9 From Shakib Efendi to Ta'if

"In cases where conflict is primarily of an ethnic, communal character in contrast to those provoked by economic and/or political issues, the likelihood of a negotiated non-belligerent resolution becomes very slim. Indeed, all communal wars end in blood. There must be a victor and a vanquished before combatants begin to consider negotiation."
—Jay Kaplan, "Victors and Vanquished: Their Post-War Relations" (1988)

"The history we leave behind is painful and hard. We must not forget it but we must not be controlled by it."
—William J. Clinton, "Speech in Vietnam" (November 19, 2000)

This study is predicated on the overarching premise that much of the *displaced* and *protracted* character of collective strife that has beleaguered Lebanon at various interludes could well be a reflection of two other constant features of its fractious political history; namely the radicalization of communal solidarities and the unsettling, often insidious, character of foreign intervention. By probing further into the nature of this interplay one, it is hoped, can better understand when, how and why social strife becomes more belligerent and assumes some of the menacing cruelties of uncivil violence.

Hopefully the evidence provided thus far has shown how some of the socioeconomic disparities, both vertical and horizontal, are often linked to the uneven and asymmetrical developments generated by Western contacts. Naturally, many of the unsettling manifestations of such contacts were unintended consequences. All cross-cultural encounters affect recipient groups differently. For example, Christian communities, particularly during the second half of the nineteenth century, were much more receptive to the secular, liberal, and technological changes associated with Western incursions in Mount Lebanon. Hence the disproportionate socioeconomic standing and privileges they enjoyed were, to a large extent, a reflection of such predis-

positions. For a variety of considerations, they were in a position that allowed them to take fuller advantage of the opportunities generated by such encounters.

Clearly, not all the internal disparities should be attributed to foreign intervention. Nor were they exclusively generated by unplanned and fortuitous circumstances. Foreign powers, by virtue of their preferential and shifting patronage of different communities, must have also contributed to the accentuation of such gaps and dislocations. This is most visible in their direct involvement, often as principal architects of covenants and pacts or in negotiating terms of settlements on behalf of their client groups or protégés. Such willful and deliberate involvement carries their intervention to its ultimate degree. Without exception all pacts in Lebanon, particularly those coming in the wake of armed struggle, were brokered by foreign governments either unilaterally or through their trusted local or regional allies.

Despite sharp differences in their visions, all the foreign powers involved in the various settlement schemes ended up, willfully or otherwise, by consolidating the confessional foundation of the political order. I wish to argue here that the schemes which were fairly successfully (particularly the *Règlement Organique* of 1861 and the *Mithaq* of 1943), had recognized the realities of confessional affiliation but sought to secularize sectarianism in such a manner as to encourage harmonious coexistence between the various confessional groups. In short, they made efforts to transform some of its divisive and pathological features into a more enabling and constructive system.

The *Mithaq*, in particular, managed to contain sources of division by meeting or bypassing those critical differences over the "indivisible" issues of political identity, secularization, and power sharing. Even in the absence of national consciousness over such issues, the collective struggle for independence allowed the various communities to transcend or suspend the atavistic passions aroused by these differences. The conventional forms of mitigating conflict through avoidance or "mutual lies," as they are dubbed by the local political culture, were workable. In other words, as long as the Lebanese continued to skirt over these issues — both the discourse over the issues of destiny (*qadayah al-masir*) and those concerned with mundane matters of everyday life (*qadayah al hayatiyyah*) — their accommodation to the sources and manifestations of divisions became less contentious or problematic. Such accommodation was also rendered more feasible when external powers refrained from exacerbating those differences.

By the mid 1970s it was increasingly apparent that the unsettling consequences of this precarious inside-outside dialectics were becoming more unmanageable.

All five, despite their mixed record, offered Lebanon at various stages in its political history opportunities to experiment with different forms of representative government. More vital, perhaps, they all dealt with the nagging issues of confessional balance, the country's national identity, and its foreign policy in a changing regional and global setting.

The intention of this chapter is to elaborate on these realities by reviewing the record of five such critical landmarks in the political history of Lebanon: the partition scheme of 1843, the *Règlement Organique* of 1861, the creation of the state of Greater Lebanon in 1920, the National Covenant of 1943, and the Ta'if Accord of 1989. The first two came in the wake of bitter communal hostility. The third marked the collapse of the Ottoman Empire following its defeat in 1919. The National Pact (*Mithaq*) of 1943 ushered in Lebanon's independence from the French Mandate. Finally, the Ta'if Accord, still struggling to consolidate itself, put an end to fifteen years of collective strife and proposed reforms that laid the foundation for national reconciliation, the restoration of state autonomy and independence.

The Partition Scheme of 1843

The *Règlement Shakib Efendi* of 1843, as the plan is dubbed by historians of the period, was largely a reaction to problems of Ottoman centralization and growing sectarian tensions in Mount Lebanon. As we have seen, European intervention — particularly on behalf of France and Britain — prevented the Ottoman government from imposing direct control over Lebanon. The efforts, however, failed to reconcile the Druze and Maronites. The five powers, eager to contain the mounting tension between them, agreed in 1843 to a scheme of partitioning Lebanon into two administrative districts: a northern district under a Christian *qa'immaqam* ("sub-governor"), and a southern under a Druze *qa'immaqam*. Each was expected to rule over his coreligionists while being responsible to the local Ottoman governor residing in Beirut. Interestingly, even then the Beirut–Damascus road was seen as a natural divide or demarcation line.

Like other subsequent schemes, it took considerable diplomatic jockeying to bring it about. In fact it was the byproduct of a compromise arrangement between the Ottoman and French proposals, masterminded by an eminent diplomat; Prince Metternich. The French, backed by the Austrians, were hoping to restore the Shihabi Emirate. The Ottomans, along with the Russians, were insisting on the integration of Lebanon into the Ottoman Em-

pire. Hence, they were naturally averse to any scheme that would have promised Mount Lebanon any measure of autonomy.

The double *qa'immaqamiyyah*, like all other partition schemes, was destined to fail. Indeed, it brought forth precisely the opposite of what it was intended to accomplish. Rather than mitigating the sources of religious and confessional cleavages, it ended up by deepening them. According to the partition plan, each sub-governor was to exercise authority over his own coreligionists. The religious composition of the two districts was, however, heterogeneous. Hence, this created the problem of how to treat subjects who belonged to one religious community, but happened to reside under the political authority of another. This was particularly acute in mixed regions like the Matn, Shuf and the Gharb.

To overcome the jurisdictional problems created by the mixed districts, the Porte decided to limit the authority of each *qaimmaqam* to his own territory. By doing so Christians in the Druze districts were denied the right of appealing to a Christian authority in judicial and personal status matters (Kerr 1959: 6–7). As usual, each of the European powers intervened on behalf of their protégés. France, as the protector of Maronites and Catholics opposed the Ottoman plan. Instead, it encouraged the church to remove Maronites from the jurisdiction of the Druze *qa'immaqam* and to place them directly under the Christian one. Britain, eager to safeguard the prerogatives of the Druze feudal sheikhs, was naturally more receptive to the revised scheme. In the meantime, Russia maintained that the Greek Orthodox community of 20,500 was populous enough to justify the creation of a special *qa'immaqamiyyah* (for further details, see Salibi 1965: 63–66).

In the face of such disparate expectations, an arrangement was arrived at whereby Christian and Druze *wakils* would be entrusted with judicial authority over their coreligionists in the mixed districts. Mixed cases, involving Christians and Druze, would be heard jointly by the two *wakils*, who were also empowered, it must be recalled, to collect taxes, each from his own sect, on behalf of the feudal chief.

The outbreak of hostilities in the spring of 1845, barely two years in the life of the partition, finally convinced the Ottomans of the inadequacies inherent in the double *qa'immaqamiyyah*. They were reluctant, however, to resort to a thorough reorganization of Mount Lebanon. Instead, they modified the existing arrangement by settling the jurisdictional problems of Christians living in Druze districts. As shown earlier, the Règlement not only reinforced the confessional proclivities of Mount Lebanon but also enhanced the social and political privileges of its feudal structure. The ar-

ticles of the Règlement were quite explicit in this regard. The sub-governor was to be appointed from the feudal families. The choice was to be restricted to only two families: Abillama for the Maronites, Arslan for the Druze. After consultations with the *a'yan* and the clergy, an elected council of twelve members (two from each of the major six religious communities) was to be selected at large from the people without restriction to birth and status. Yet the Christian clergy had the strongest voice in determining the election, while the Muslim members were appointed by the *wali* of Saida (Harik 1968: 273). Furthermore, in the event that any vacancies were to arise in the council, the heads of the religious sects were to appoint the new members.

Feudal families throughout Lebanon had recognized Shakib Efendi's Règlement as a direct threat to their status and traditional privileges and did their utmost to resist its application. Shortly after his departure, both Christian and Druze feudal sheikhs began "to resort to the old ways and revive old fiscal abuses, much to the distress of the peasants" (Salibi 1965: 73). The abuses, exacerbated by the dislocations generated by the disruptive impact of European industrialization on the local economy, finally culminated in a fresh outbreak of sectarian hostilities.

The Règlement Organique of 1861

As we have seen, the massacres of 1860 were so devastating that they drew the attention of the international community, France in particular, which as a leading Roman Catholic power had for a long time considered itself the protector of the Maronites as fellow Roman Catholics. To ward off European intervention, the Ottomans were eager to dismiss the crisis as a purely internal affair. Accordingly, Khurshid Pasha, the governor of Beirut, succeeded in drawing up a peace settlement between the warring factions, which, among other things, gave the Ottomans increased control over the country. The crisis was almost settled when, only three days after the Druze-Christian peace convention in Lebanon was signed, the Christian quarter in Damascus was, without provocation, attacked and set on fire, resulting in the loss of 11,000 lives. Foreign intervention became unavoidable and imminent.

Through French initiative, major powers — Great Britain, Austria, Russia, and Turkey — convened and decided on intervention. An international commission was set up to fix responsibility, determine guilt, estimate indemnity and suggest reforms for the reorganization of Lebanon.

The political settlement was complex and problematic. Internal divisions and a growing polarization between the two communities were compounded by the divergent plans and intentions of foreign powers. France advocated restoration of an autonomous Maronite principality much like the Shihabi Emirate of the pre-1840 model. Russia mildly supported the French proposal while it was bitterly opposed by Britain, Austria, and Turkey. Britain, it seems, had designs to transform all Syria into a vice-royalty similar to the Egyptian Khedivate, or to partition Mount Lebanon into three *qa'mmaqamiyyah:* Maronite, Druze, and Greek Orthodox. After eight months of extended discussion, agreement was reached on June 9, 1861 on a new organic statute (*Règlement Organique*) which reconstituted Lebanon as an Ottoman province or *mutasarrifyyah* (plenipotentiarate) under the guarantee of the six signatory powers.

At least on paper the Règlement called for some radical reorganization of the country's political, administrative, and institutional structures, along with its geographic boundaries: A Catholic Christian governor (an Ottoman subject but non-Lebanese), designated by the Porte with the approval of the signatory powers, was now to govern Lebanon. He was to be assisted by a central Administrative Council of twelve elected members representing the various confessional groups. Distribution of seats within the Council was purely on a confessional basis; i.e., each of the major six sects (Maronite, Greek Orthodox, Catholic, Druze, Shi'te, and Sunni Muslim) claimed two seats.

The provisions of the Règlement also called for a new geographic delimitation of Lebanon. The country was now stripped of its three major coastal cities (Beirut, Tripoli, and Sidon) and its fertile regions of al-Biqa' and Wadi al-Taym, and divided into seven districts (*qada)*, each under a Qa'immaqam with further divisions into small counties (*mudiriyyat*).

All members of the Administrative Council, judiciary councils, and smaller counties were to be, according to article 11, "nominated and chosen, after agreement with the notables, by the leaders of the respective communities and appointed by the government." Likewise, the administration of local justice involving minor cases was left in the hands of government appointed or popularly elected sheikhs. Ecclesiastical jurisdiction over cases in which only clergy were involved was maintained.

Other than the geographic rearrangement of Lebanon's boundaries and the formal abolition of feudalism, which continued to survive in other forms, the Règlement did not involve a radical redefinition or a qualitative transformation of the social order as in often suggested. In fact, it reinforced the provisions of Shakib Efendi's Règlement of 1845. This is apparent in its

explicit avowal of confessionalism as a basis for distributing seats within the Administrative Council. The architects of the Règlement had no other option at the time. Given the mutual confessional bitterness and suspicion, generated by decades of civil unrest, they sought to maintain a modicum of harmony among the various sects. Accordingly, the most they could do was to fashion an arrangement, which from then on was to become not only the *sine qua non* of Lebanon's political culture, but also its Achilles' heel. They saw to it that no one sect was placed in a position of dominance over another. Hence, in its original form, the Règlement favored straightforward sectarian representation over a more territorial, proportional, or "democratic" representation.

This disregard of the proportional principle of representation was not enthusiastically received by the Maronites, and was a source of unrest and agitation during the formative years of the Mutessarifate. By a twist of historical irony, the Maronites themselves subsequently became resentful or hostile when other sects, particularly Sunnis and Shi'ites, made similar claims for numerical representation. Since they were then the most populous group in the mountain, the Maronites favored a system of representation consonant with their numerical or territorial distribution. It must be recalled that in the 1860s they formed close to 60 percent of the Mountain's population (Akarli 1993:10). By contrast, although Shi'ites once had substantial pockets in the central and southern regions of the Mountain, their numbers diminished significantly by the mid nineteenth century. Largely because of the suppression they were subjected to by the Sunni potentates of Saida and Tripoli, they dispersed to regroup in less hostile regions. In the 1860s they constituted less than 6 percent of the Mountain's population (see, among others Hourani 1986).

The designation of an Armenian Catholic (Dawud Pasha) as the first *Mutesarrif* was intended as a compromise appointment. By 1864 it was apparent that the Règlement needed drastic revisions, if the growing tension between the *Mutesarrif* and the Maronite community of the North were to be mitigated and controlled. Once again, the signatory powers intervened, each advancing a proposal intended to give its favored protégé or client group added advantage. The French sought a reconsideration of the confessional formula and proposed the allotment of seats in the Administrative Council on a territorial basis giving one seat for each of the seven districts. By outwardly opting for more "democratic" representation, the French were hoping to give the Maronites a guaranteed opportunity for increasing their seats on the council.

The British and the Russians were not eager to endorse the French

scheme. The former, because under a territorial representation the most that their Druze clients could gain was only one seat in their stronghold of the shuf; the latter, because their Greek Orthodox clients were also not likely to gain more than one seat in the Kura district.

Strong opposition and months of debate persuaded the French to modify their principle of territorial divisions and to accommodate a greater measure of sectarian representation. The final formula that emerged embodied both these principles and proved instrumental in shaping the political life of Lebanon. The council was now to be composed of twelve members: four Maronites, three Druze, two Greek Orthodox, one Greek Catholic, and one from each of the Sunni and Shi'i communities.

This compromise arrangement was acceptable to both the signatory powers (particularly France, Russia, and England) and their confessional protégés in the Mountain. It maintained a delicate balance between the Uniate, Muslim, and Druze representatives, and gave the Greek Orthodox, in the event of a sectarian split, the decisive votes; something Russia was angling for. Confessionalism, in short, became firmly rooted into Lebanon's political system.

The Règlement Organique had recognized the confessional and pluralistic realities of Mount Lebanon but carefully worked out a formula that avoided the political subordination of one sect to another. In doing so it restrained the outward expression of confessional violence and managed to ensure a modicum of sectarian coexistence. In no sense, however, should this be taken to mean that confessional loyalties had been diluted. In fact, religious sentiments came to assume a more intense role in sustaining identity and communal solidarity. Other than the growing disparities in wealth and life style, which accentuated the differences between the various communities, there were at least three major manifestations of the persistence and growing dominance of confessionalism.

First, both in its original and revised forms, the Règlement Organique had, by institutionalizing confessional representation on the Administrative Council, confirmed the sectarian foundation of society. More important, perhaps, the broad religious conflict was compounded by a more diffuse, often pernicious, intersectarian rivalry, as each sect sought a greater share of power and privilege. Indeed some of the governors of the *mutasarrifiyya* openly admitted and took special pride in inciting such discord. Wasa Pasha, the third governor (1883–92), was unrestrained in making such a confession in one of his letters to the Porte: "Since it would be politically expedient to have the religious heads of the Maronite community at logger-heads, I paid

due attention to this important matter and managed to bring about a degree of discord and mutual aversion among them." (Akarli 1993:50). Such conflict, however, rarely degenerated into belligerent hostility or assumed manifestations of collective violence.

Secondly, the Maronite community in the North continued to hark back for the communal consciousness awakened earlier during the century. In a sense, the Maronites never ceased to recognize Mount Lebanon as their national home. Accordingly, they longed for a greater measure of autonomy and independence. There were several episodes which attempted to reawaken such communal sentiments. Yusuf Karam himself, after his exile, made several attempts, in 1873, 1874, 1875, and 1877, to liberate the Mountain. Of course Karam was not acting alone. French political circles and the Maronite clergy were encouraging the resurgence of such sentiments.

Thirdly, the forces of secularization, which often accompany urbanization, growing literacy and exposure to alternate sources of socialization, did not detract from the dominance of the church and growing influence of prelates. It should be remarked here that both Catholic and Ottoman theories of government legitimized and reinforced the exertion of such an influence.

The church was not only gaining increasing recognition as the protector and promoter of Christian autonomy in the Mountain, but was also reinforcing and extending the multifaceted roles it had initiated earlier. Church-affiliated schools and colleges of the various monastic orders became more widespread. Enterprising monks sustained their agricultural and industrial activities, and maintained their position as a major source of employment. The ubiquitous village priests dominated the everyday life of their communities as much as they did at the turn of the century. In short, the church continued to satisfy much of the spiritual, welfare and benevolent needs of Mount Lebanon.

It is in this fundamental sense that sectarian loyalties, along with those of kinship and communal attachments, survived as sources of social and cultural integration, satisfying much of the unmet needs of various groups. This is reflected in the type of benevolent and welfare agencies that emerged at the time. For example, of the 100 recorded voluntary associations established between 1860 and 1919, 53 were family associations, 42 religious and 5 communal. None, whatsoever, were secular in character (Khalaf 1987: 161–184). In other words, the extension of state services and public welfare activities did not undermine the nature and intensity of confessional allegiances.

Indeed, the *mutasarrifiyya* evolved into a sort of "confessional sectocracy." In the words of an astute observer of the period, it was altogether a "feeble but embryonic nation-state" or at least a felicitous experiment in nation and state-building (Akarli 1993: 1–3). Though the country's economic development became more subordinate to European market forces and was marked by a massive demographic hemorrhage in its manpower resources, on the whole this special political arrangement managed to contain external sources of instability and usher Lebanon into its longest interlude of guarded coexistence. Except for the minor revisions introduced in 1864, the Règlement remained in effect until the State of Greater Lebanon was declared in 1920.

Perhaps because the Ottomans were keen to woo the Lebanese away from the growing appeals of French influence, they encouraged the development of basic integrative political institutions germane for organized political participation and self-government. The special internationally guaranteed status the Mountain enjoyed at the time, embedded in capitulatory and other concessionary protocols, was also helpful in enabling the Lebanese to develop and consolidate their own political identity. In time this salutary measure of autonomy, and the presence of a fairly independent-minded and recalcitrant local political elite, allowed the Lebanese to extricate themselves from the troubles the Ottomans were ultimately beset with. Once again, Akarli is unequivocal in his overall assessment: "the Ottoman evidence suggests that whereas European intervention in the affairs of the Mountain was often self-interested, sectarian, and divisive, the Ottomans perforce worked hard, until 1912–13, to build a stable governmental order which would help reconcile the moral and material differences among Lebanon's different regions, sects, and dominant social classes" (Akarli 1993: 189).

The State of Greater Lebanon 1920

Though, outwardly, the creation of Greater Lebanon in 1920 appeared to have sustained this relatively blissful interlude, this new entity was not born in harmony. Indeed, to some observers it was a "schizophrenic birth," an ironical outgrowth of French-British diplomatic rivalries each, in turn, exploiting internal sectarian parochialism (see Hudson 1968: 37–39; Petran 1987: 29).

The fascinating and labyrinthian story of how France established its mandate over Lebanon has been told and retold elsewhere. What needs to be

emphasized here is, once again, the impact of this inside-outside dialectics on exacerbating sectarian hostility. Though 1920 marks the creation of the political state of modern Lebanon with its internationally recognized borders, it also heralds an epoch of mounting tension. Despite its remarkable durability the creation of this entity has had grave consequences for upsetting the precarious demographic and sectarian balance, and therefore has become a perpetual source of confessional suspicion and ill-feeling. As we have seen, a growing segment of the Maronite community was never too happy with what it regarded as a truncated Mount Lebanon and harked back to the days of the Emirate. Without the coastal cities and the fertile hinterland, the *Mutesarrifiyya* became too dwarfed and vulnerable. France, ever so ready to rush to the rescue of its reliable ally, took measures to annex parts of Ottoman Syria to the autonomous province of Mount Lebanon.

Like most other arrangements, the creation of Greater Lebanon was replete with discord at virtually all levels: French-British rivalry, differences within and among the French, between various communities, and even among the Maronites themselves. It must be recalled that much of the diplomatic discourse was taking place in the wake of the Arab Rebellion of 1916 and the aborted Cherifian government of 1918.

Shortly after World War I, the standing of the French in geographical Syria was being undermined. British troops were in control of the coastal areas and much of the other strategic regions. The French had hoped to convince Amir Faisal to accept a French mandate over his envisioned state. These and related developments were, naturally, a source of considerable anxiety within Mount Lebanon. Faisal was in no position to look with favor at any autonomous entity in Lebanon, let alone the prospects of territorial enlargements entertained by the so-called "Kiyanists" who perceived "Greater Lebanon" as the natural geographical and historical boundaries. To them, a Lebanon without access to the agricultural resources of the Biqa' or the port of Beirut is detrimental to its economic viability and autonomy. The "Kiyanists" were also keen to preserve some of the liberal attributes of the *mutasarrifiyya;* namely parliamentary democracy, protection of minority rights, self-rule, independence and other civil and secular liberties. They were also willing to accept support from the French government for the "cultural and political progress . . . and the security it would provide against any infringements upon the country's independence" (for further details see, al-Khuri 1960: 1: 269–271; Haffar 1961: 207–300; Zamir 1985: 53–54).

The Arab Revolt of 1916 and the brief Cherifian interlude of 1918 had inspired genuine Arab nationalist sentiments and strong antipathy at French

sponsorship of an "artificial" Greater Lebanon. If foreign protection was deemed inevitable at the time, there was clear preference for the British, particularly among Muslims, Druze, and Greek Orthodox. Indeed, the King-Crane Commission, based on the plebiscite they conducted in the summer of 1919, had recommended the creation of an autonomous Lebanon but only within a larger Syrian entity. Of course, the King-Crane recommendations were ignored.

French diplomatic circles were not, it seems, of the same mind. Even those who were in support of breaking up the French-mandated territory in the Levant into a patchwork of ethnic states (to prevent the consolidation of a large anti-French Syrian Arab unity) were apprehensive about such prospects (see Zamir 1985). The Maronites themselves were also divided. The diehards among them continued to hope for greater alignment with France to protect the Christian entity against ascendant Pan Arab and Muslim sentiments. Some, particularly Patriarch Huwayyik and the delegation he headed to the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, were in support of a French mandate over Lebanon, but wished to curb its excesses in undermining the sovereignty and independence of the future state. Some of the ardent members of the Huwayyik delegation were clearly more concerned about preserving the Christian identity of Lebanon. "They undermined the differences between the Western-Oriented Lebanese and the mostly Bedouin and culturally backward Arabs," and described at length the atrocities inflicted upon Christians during the war for their loyalty to France. The delegation also appealed to France's responsibility in protecting Christians against Muslims (Akarli 1993: 176–77). Others, led by Emile Edde, Lebanon's President (1936–1941), saw in the territorial reduction of Lebanon, given the anticipated demographic changes in favor of Muslims, a more homogeneous and cohesive Christian entity.

Ultimately, a more reconciliatory and flexible school of thought came to prevail, one more receptive to the need of incorporating non-Christian minorities in an essentially Christian Lebanon. Thanks to the foresight of Michel Chiha and his enlightened circle of intellectual, business, and political associates, who articulated a vision of Lebanon more open to European and Western contacts without necessarily undermining the nascent Arabist and nationalist sentiments coveted by Muslim and Christian secularists. It was largely the ideas of this circle along with thoughtful Sunnites, equally mindful of the legitimate fears of Christians being engulfed in an avalanche of Arabism, which were incorporated into the constitution of 1926 and the National Covenant of 1943. External events, once again, facilitated the workings of this

more consociational resolution of the discord. France's political demise after World War II tilted in favor of the Constitutional Bloc of Bishara al Khoury which was more receptive to such an accommodationist view.

The National Covenant of 1943

The National Covenant of 1943 (*Mithaq al Watani)*, an unwritten pact brokered by the British to secure the country's independence from France, also evolved into a pragmatic political strategy to alleviate the tensions engendered by the issues of confessional coexistence and national identity. Essentially a gentlemen's agreement between the two leading spokesmen of their respective communities, the *Mithaq* provided a consensual basis for articulating the character of Lebanon's polity and the distribution of power in the country. Briefly, it stipulated four basic tenets: (1) The independence, neutrality and sovereignty of Lebanon; and called upon Christians to forego seeking Western protection (particularly French) in return for Muslim renunciation of attempts to align Lebanon with Syria or other forms of Arab union. (2) Lebanon was a country with an Arab "face" while retaining its separate and special identity. In other words, despite its Arabism, Lebanon should not cut off its cultural and spiritual ties with the West. (3) Lebanon was to cooperate with all Arab states provided that they recognize its sovereignty and independence. (4) Finally, it called for a reinterpretation of the constitutional provisions for an "equitable" distribution of seats in the executive and legislative bodies to approximate more closely the proportional sectarian representation.

Although the *Mithaq* was far from perfect, critics have been too excessive in attributing many of the country's frailties to it. Over the years it has served as a convenient scapegoat to account for virtually all the pitfalls inherent in its testy political culture: Immobilism, consecration of confessionalism, inhibiting the emergence of organized political parties, the exclusion of extremists and other ideological groups from the arena of legitimate political behavior, have, among other pathologies, been attributed to the *Mithaq*. (see Hudson 1968: 44–45; Saab 1966: 276; Maksoud 1966: 241). For nearly three decades though, both as a solemn pact and a pragmatic instrument of political management, it was effective in accommodating the inbred mutual suspicions between religious groups whose political orientations and frames of reference were basically different. What the architects of the *Mithaq* sought to do was to mute or neutralize those differences and thus forestall

the emotional and confessional upsurges associated with them. To a considerable degree, at least if measured by the low incidence of collective political violence, this was realized.

In this sense the *Mithaq* was more than just an "expedient deal among a few politicians" (Binder 1966: 319). It was something akin to a "social contract." Like all other contracts or covenants, it exacted a price: the renunciation of some of the politically charged claims or sentiments of each of the major religious groups for the sake of national concord and amity. This was vividly apparent by the way the crisis of representation was resolved. The ratio agreed upon, 6:5 in favor of Christians, did not reflect demographic realities of the time. Rather it evinced a sentiment of "noblesse oblige" among Muslims or, more concretely, a concession on their part to preserve this skewed margin in favor of Christians in order to allay their fears as an endangered minority about to be engulfed in an overwhelming Muslim region.

At the same time, the *Mithaq* promoted political balance and did not detract much from the actual power of the other sects. For example, the electoral system, based on the quota principle and multi-sect constituency, promoted a greater measure of nonsectarian alignment of leaders in the parliament and, in doing so, reduced sectarian tensions. The results of the national elections of 1972, the last such regular elections held before the outbreak of hostilities in 1975, clearly demonstrate the redistributive potential of this ingenious arrangement. At least thirteen Christian deputies were elected to parliament under the sponsorship or cooptation of Muslim leaders, while only five Muslims gained entry to the national assembly under the sponsorship of Christian leaders. Such gains clearly tilted the actual distribution of parliamentarians in favor of Muslim representatives (Harik 1987: 194–95). The office of Prime Minister also witnessed appreciable enhancement in its power and public stature. Sunni Muslim premiers have traditionally suffered from this "second fiddle," subservient status. They repeatedly complained that their tenure in office is often at the whim and mercy of a Maronite President. "By 1974, however, the office had gained so much power that it was nearly equal in importance to the presidency. Indeed, a major problem of the Lebanese state since the 1960 was what it had become a two-headed institution, with each head having veto power over the other" (Harik 1987: 196).

More fundamental perhaps, as Albert Hourani has propounded repeatedly, the *Mithaq* reconciled two distinct visions or ideologies of Lebanon which had been tenuously held together since the creation of Greater Lebanon in 1920.

> On the one hand, there was the idea of Mount Lebanon: a society rural, homogeneous, embodied in an institution, the Maronite church, with a self-image . . . and with a vision of an independent and predominantly Christian political community. On the other, there were the urban communities of Beirut and other coastal cities, mainly Sunni Muslim but with Orthodox and other Christian elements, and with a different idea: that of a trading community open to the world, and serving as a point of transit and exchange, and therefore a community where populations mingled and coexisted peacefully; of a society which needed government and law, but preferred a weak government to which the leaders of its constituent groups had access and which they could control (Hourani 1988: 7–8).

Hourani traces the theoretical basis of this vision and its embodiment in the *Mithaq* to, of course, the writings of Michel Chiha, in which we can see the marriage of the two ideologies; the mountain and the city:

> Lebanon the mountain of refuge and Lebanon the meeting place, rooted in its own traditions but open to the world, with bilingualism or trilingualism as a necessity of its life; possessing stable institutions which correspond with its deep realities, an assembly in which the spokesmen of the various communities can meet and talk together, tolerant laws, no political domination of one group by another, but kind of spiritual domination of those who think of Lebanon as part of the Mediterranean world (Chiha 1949).

Chiha's optimistic vision notwithstanding, the marriage was strenuous from its very inception. It was, after all, an arranged liaison, a contract; not a romantic bond. With all the bona fides of its architects and the noblesse oblige of the consenting parties, the *Mithaq* could not have possibly survived the multilayered pressures (local, regional, and international) it was burdened with. It was a partial covenant. It did not fully express the changing demographic and communal realities of the time. With the creation of Greater Lebanon, Christians as a whole were no longer in a majority, though arguably the Maronites were still the largest single community. The annexation of the coast and the Biqa' also ushered in an unsettling variety of political cultures and disparate ideologies.

Incidentally, it is these "New Phoenician" voices which captured the attention of the American Legation offices in Beirut at the time; particularly

those of Chiha, Gabriel Menassa, Alfred Kettaneh, and their extended network of family circles and close associates of the commercial and political elite. As staunch advocates of free trade, they were opposed to any form of central planning and protectionism, shunned industrialization, jealously guarded the sources of their new wealth and lived by the edict: "import or die." Writing to the Secretary of State, on August 19 1947, Lowell Pinkerton of the U.S. Legation had this to say:

> The ancient commercial craft of the Phoenicians is still very evident . . . perhaps it will prevail more modern counsels, or be more effectively supplemented by expert foreign advice. In any case, here are vigorous exponents of the capitalist system who now look only to the United States for ideas and encouragement (Gendzier 1990: 35).

Chiha himself, incidentally, was fully aware that his vision was far from an exemplar of stability and harmony. His liberal image of Beirut as a cosmopolitan city-state coexisting with the more archaic tribal and primordial loyalties of those of the mountain and hinterland was, to say the least, a cumbersome and problematic vision. This was compounded, particularly after 1920, by the impassioned claims of the rival ideological currents taking root in the coastal cities. The "Lebanism" of the Christians was pitted against the "Arabism" of the Sunni Muslims with reverberations among the Shiites and Druze of the hinterland. No wonder that during the 1930s the neighborhoods of Beirut were periodically "the scene of violent clashes between Christian and Muslim gangs, one side brandishing the banner of Lebanism, the other of Arabism" (Salibi 1988: 180).

That the *Mithaq* managed to hold such a potentially violent society together for more than three decades is a tribute to both its architects and the so-called "fathers of independence"—a generation of visionaries but also moderate and reasonable leaders.

The shortcomings of the *Mithaq*, then, are not inherent in its basic philosophy or modus vivendi to arrive at a consensual compromise between communities seeking to contain potentially explosive issues of sovereignty, representation, and peaceful coexistence. The *Mithaq* was also addressing perhaps the more delicate problems associated with the "fears" of the Christians and the "demands" and "grievances" of the Muslims. Like most pacts it involved mutual renunciation. As we have seen, the Christians undertook to renounce their traditional alliances with the West and France in particular, while the Muslims promised to abandon their pan-Arabist aspirations.

In effect both communities were to turn away from the larger world to help galvanize their loyalties to Lebanon. George Naccache's pungent aphorism notwithstanding — "deux négations ne font pas une nation" — this double renunciation seemed both feasible and appropriate at the time.

The Ta'if Accord of 1989

The Ta'if Accord is often heralded as an innovative and remarkable pact marking the threshold of a new republic. It is credited for putting an end to nearly two decades of protracted violence and for laying the foundation for reconciling differences over the three implacable sources of long standing discord and hostility, namely: political reforms, national identity, and state sovereignty. To Latif Abul-Husen the Accord is seen as a "breakthrough," a quest not only for the termination of conflict but also for the establishment of permanent peace. Until then, he maintains, peace remained elusive since all earlier attempts at resolving the conflict were no more than stopgap measures that failed to produce any substantial results. He goes further to assert that Ta'if succeeded because it "brought the conflict down to a legal and manageable level . . . by establishing a workable and effective conflict resolution" (Abul-Husen 1999: chap-6).

Even those who recognize its precarious birth, its inherent shortcomings, and its falling short in meeting the desired expectations of the actors and groups involved still see it as a document of "immense historical significance." To Paul Salem it is "the first general, written agreement among a broad spectrum of parties, militias and leaders on fundamental political issues . . . and it does provide the first real chance for the winding down of war and the re-establishment of a workable state and a relatively fair political system." By virtue alone of the reforms it managed to introduce into the Lebanese Constitution, particularly with regard to power-sharing, Ta'if is seen, regardless of its ultimate success or failure, as ushering a new and radical turn in Lebanon's modern political history (Salem 1991: 75–77). To Richard Norton Ta'if's uniqueness is attributed to one significant feature: "it was the byproduct of elected officials who were not, in most cases, belligerents in the war" (Norton 1991: 461).

These and other such optimistic assessments of Tai'f's virtues notwithstanding, I wish to advance here a more moderate and realistic view of its avowed promises and accomplishments. Foremost, Ta'if does not constitute a paradigm shift or a radical departure from earlier attempts at political

reform or conflict resolution. Indeed, it embraces some of the deeply ingrained traditions and defining elements that have long sustained its political culture: its consociative attributes, and the ethos of no victor and no vanquished. More grievous, the hailed Accord did not put an end to the fighting. Rather, it sparked off another more devastating outburst of internecine carnage and generated a heavy residue of renewed feelings of marginalization and intercommunal hostility and paranoia. Even if one were to recognize that Ta'if may represent a "radical turn" in the evolution of Lebanon's protracted crisis, it is a doubtful whether it has or could bring about any tangible political progress or restructuring in basic loyalties or perceptions.

Like virtually all its predecessors it came in the wake of a treacherous and relentless war and involved the same disparate and conflicted set of local, regional and global actors. The setting and atmosphere that enveloped the negotiations had an air of urgency and drama, suffused with pregnant expectations mixed with feelings of apprehension and uncertainty as to the final product. That product, again like many of its illustrious forerunners, was almost faultless as a written document. All its avowed assertions, whether expressed as anticipated hopes or explicit stipulations, display genuine concern to introduce desired political reforms and constitutional amendments. These are often enshrined in terms of lofty and uncontested national goals such as the abolishment of political confessionalism and the establishment of universal social and economic justice, reclaiming state authority, sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity. The Accord also addresses boldly the two critical issues of ending the war: disbanding the militias and scaling down Syrian presence in the country.

It had a difficult, almost cesarean, birth. Credit goes, of course, to the determination and skills of the midwife(ves). Saudi Arabia, which hosted the conference at Ta'if, was at the time in a propitious diplomatic position to act as the main sponsor. Of course the Saudis were not a new player in Lebanon's troubled waters. Throughout the war they had stepped in on repeated occasions to mediate between and among the local and regional combatants.

It was in Riyadh during the first Arab League summit (October 17–18, 1976) that the Arab Deterrent Force (ADF) was created. As contributor to ADF, the Saudis took part in the Beit Eddin conference, convened to mitigate the mounting tensions between Syria and the Lebanese Christians. Also, after the Arab summit in Tunis (November 20–22, 1979) Saudi Arabia was part of the quadripartite Arab Vigilance Committee established to implement the resolutions. Most crucial perhaps when general Awn declared

his so-called "War of Liberation" against Syria (mid March 1989), this disastrous turn of events, sparked off by this new spectacle of senseless cruelty, gave added credence to another beneficent Saudi diplomatic intervention. At the Casablanca summit (May 25–26, 1989), the Arab League Committee of six was reactivated. It was then that the Tripartite High Commission, composed of King Hassan of Morocco, President Chadli Benjedid of Algeria, and King Fahd of Saudi Arabia, was entrusted with the task of resolving Lebanon's protracted crisis. The triumvirate, with the astute assistance of Lakhdar Ibrahimi, the Assistant Secretary General of the Arab League, was specifically charged with the mandate of overseeing the impending presidential elections and envisioned reforms.

Syria, it must be noted, was visibly excluded from the Commission. More injurious, the first report of the Commission (issued at the end of July 1989) was highly critical of Syria, singling it out as detrimental to the restoration of Lebanese sovereignty (for these and other related details, see Maila 1994; Norton 1991; Salem 1991).

Saudi Arabia's diplomatic intervention was more than just an expression of its longstanding investment in Arab peace and the reconciliatory role it is often called upon to play in containing the ruinous fallouts of bickering Arab regimes. Unsettling regional and global transformations, some with immense historic implications, rendered Saudi mediation efforts all the more compelling. Indeed, no other power at the time was better equipped to play that role. After the Cold War, with the bitter superpower rivalry between the Soviet Union and the U.S. now ended, a U.S. brokered solution through a trusted ally became feasible. Saudi Arabia, given her phobic proclivities about some of her conventional enemies, particularly ascendant Shi'ism, fractious Palestinians, and Islamic extremism, was more than eager to step in. Some of the local combatants also welcomed, declared or otherwise, this shift away from the Syrians and toward the Saudis.

It was against this background, made all the more compelling by, perhaps, the most tumultuous years in Lebanon's fractious political history, that the urge to meet at Ta'if must be viewed. Even against the gruesome backdrop of the previous fifteen years of reckless bloodletting, those of 1988–90 seem all the more menacing. They were dense with the havoc of bewildering succession of disruptive and terrifying events: a constitutional crisis of unprecedented dimensions in which two governments contested the legitimacy of the other but with no president; recurrent crises of presidential succession; reawakened fears of partition; the specter of Syria's tightening grip over the country; and, most devastating, the bitter residues of three fractious wars

between factional leaders vying to extend their hegemony over the marginalized and threatened Christian community.

The grim story and catalogue of events surrounding those years have been told and retold elsewhere. I only wish here to highlight briefly some of their distinctive implications for a better understanding of the prospects of conflict resolution engendered by Ta'if.

Between September 22, 1988 and November 24, 1989, Lebanon knew three presidents: the tumultuous term of Amin Gemayyel, the brief and tragic tenure of Rene Mouawad, and the inauguration of Elias Hrawi. Minutes before the expiration of his official tenure in office (on September 22, 1988), President Amin Gemayyel, in view of the failure of the parliament to elect a successor, exercised his last prerogative as president and appointed, albeit reluctantly, General Awn to head a bi-sectarian interim government composed of six military officers — three Christian and three Muslims. The confessionally balanced cabinet was intended as a caretaker government until a new President was elected. This unprecedented move unleashed a flurry of fateful repercussions. Gemayyel's appointment of a Maronite as a Prime Minister, a post reserved by the *Mithaq* and by political convention to the Sunnis, outraged the Sunni Muslim establishment and their allies on the National Movement and Reformist Camp. Shortly after the announcement of the new cabinet, the three Muslim officers declined to serve. Awn was left heading a cabinet with two other Christian colleagues.

Salim al-Hoss, the incumbent Prime Minister since Rashid Karami was assassinated in 1987, refused to recognize Awn's government. With popular Muslim support reinforced by Syria's blessings, Hoss continued to head his cabinet from West Beirut. For the next year, the country was, in effect, run by two rival governments: one in West Beirut presided over by Hoss and the other in in Ba'abda, led by Awn.

This tenuous division of powers soon started to unravel. It quickly became apparent that Awn had greater political ambitious in mind. He not only denied the legitimacy of Hoss's government but went even further to claim that his Council of Ministers was also constitutionally entrusted with all the powers of the president as long as the post remained vacant. Hence, he saw no urgency in holding presidential elections. He embarked instead on an adventurous scheme to extend and consolidate his powers.

The rivalry between the two governments spilled over to other contentious militia groups and paramilitary organizations eager to exploit the power vacuum. The Lebanese Forces (LF) took over President Gemayyel's party bases in his hometown and adjoining regions. Hizbollah and Amal clashed in the southern suburbs of Beirut. More decisive, Awn launched his first

offensive (mid February of 1989) against the LF in his campaign to consolidate his hold over the Christian enclave. The pitched street battles, lasting hardly a week, left about 80 dead and more than 200 wounded. After a few initial successes, Awn found himself unable to subdue Ja'ja. He reluctantly accepted a cease-fire brokered by the Papal Nuncio and the Maronite Patriach. Awn had, however, succeeded in recapturing Beirut's port. Buoyed by this victory he launched his second assault, hardly a month later, by imposing a sea blockade on all illegal ports in the country. Since many of these ports were controlled by other militias and were a source of immense revenues, it sparked off the violent opposition of virtually all the militias and their accessories: the Shi'ite Amal, the Druze PSP, and the Christian Marada of Suleiman Franjieh. More disconcerting, it provoked the indignation of their Syrian Patrons.

It was at this point that the confrontation started to assume more war-like and belligerent manifestations. In-fighting and localized turf wars were suspended to confront bigger enemies beyond. The conventional embattled war zones and demarcation line, dormant for a while, were reawakened. The dreaded din of artillery exchanges across the "Green Line," dividing East and West Beirut, resumed its vengeful cycles. So did the cycle of broken cease-fires.

Syria's direct involvement brought another unlikely regional actor, Iraq, into the fray. Like other such proxy interventions, it was bound to escalate the level of hostility. On March 14, 1989 Awn declared his "war of liberation" to expel Syrian forces from Lebanon. Clearly Awn, even in alliance with the LF, was no match for Syria's military presence in the country. His defiant call to war, often attributed to his impulsive and impetuous behavior, might have been intended to draw regional and international attention. By "arousing national sentiments and challenging Syria's presence in Lebanon, he wanted to force the great powers to pay more attention to the fate of his country" (Laurent 1991: 96).

International attention was late and timid. The war raged for six months with no apparent victor or vanquished. The cost was massive: more than 1,000 casualties, 5,000 wounded and $1.2 billion in damages to homes and infrastructure. It was estimated that more than 1 million Beirutis had to flee the city to escape the relentless volleys of artillery fire between the two sectors of the city. Syrian gunners on the western flanks responded it seems with greater savagery, inflicting thereby greater damage on residents in the east. (For these and other vivid details see Fisk 1990: 629–43; Salem 1991:67; Norton 1991: 465–66).

As usual, innocent civilians and bystanders, were disproportionately vic-

timized. But the country was also a surrogate victim, as in other such seemingly internal wars, of more pernicious regional and international rivalries. France, the traditional ally of the Francophone and Francophile Christians of Lebanon, was naturally inclined to support Awn's efforts in restoring his country's sovereignty and independence. The U.S., however, the more potent broker in the region, was reluctant to be embroiled again in Lebanon's quagmire before a definite settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

The intensity of the suffering finally, induced international concern. A diplomatic exit, the congruence of regional and international power brokers, became feasible. The U.S. and Saudi Arabia were to endorse an Arab League initiative in which the Lebanese parliament would convene at Ta'if (Saudi Arabia) to discuss and approve what appeared to be a plausible middle-course for all concerned: Awn was to halt his "war of liberation," Syria would agree to a timetable for its withdrawal, and the Lebanese parliamentarians would agree on the desired political reforms, particularly the contested issues of power-sharing, sovereignty, and national identity.

After eight weeks of heated, often contentious, debate, agreement was finally reached (October 22, 1989) on a draft document. Considering the polemical baggage of dogmatic mindsets the conferees carried with them, let alone the polarized sentiments and aspirations of their own constituencies, it is remarkable that an agreement could have been achieved at all. Each of the two broad coalitions came to Ta'if with diametrically opposed, often irreconcilable, views regarding the three fundamental issues under debate: political reforms, state sovereignty, and national identity (For an informed analysis of these differences, see Abul-Husen 1998).

On political reforms the most striking feature of the Accord was its attempt to provide a more balanced confessional redistribution of power. Accordingly, it endorsed the transfer of some of the executive powers of the president, traditionally reserved for a Maronite, to the Chamber of Deputies and the Council of Ministers. The ministerial portfolios were also equally divided between the two main religious communities.

The speaker of the Chamber of Deputies, a post customarily reserved for a Shi'i Muslim, was to be elected for a four rather than one-year term. The number of seats were also increased from 99 to 108 and were divided equally between the two confessional groups. Likewise, the powers of the Sunni prime minister were elevated. His nomination by the president requires now consultation with the speaker who becomes the real custodian of executive powers. With a few minor exceptions, such as the accreditation of ambassadors and the granting of pardons, the autonomous powers of the president

are shifted to the cabinet. In effect, as one observer puts it, the president is "stripped of most of his executive powers and is reduced to a largely ceremonial figure who reigns but does not rule. He remains the head of the state and symbol of its unity, but he can only exert executive authority through the cooperation of the Council of Ministers" (Salem 1991:78).

In addressing the entrenched and testy issue of sectarianism, Ta'if simply reiterates the call for its elimination made by earlier covenants and proposed pacts. Here again, this is expressed as a "fundamental national objective" and a phased plan is provided for at least abolishing political sectarianism. The proposed plan stipulates measures of how to rely on merit, capability, and specialization in public jobs (excluding top level positions) as a substitute for sectarian quotas. It also goes as far as to call for the deletion of the mention of sect and denomination on the identity card.

The issue of national identity and sovereignty are addressed in the preamble as a set of general principles. The Accord opens up by stating that "Lebanon is a sovereign, free, independent country and final homeland for its citizens." Then it goes on to assert that it is Arab in belonging and identity. It is an active and founding member of the Arab league and is committed to the League's charters.

Sovereignty is considered in the context of three testy and controversial issues: the Israeli occupation of parts of southern Lebanon, the abusive powers of the militias in undermining state sovereignty, and, most thorny, the scaling down of Syrian presence in the country. With regard to the first, the Accord simply urges the implementation of UN Resolution 424, of March 1978, and other Security Council Resolutions concerned with the withdrawal of Israeli troops from southern Lebanon. Likewise, the Accord stipulates that all militias and paramilitary organizations are to be disbanded within six months after the approval of the Accord's charter. It does not, however, indicate how this is to be done, or how to reabsorb the tens of thousands of trained fighters into the institutions and agencies of civil society.

The contentious issue of Syria's presence and the timing of its phased withdrawal is dealt with in two ways. First, it is invoked in the context of how the state is to spread its authority over all the Lebanese territories. "In view of the fraternal relations binding Syria to Lebanon, the Syrian forces shall thankfully assist the forces of the legitimate Lebanese government to spread the authority of the state within a set period of no more than two years." In the interim, the Accord would have been ratified, a president elected, a cabinet formed and the political reforms approved. It is only at the end of this period that the two governments "shall decide to redeploy

the Syrian forces in the Beqa' region." Secondly, Syria's presence is addressed in the final article of the Accord under the rubric of the distinctive relations between the two countries which derive their "strengths from the roots of blood relationships, history and joint fraternal interests. . . ." The last clause of the Accord ends with the following protective and patronizing high note:

> Consequently, Lebanon should not allow itself to become a pathway or a base for any force, state, or organization seeking to undermine its security or Syria's security. Syria, which is eager for Lebanon's security, independence, and unity, and for harmony among its citizens, should not permit any act that poses a threat to Lebanon's security, independence, and sovereignty.

Awn was naturally very critical of the Accord. Even before the delegates had convened at Ta'if, he made efforts to foil the meeting by insisting on Syrian withdrawal as a precondition. When that failed, he resorted to all the intimidating, often insidious gambits against the deputies who participated, or those who were favorably predisposed toward it. Even those who had not openly declared their opposition to Ta'if were considered traitors and a threat to the country's sovereignty and well-being. Not even the Maronite Patriarch, Nasrallah Sfeir, was spared. He was so harassed at his official residence in Bkirki that he sought refuge in Diman, the Syrian–controlled region in the North.

To forestall parliamentary approval of the Accord, Awn tried to dissolve the parliament. However, it still managed to meet in Qulay'at (November 5, 1989) when the Accord was formally approved and René Mouawad was elected President. Mouawad's term was tragically cut short seventeen days later when he was assassinated by a remote-controlled bomb as his motorcade drove through Beirut. His brutal cold-blooded assassination, like so many others, remains unsolved, or at least the identity of the murderer has never been revealed. Elias Hrawi, a favored Syrian candidate, was elected to succeed him.

Awn's vehement condemnation of the Accord was based on at least two grounds. First, the withdrawal of Syrians, his most passionate demand, even in principle, remained nebulous. Only a "redeployment" of the forces to the Biqa' was to take place two years after the ratification of the Accord. No explicit timetable was given as to further withdrawal other than the indefinite reference that such withdrawals would be "negotiated at the appropriate time

by the governments of Syria and Lebanon." Second, Awn was equally adamant in his opposition to the alleged political reforms because they involved no more than the shift of the executive powers of the President to the Prime Minister. This, in his view, would further undermine the already marginalized political standing of the Christian community.

In the fall of 1989, shortly after the ratification of the Accord, the alliance between Awn and the LF, tenuously held together during the "war of liberation," started to dissolve. The fierce intra-Maronite rivalry between Awn and Ja'ja' soon erupted into open warfare. When Awn declared his intention (January 30, 1990) to "unify the gun under one control," it became apparent that the much-dreaded military confrontation between Awn's army and the LF commanded by Ja'ja was bound to be a particularly menacing example of the normally atrocious and anguishing fratricidal warfare.

Fighting erupted suddenly in pitched street battles in densely populated quarters that took much of the resident population off-guard. The suicidal war pitted two combatants seething with mutual enmity, each yielding considerable destructive power but with neither in a position to achieve a decisive victory. The army under Awn was highly motivated, fairly well-trained and equipped. So were the LF under the supervision of Fuad Malik, an ex-army officer.

At a more ideological level, the confrontation was also pitting two different visions of Lebanon and the place of the Christian community within it. Awn was articulating a more unified vision where the state will restore its total authority and sovereignty and territorial integrity. Ja'ja, on the other hand, envisioned the establishment of a federal system with a strong and cohesive Christian state or canton. He also did not exclude the possibility of a loose association with other confessional mini-states in a system of semi-independent cantons (for further details, see Laurent 1991: 88–101). Either way, the stakes were very high since at the time the confrontation was, in effect, a showdown over the leadership of the Christian community.

Like all other seemingly internal wars, the changing course of battle, brought in some very improbable shifts in the pattern of regional and global alliances. For example, when the LF forces proved more resilient than Awn had expected, Syria, normally his most accursed nemesis, rushed in to assist him. This obviously outraged Iraq, which prodded Saddam Hussein and his Foreign Minister, Tariq Aziz, to undertake a diplomatic initiative, along with France and the Vatican, to arrange for a cease-fire. After an uneasy lull of a few months, fighting broke out again with greater ferocity. Barely four months old, the war generated a massive toll in human and material destruc-

tion: there were about 1,000 casualties and 2,500 injuries (for estimates see Abul-Husen 1998: Norton 1991: 467).

Despite the war's damage, and much like other instances of internal strife, it never ended or was permitted to end in a decisive victory of one adversary over the other. Awn was neither victorious nor defeated. Despite the popularity he continued to enjoy in parts of the Christian enclave, he was unable to transform the groundswell of enthusiasm he elicited among ordinary citizens for political activism into concrete political gains. He became increasingly isolated both internally and externally and lost much of the sympathy of his former supporters, particularly Iraq, France, and the Vatican.

As in other such local squabbles, an expected shift in the regional and global setting had a decisive impact in redirecting its course. The Gulf crisis allowed Syria to exploit this sudden diversion in diplomatic attention and its enhanced standing in Washington to exacerbate Awn's ultimate demise. Indeed by then the U.S. was already calling for the removal of Awn as the only solution to the Lebanese crisis (Friedman 1991). A joint Syrian-Lebanese military assault (October 13, 1991) on Ba'abda and the Metn region bombed Awn out of his headquarters in the Presidential Palace. He had no choice but to flee to the adjoining French Embassy where he sought political asylum and eventual exile in France.

As mentioned earlier, it was against this background, made all the more pressing by the ruinous hemorrhaging of the Lebanese economy, its crumbling services, and the relentless exodus of (mostly Christian) young professionals and skilled groups, that Ta'if must be viewed. As Joseph Maila (1994) persuasively argues, the urge to meet at Ta'if could well be seen as the immediate result or convergence of three fateful failures: the failure of General Awn's war of liberation against Syria; the failure of Syria to impose a solution acceptable to all the factions and communities in Lebanon; and finally, the failure of all internationally mediated efforts.

Despite its shortcomings one must recognize a few of its distinctive features. Foremost, and unlike earlier efforts of conflict resolution, those who convened at Ta'if were elected parliamentarians, not warlords or those who were directly involved in the fighting. For example, the short-lived Tripartite Agreement mediated by Syria in 1985 brought together the heads of the three most belligerent militia organizations. Elie Hobeika, Walid Jumblat and Nebih Berri. It barely survived two weeks. It was cut short by the mutiny of Samir Ja'ja' against Hobeika and his removal from the leadership of the LF.

Another enlightened feature of Ta'if was its recognition of the inextricable link between the intensity of internal rivalries and unresolved external con-

flict. Rather than treating the crisis as a reflection of exclusively internal dislocations it pronounced its regional and international dimensions. Though not very committal or definitive it at least promised the provision of Arab guarantees for safeguarding Lebanon's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Groups who are inimical to Syria's growing dominance in the country felt a measure of reassurance that they need not face Syria's intransigence alone.

Equally enlightening is the way Ta'if enshrined intercommunal consensus to sustain its solemn pact of communal coexistence (*al aysh al-mushtarak*) and safeguard the strained features of power-sharing and distributive justice as the defining elements of its political culture. This is at least a tacit recognition on the part of the architects of the Accord that nearly two decades of civil strife had done little by way of undermining the intensity of communal and sectarian loyalties in society. Ta'if, in other words, has judiciously opted to embrace, as Joseph Maila has argued, the "consensual, sectarian logic and accepted its dictates." This, once again, renders Lebanon "more of a contractual, consociative country than one based on a constitution. According to this tradition, the formal, legal framework is always subordinate to pragmatic, consensual approach to mitigating conflict within the country, and to managing national and communal strains" (Maila 1994:31).

Such auspicious features notwithstanding, Ta'if's record for nearly a decade now does not provide an encouraging outlook regarding its future prospects either as a peace-making venture or as a covenant for achieving a more balanced and harmonious intercommunal coexistence. Since its inception, in fact, the Accord has been a source of heated controversy. Some observers continue to maintain that its flaws are congenital. Others suggest that these inborn defects were compounded by the setting and the history surrounding the three-week diplomatic bonanza at Ta'if. It was clear that some of the conferees were acting under duress. Although they were freely elected participants, the charged atmosphere imposed constraints on how far they could have ranged beyond some of the pre-prepared texts and agendas. They were left with a very limited margin to maneuver or to work out alternative schemes and proposals.

Even these who found no fault with the text still had misgivings about its lofty overtones, rendering it altogether more "declarative than definitive (Maila: 1994:37). Hence, at the operational level virtually all the concrete proposals for reform have either been "violated or derailed" (el-Khazen 1999:2). Political deconfessionalization, let alone the aspired hope of transforming Lebanon into a truly secular society, has yet to be achieved. Some, particularly a few of the noted architects of the Accord, see no resemblance

between the initial text and the one groping to be implemented (al-Husseini 1994; Mansour 1993). For example, the government's efforts to decentralize have come repeatedly under fire in parliament. The government in fact has been abrogating to itself the right to redraw the country's administrative districts, doing so by decree, and thus bypassing parliament. The proposed plan, another radical departure from Ta'if, would do away with the *qada* system and create, instead, thirty-two smaller units. Areas which historically have been the basis for a coherent and meaningful territorial identity (e.g. Iqlim al-Kharoub in the Chouf or Hammana of Babda) are now splintered arbitrarily into fragmented units.

Most grievous perhaps is the pronounced and uneven shift in the relative political standing of the various communities. Ta'if's political reforms, particularly in laying the foundation for a more balanced system of power-sharing of sectarian representation, were expected to redress some of the internal gaps and disparities. As we have seen, the transfer of executive powers of the President to the Chamber of Deputies and the Cabinet rendered the position of a Maronite president more ceremonial and symbolic in character. The political standing of the Maronites has been unevenly undermined in other more disparaging respects.

The size of the electoral district, a hotly contested issue at the moment, has direct bearing on the hegemony and scope of political influence the various communities can yield. The electoral laws of 1992 and 1996, by rearranging the size of electoral constituencies, contributed in no small measure to curtailing the impact of Christian voters on the election of Christian deputies. The post-Ta'if electoral laws were such that they assigned large districts in predominantly Muslim regions where Christians are in the majority. This, in effect, meant that more Christian deputies were elected by Muslim votes than Muslim deputies elected by Christian votes. In his methodical analysis of the conduct and outcome of the two post-Ta'if elections (1992 and 1996), Farid el-Khazin substantiates such anomalies. In both elections, for example, Greek Orthodox and Greek Catholic voters had little or no impact on choosing any of their deputies in their respective constituencies. This was not true, however, of Muslim representatives who were brought to parliament by the votes of their co-religionists (el-Khazen 1998:27).

Such manifestations of political dispossession and disinheritance, particularly among the Maronites, have been spilling over to other dimensions of the political system, which serve to heighten further the feelings of marginalization and disenchantment (*ihbat*). Christian representatives on the Executive, in successive cabinets, have also been of lesser stature and cred-

ibility in comparison to those of Muslims. On the whole, the three leading Muslim communities continue to be represented by their most established and credible political leaders. Rafic Hariri for the Sunnis, Nabih Berri for the Shi'a, and Walid Jumblatt for the Druze all enjoy a wellspring of popular support and almost uncontested power base which wields considerable bargaining strength on behalf of their constituencies. In stark contrast, Christian communities, with rare exceptions, are bereft of such consequential public spokesmen. Those who command such standing are either excluded from public office or are in voluntary or, more likely, involuntary exile.

The collective fears and anxieties of Christians are exacerbated by two other momentous problems with dire consequences for intercommunal balance and harmony: The return of the displaced and the specter of naturalization. Ta'if makes a passing and declarative reference to the former: "The problem of the Lebanese evacuees shall be solved fundamentally, and the right of every Lebanese evicted since 1975 to return to the place from which he has been evicted shall be established. Legislation to guarantee this right and to insure the means of reconstruction shall be issued."

The problem of the displaced and the prospects for their return is a complex issue fraught with an interrelated set of economic, sociocultural, and psychological implications. In sheer magnitude it is immense. Close to 827,000 (about one-third of the country's resident population) were displaced between 1975 and 1989. Christians, however, bore a disproportionate burden of its misfortunes. The same source (Labaki and Abu Rjeily 1998) reveals that of those, 670,000 are Christians and only 157,500 are Muslims, roughly a ratio of 7 to 1. Also 70 percent of those who have not as yet reclaimed their homes and property are Christians. This is notably true of Areas like Aley and Chouf where displaced Christian families continue to harbor misgivings about their return.

The measures the government have taken thus far are not only fickle. They have also been mired in charges and counter charges of corruption, favoritism, and mismanagement of resources. The special fund established in 1993, attached to the Prime Minister's Office and administered by the Ministry of the Displace, has drained more than $600,000 million. I say drained, because close to 80 percent of the fund's budget has been squandered on indemnifying squatters to reclaim the houses and premises they have illegally occupied in Beirut and elsewhere.

The problem of naturalization, though not attributed to Ta'if, has also aroused the apprehensions of Christians since this, too, carries with it the dread of their demographic marginalization. The naturalization decree (rat-

ified by the parliament on June 20, 1994), has reawakened their fears, particularly since the religious breakdown of those who were recently naturalized is skewed heavily in favor of Muslims: About 80 percent compared to only 20 percent Christians (el-Khazin 1999: 7–8). The problem is compounded by two further unsettling considerations: A large proportion of those granted citizenship (about 40,000) were UNRWA-registered Palestinian refugees. More disruptive, efforts were made to register the new citizens in selected mixed villages and towns to tilt the demographic profile of these electoral constituencies in favor of known pro-government candidates (for further details, see Atallah 1997).

It might be too soon to pass judgment on the ultimate future of Ta'if. If howerver, the first decade of its life is any measure, and if one were to judge its prospects in light of its own declared intentions, the outlook is far from promising.

Any cursory review of the swift and arresting succession of events heralding the onset of Ta'if attests to the compelling transformations it managed to unfold. In hindsight, they stand out as a stark threshold in the country's recent political history. As in earlier such episodes, unforeseen regional and international changes had a momentous impact on the course of internal events. The gulf war, this time, acted as the catalyst.

Syria quickly seized the day. Exploiting the diplomatic rewards of its membership in the anti-Iraqi coalition, it proceeded adroitly to implement Ta'if's edicts in ways consistent with its own interests. Since it was in full military and political control, with Awn out of the way, it met little resistance in consolidating its hegemony over a war-weary and fragmented country. Militias were disbanded, arms were confiscated, passageways and road blocks were cleared, an armistice was declared, and deputies were appointed, thereby imparting the impression of "normalization." Damascus went further to sign (on May 22, 1991) The Treaty of Brotherhood, Cooperation, and Coordination followed, a few months later, by the Pact of Defense and Security. A Lebanese-Syrian Upper Council was also established to "decide upon general cooperation and coordination policies between the two countries" (for further details see Maila 1994). Most disquieting, the Tripartite Arab High Commission was nullified; hence rendering Lebanon all the more subservient to Syria's political dictates.

In a word, Ta'if has once again confirmed, if reconfirmation is needed, that indelible feature of Lebanon's political culture; namely, that its ultimate political destiny is largely shaped outside its borders.

By de-escalating the rhetoric of war, Ta'if did in effect put an end to

outward violence. It also managed to restore a measure of peaceful coexistence thereby permitting the reappearance of civility in everyday life. But this was accomplished at a prohibitive price. Lebanon had had to forfeit much of its national sovereignty and political autonomy. It is ironical that at a time when other repressed groups throughout the world are liberating themselves from the repressive yokes of their servility, Lebanon is now being engulfed by all the disheartening manifestations of mounting disempowerment and subjugation Equally grievous is the pronounced shift in the relative political standing of various communities. The guns might have been muted but deep-seated hostility and paranoia are far from being quelled. This is most visible in the redrawing of the country's social geography and other symptoms of retribalization. Unappeased hostility and fear predispose threatened and marginalized groups to find refuge in cloistered spatial localities and, hence, become distant from or indifferent to other communities. Coexistence, let alone the professed goals of national reconciliation, become all the more elusive.