontations. Entrust the army with the task of defending the South and suffer the inevitable humiliations of a military showdown with Israel. Typically, Lebanon opted for inaction and played for time. Time, however, was hardly a bearer of good tidings. As usual, external events aggravated the magnitude of internal disarray and conflict. Though Lebanon did not participate in the Yom Kippur war of 1973, it paid heavily. Its radar installations in Baruq, which Lebanon had placed at the disposal of Syria, were destroyed. Israel also resumed its merciless incursions into the South thereby abetting another influx of embittered refugees into Beirut. More taxing, as Syria's disengagement agreement with Israel took effect, Lebanon was to bear from then on the bulk of the beleaguering fallout of the Arab–Israeli conflict.

The Arab league conference in Rabat, convened in October 1974 to allay differences between contentious Arab states, did just the opposite. Like most other such summits the disagreements became sharper. The Rabat summit recognized the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestine people. It also resolved that no further separate accords were to be concluded with Israel. Sadat, however, went ahead and signed another disengagement agreement with Israel (the infamous Sinai II). This outraged both Syria and the Rejection Front. Lebanon was destined to become, once again, the hapless proxy victim and surrogate battlefield for resolving Intra-Arab rivalries over the Palestinian crisis. By the time Presidents Assad and Franjieh met in Chtaura (January 7, 1975), to contain the gathering storm in Lebanon, the tension was already getting out of hand.

Israel is always more than ready to up the ante. A massive attack by Israeli troops devastated the border village of Kfar Chouba. Shortly after, separate units within the Rejection Front — the Iraqi-sponsored ALF and the Popular Front — attacked the Lebanese Army at different points, including the military barracks in Tyre. Typically, Arafat blamed a dissident PFLP faction for the incident. The Kata'ib lambasted the PLO for its failure to control recalcitrant and fractious elements and, hence, held it accountable for deepening

anarchy and the sources of polarization and communal hostility in the country.

Both belligerent groups were seething with hostility and fear: Palestinians were dreading the portents of another "Black September" in Lebanon; the Christian parties were perhaps more terrified by the prospects of a shift in the locus of power toward the Palestinians and their leftist allies. Like combatants in a mortal showdown, the conflict started to degenerate into a fateful life and death struggle. The conflict over "divisible" socioeconomic and political rivalries were deflected into belligerent and deadly struggles over the "indivisible" issues underlying primordialism, national sovereignty, collective identity, and communal loyalties. The inflammable tinder needed just a flint. Anything, in fact, could have sparked off the fire. The spark, as usual, needed little by way of provocation.

Outbreak of Violence: Early Rounds

Chronicles of Lebanon's protracted hostilities often single out distinctive violent episodes such as the fishermen's strike in Saida in February 1975 and/or the Ain al-Rummaneh bus incident of April 1975 as flash points; the forerunners of the menacing cruelties of armed conflict. One observer goes as far as to dub the bus incident as the "Sarajevo" of the Lebanese civil war to draw analogies to comparable incidents associated with the onset of World War I (Khalidi 1979: 47). Dramatic as such claims are, they are not altogether inappropriate. Given the critical issues underlying these events and the momentous, bloody forces they unleashed.

The fishermen's strike is practically a textbook case of a genuine protest movement being transformed into a violent confrontation. Struggling underprivileged fishermen of Sidon and other coastal towns had called for peaceful demonstrations to mobilize opposition against the licensing of a large enterprise (Proteine Company) to mechanize Lebanon's fishing industry. The fishermen perceived such threatening prospects as monopolistic incursions by foreign capitalists attempting to undermine their traditional sources of livelihood. Much like other deprived groups in the country, they were already bitter about the government's neglect and failure to resist or contain the devastations wrought by Israeli incursions into the South. That Proteine was formed by a joint Kuwaiti and Lebanese capital under the chairmanship of none other than Camille Chamoun deepened their bitterness and sense of injustice. The popular media depicted the crisis, with all

the hackneyed Marxist clichés, as a confrontation between "small fish and the devouring sharks." At the time, around 40 percent of Sidon's population and nearly half of its fishermen were of Palestinian origin. The inhabitants and much of the city's political cultures displayed progressive leanings and were sympathetic to Palestinian resistance and other radical and populist movements.

For some obscure reason, the peaceful demonstration degenerated into a riot during which Marouf Saad, Sidon's most popular leader, was killed. In this, as in subsequent confrontations between government troops and protesters, the intervention of the army in suppressing popular uprisings, given its impotence in protecting the country's defenseless borders, generated acrimonious parliamentary debates and precipitated a succession of cabinet crises. In addition, the disruptive episodes reawakened communal hostility and suspicion and sharpened the incipient polarization within society.

Challenging or questioning the role or sovereignty of the army, almost always invites divisive reactions. The Muslim establishment, with its radical and Palestinian allies, hastened to denounce the army as a fascist, exclusive instrument of Maronite power and supremacy. They decried its role in suppressing liberties and legitimate grievances of dispossessed groups while failing to protect defenseless villagers from Israeli raids. They called for the dismissal of its commander-in-chief and an overhaul of the army structure to permit a more equitable participation of non-Christian recruits and officers. Maronite factions, and their Christian supporters in East Beirut, responded by organizing their own demonstrations in support of the army. They proclaimed March 5 as "Army Day," denounced efforts to undermine its sovereignty, and cautioned against the growing intervention of Palestinians in Lebanon's domestic affairs.

In short, the Sidon episodes and the violent convulsions they unleashed gave vent to many of the unresolved issues which were to precipitate and sustain subsequent rounds of civil strife: regional and sectarian socioeconomic disparities, Israeli incursions and the radicalization of Palestinian refugees, Muslim demands for a more equitable share of power and political participation, state impotence, and the role of the army in maintaining internal security.

The havoc provoked by the Sidon disturbances had hardly been contained when another seemingly spontaneous incident, bloodier and much more grievous in magnitude and consequences, was thrust on an already charged political situation. As Pierre Gemayyel, leader of Kata'ib, was at-

tending (April 13, 1975) a new Maronite church in Ain al-Rummaneh, the Christian suburb of east Beirut, a car with unidentified assailants and concealed license plate broke through a Kata'ib security line and fired at the Sunday church congregation. Four men, including two of Gemayyel's personal bodyguards, were killed. Later in the afternoon of the same day a bus with twenty-eight passengers, mostly Palestinian commandos returning to their camp of Tel-al-Za'tar from a parade in one of the Muslim quarters of West Beirut, somehow drove back through the same anxiety-ridden area. Outraged Christian militias were in no mood but to assume that the armed Palestinians in the bus were coming back to provoke another confrontation. In vengeance, they ambushed the bus and massacred all its passengers.

The reactions, both politically and militarily, were instantaneous and sweeping. That same evening leaders of the National Movement (a coalition of Arab Nationalists, leftists, and other radical Muslim factions and parties under the leadership of Kamal Jumblat) met and called for the dissolution of the Kata'ib party and the expulsion of its two ministers from the cabinet. At the same time, PLO leader Yassir Arafat appealed to Arab heads of state to intervene and foil what he termed a conspiracy to disrupt Lebanese–Palestinian relations.

The conflict, given the intensity of recriminations and reawakened communal hostility on both sides, could not have remained a nonbelligerent political discord. It quickly touched off waves of violence. Armed clashes between the Kata'ib and Palestinian commandos erupted virtually everywhere around Beirut. Fierce fighting with rockets and artillery raged for three days. Much of the fighting assumed first the form of shelling and counter-shelling between the Kata'ib forces, perched on the Ashrafieh heights of the Christian quarter in East Beirut and Palestinians in the outlying refugee camps in Tel-al-Za'tar. As the fighting intensified, it soon engulfed adjacent quarters and neighborhoods and displayed sectarian and communal manifestations. Armed Palestinians from Bourj-al-Barajina camp, reinforced by Shi'ites, Communists, and other dissidents, terrorized the predominantly Christian suburbs of al-Shayyah and Haret Huryak. Shops and homes were plundered. Cars parked along the streets were blown up. Business enterprises with known religious affiliations or identities were dynamited. Gangs and unidentified elements took to the streets. They blocked roads and alleyways and committed wanton acts of crime. For the first time passageways of the southern outskirts of Beirut became unsafe.

By the time Mahmoud Riad, Secretary General of the Arab League, arrived in Beirut to mediate a truce, the fighting had already claimed the lives

of about 350 persons. No sooner was a cease-fire secured (April 16, 1975) and life returned to normal, when snipers appeared in downtown Beirut and parts of Tripoli. Business life in both cities came to a sudden halt. As in the Sidon episodes, mysterious "third parties" were held responsible for inciting the violence; with each side attributing the mischievous elements to their adversaries. Typically, the Kata'ib and their allies were inclined to accuse the "borrowed ideologies" of radical extremists and saboteurs of "rejectionist" Arab regimes. Palestinians and the National Movement blamed Maronite "Isolationists" and state agents; part of what was perceived as an international conspiracy to liquidate the resistance as a movement.

As in the Sidon episodes, the bus incident precipitated a government crisis, polarized and deepened hostility between the major antagonists and escalated the level of terror and fear. It also unleashed new forms of violence disclosing, thereby, the communal character of enmity: i.e., targeted kidnapping of sectarian groups, sniping and artillery barrages between neighborhoods and strategically located suburbs. Likewise, the Ain al-Rummaneh episode revealed the volatility of the issues underlying the conflict: Palestinian presence, socioeconomic disparities, and the call for political reforms, the role of the army in maintaining security, and overarching polemics over Lebanon's sovereignty and its national identity. Indeed, the security and reform issues became interlocked.

Existing political parties—i.e., the Kata'ib, Chamoun's National Liberation Party (PNL), Kamal Jumblat's PSP, The Syrian Nationalist's PPS—all stepped up their mobilization by launching recruitment, training and paramilitary campaigns. Maronites in particular, already outraged by an assassination attempt on Camille Chamoun and the kidnapping of Bashir Gemayel, felt ostensibly the most threatened and ardent to arm itself. Chamoun built up a "Tiger Militia" under the leadership of his son Danny. The Franjieh's in Zghorta did likewise under the command of Tony, Suleiman's older son and heir apparent to assume the clan's leadership. Reminiscent of the mobilizing role the Maronite clergy had played during the peasant uprisings and other episodes of communal strife in the nineteenth century, they were more than just covertly active in inciting and organizing armed struggle. Then, as now, they were directly involved in recruiting; in providing material support, and in offering shelter and refuge in times of public distress. More important, they gave moral and spiritual legitimization to acts of violence. No sooner, for example, had the fighting broken out in 1975 than the Maronite monastic orders, under the leadership of Sharbel Kassis, stepped promptly into the fray. Sunni Muslim, Shi'ite, and Druze clerics and religious leaders were equally involved in mobilizing their own communities.

Precipitously many of the original nonsectarian sources of unrest receded and the conflict began to acquire a life of its own and was deflected into directions unrelated to the initial sources of hostility. The fighting also became bloodier and more belligerent as it evolved into a struggle over the "indivisible" and more contentious principles of communal identity, cultural heritage, national sovereignty, pluralism, and sectarian coexistence.