

Death of a Martyr:

Rafic Hariri, Syrian Imperialism, and Perceptions of the Lebanese Independence Movement of 2005

By Tim Edge

On February 14th, 2005, a massive explosion rocked the Corniche—a popular seaside promenade in downtown Beirut, Lebanon—shaking surrounding buildings to their foundations. Restaurant windows shattered into a thousand shards of glass and rained down on unsuspecting diners as the force of the blast traveled down the wide boulevard just outside Beirut’s newly rebuilt town center. In its wake, it left nothing but chaos. Rubble and debris littered the street and fire began to consume damaged cars. In the center of the devastation, a huge column of black smoke billowed up from a wasteland of twisted metal. Flames hungrily devoured what had minutes before been a motorcade of armored cars and SUVs. The force of the explosion had tossed these vehicles, and their occupants, around like fallen leaves. An entire car had been thrown into the ruins of an old luxury hotel on the other side of the road, while another had been catapulted over a retaining wall, into the blue Mediterranean Sea beyond. In total, about twenty-two vehicles were on fire and countless bodies—some in pieces—gruesomely decorated the pavement. Onlookers rushed to combat the inferno that enveloped the street, but there was nothing to be done for the occupants of the armored Mercedes limousines that had suffered the full force of the explosion. The remains of these armored cars were strewn about an enormous bomb crater that was at least 15 feet deep.¹

¹ description of scene compiled from Linda Dahdah, Robert Fisk, Jim Lobe, Linda Heard, Richard H Curtiss, *Five Views: The Hariri Assassination*, The Washington Report on Middle East Affairs, April 2005, Vol. 24, Iss. 3, p. 10-15, ProQuest [online database], <http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=815913291&Fmt=2&clientId=31812&ROT=309&VName=POD>

The motorcade, of course, was the target of the blast. The six Mercedes limousines that were burning fiercely in the graveyard of rubble had been the signature mode of transportation for former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafic Hariri as he traveled the streets of Lebanon's capital city. On this particular day, former PM Hariri was traveling in his convoy back to his official residence, Koraytem Palace, with his security detail and another Member of Parliament, when the deadly explosion occurred. With a thousand kilograms of high explosive packed into a van, unknown killers assassinated Rafic Hariri, along with more than twenty other unfortunate people.

As soon as the dust on Beirut's Corniche had settled, politicians both inside and outside Lebanon rushed to use Hariri's death for their own political purposes. Suspicions and accusations started to fly, and the many Lebanese political factions began to jockey for possession of this new "martyr" and his many grief-stricken supporters. Within twenty-four hours, America became involved in the issue when it withdrew its ambassador from Syria and signaled that it linked the assassination to the Syrian occupation of Lebanon. U.S. government officials began to fulminate against the oppressive Syrian regime that was terrorizing and suppressing both the Syrian and the Lebanese peoples, while at the same time, thousands of Lebanese were taking to the streets to send their own message to the world. Giant crowds gathered day after day in the streets to ask, "Who killed Rafic Hariri?"

Within three months of Hariri's death, the political structure in Lebanon had been utterly shaken up. The entire pro-Syrian government had resigned, to be replaced by an interim government until elections could be set up. For the first time in 29 years, Syrian troops had completely withdrawn from Lebanese soil. Young Lebanese had peacefully demonstrated in the streets and demanded government accountability and independence from foreign influence.

America hailed these developments as another glorious example of democracy breaking out across the Middle East. Only a week before Hariri's death, Iraqis had flocked to the polls to vote in their first post-Saddam election and, for the United States, Lebanon's independence movement was just another piece of evidence showing that democracy could be exported to the Arab world. State Department officials praised the Lebanese "Cedar Revolution"² for shaking off the weight of Syrian oppression and American commentators touted the movement as a victory for self-determination in the face of imperialist occupation. The withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon echoed the withdrawal of oppressive imperialism from around the globe. In America's eyes,³ Syria was a regional imperialist power illegally and immorally occupying a sovereign nation while denying the fundamental rights of self-determination and democracy to the common people.

This perspective, however, was not entirely accurate. By labeling Lebanon as another triumph for liberal democracy, the United States oversimplified and misrepresented the Lebanese situation. Recent attempts by the Bush administration to characterize the independence movement to fit its own needs revealed just how distorted the U.S. government's perspective of Lebanon is. Instead of using the rhetoric and vocabulary of the actual independence movement, state department officials tried to create a whole new name for the events that resulted from Hariri's assassination. This attempt at re-definition and misdirection was also accompanied by oversimplifications. As Congress worked to pass a resolution condemning the Syrian occupation of Lebanon, another misleading facet of the American perspective was revealed. This came in

² United States Department of State. *Remarks on Release of Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2004* [Govt. document online.] Available from <http://state.gov/g/rls/rm/2005/42793>. Internet. Accessed 24 November 2005.

³ My labeling of this view as "American", or "of the United States", is by no means an absolute blanket statement about all of the people in the United States, but rather a general observation of the views promoted by their elected officials, which can be used to create a useful distinction between the "American" domestic perspective and a more general perspective closer to the Lebanese reality.

the form of a gross exaggeration that believed that as soon as Syria withdrew, all of Lebanon's problems would evaporate and Lebanon would soon be able embrace its long-lost democratic brethren in the West.

Both these instances are part of a general American perspective that fails to appreciate the entire Lebanese situation. Lebanon is still a very divided and fragile country. Most of the factions that fought each other during the many decades of civil war are still very active in the country's politics. Many have disarmed; yet one key party, the Hezbollah, still retains its weapons—the same weapons that helped it drive out Lebanon's other recent occupier, the Israeli army, in 2000. The Hezbollah is a military and political organization in southern Lebanon that the United States and Israel list as a terrorist group. Hezbollah receives most of its support from Iran and Syria and has been less than enthusiastic to see Syrian troops withdraw from Lebanon, greatly complicating the U.S.'s simple, straightforward view of Syrian withdrawal as a new democratic spring for Lebanon. The Bush administration might wish to see a resounding triumph for liberal democracy in the Middle East, but Lebanon's independence movement is not the place to look.

By confidently proclaiming Lebanon's independence movement a successful democratic revolution and ignoring the persistent problems of Lebanese politics, the United States revealed its own limited perspective—a perspective that obscures and ignores major issues that still need to be resolved by the war-torn country. Let us examine this issue further by taking a brief look at exactly why Rafic Hariri's assassination sparked the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon, and then continuing with an in-depth analysis of the United States' perspective and its many shortcomings.

Rafic Hariri

“For more than two decades Syria has never wavered in its support for Lebanon and in its attempts to protect it from internal as well as external threats... Indeed, had it not been for Syria, Lebanon would not be where it stands today, nor would it have been able to reunite its territory and its constitutional, security, military and administrative institutions.”

--Rafic Hariri, 1999⁴

In his book *Statesmanship In Government*, Rafic Hariri ended his explanation of Lebanon’s road to economic recovery by praising the presence of Syria in Lebanon and thanking Syria for all of the support it had provided. Yet within six years, Hariri’s death would provoke the greatest uprising against Syrian domination that Lebanon had ever seen. How did this influential man who earned the title “Mr. Lebanon”⁵ suddenly become the catalyst for an anti-Syrian independence movement only six years after warmly praising Syrian involvement in Lebanon?

Above all, Rafic Hariri was the consummate self-made businessman. He was born in 1944 to a family of poor farm workers in Lebanon’s southern city of Sidon. He worked his way through school, majoring in commerce at the Beirut Arab University. Like many other Lebanese workers, Hariri left the country to search for more opportunity in the 1960s. He ended up in Saudi Arabia and, over 20 years, came to dominate the Saudi construction industry. Lucrative construction deals with Saudi royalty rocketed Hariri into the ranks of the world’s richest men,

⁴ Rafic Hariri, *Statesmanship in Government: Emerging from war and entering the future* (Beirut: Arab United Press Company, 1999), 89-93

⁵ Siddiqui, Habib. “The Assassination of Mr. Lebanon.” *Al-Jazeera*, February 20, 2005 [on-line article] available from <http://www.aljazeera.info/Opinion%20editorials/2005%20Opinion%20Editorials/February/20%20o/The%20Assasination%20of%20Mr%20Lebanon%20By%20Habib%20Siddiqui.htm>; accessed 8 December 2005.

with an estimated fortune of \$3.8 billion dollars and a spot on *Forbes's* 2003 World's Richest People list.

Meanwhile, back in Lebanon, the many different sects that comprised Lebanese society had fallen into armed conflict and, in 1975, the country dissolved into civil war. The various factions each controlled separate areas of Lebanon, and even separate streets in the capitol of Beirut. Armed militias clashed day and night for control of Lebanon's most important city, while the national government could not agree on an effective response. Finally, Lebanon's sister country Syria was invited to intervene to stop the bloodshed. In 1976, advancing Syrian troops entered Beirut and were welcomed by joyful civilians, grateful that the war had come to an end.

Yet Syria did not occupy the entire country. Much of the Shia- and Palestinian-dominated south was left to its own devices and these forces stirred up trouble with Israel. In 1978, Israel invaded Lebanon to deal with the armed Palestinians, but eventually retreated in the face of international pressure. Throughout this period of invasion and foreign influence, the internecine civil war continued among the many Sunni factions, the Maronite Christian militias, the Palestinian militants, and many other armed groups in Lebanon. This brutal and incessant violence was fed by the various regional and global powers that constantly confronted each other indirectly on the Lebanese battleground. The last major invasion of Lebanon occurred in 1982 when the Israeli army returned to occupy more than a third of the country.

After these many years of conflict and death, the Lebanese were ready for peace and stability. Rafic Hariri now had vast resources with which to help the people of his country, and he spared no expense in rebuilding Lebanon. He donated \$12 million dollars to victims of Israel's 1982 invasion, and later, in 1989, he helped finance the Taif Accord out of his own

pocket. This Accord put an end to the 15-year Lebanese civil war and ushered in a new, relatively peaceful era in the country. As the largest shareholder in the Solidère construction company, Hariri used his resources to rebuild the devastated downtown area of Beirut. He gained a philanthropic and patriotic reputation as the man who single-handedly rebuilt Lebanon. Since Hariri was one of the few leading men in Lebanon who had not commanded a militia during the civil war, he was seen as a clean politician with no blood on his hands. He was elected prime minister in 1992 and served until 1998. His administration initially had great success stabilizing the Lebanese currency and rebuilding Lebanon's reputation as a financial capital of the Middle East, but in the process, the government accumulated a massive national debt. Hariri was defeated in 1998 for that reason, but when the country continued to experience economic recession, he was re-elected in 2000.

Throughout this time, Syria was still heavily involved in Lebanese politics and continued to maintain troops in Lebanon, despite the Taif Agreement, which called for their withdrawal. Syria justified its presence by portraying itself as defenders of Lebanese sovereignty against Israeli aggression, and in this role, it did receive a lot of popular support. This is why Hariri expressed his thanks for the Syrian involvement, which had “never wavered in its support for Lebanon and in its attempts to protect it from internal as well as external threats.”⁶ However, in southern Lebanon, Hezbollah resistance fighters had made the Israeli occupation too costly to maintain and so, one day, Israel simply decided to leave.⁷ The justification for Syrian occupation simply evaporated and what had been a fairly limited anti-Syrian opposition movement in Lebanese politics rapidly grew into an opposition party.

⁶ Rafic Hariri, *Statesmanship in Government: Emerging from war and entering the future* (Beirut: Arab United Press Company, 1999), 89-93

⁷ For a description of the Israeli retreat, please see Robert Fisk's *Pity the Nation: The Abduction of Lebanon*, 4th ed. (New York, Thunder's Mouth Press/Nation Books, 2002). Especially pp. 686-688.

Hariri, the pragmatic businessman that he was, could see the shift occurring and slowly distanced himself from the Syrians that he had once described so positively. When Syria pressured the Lebanese government to amend its constitution and extend the current pro-Syrian president's term in office in 2004, Rafic Hariri resigned from his position as prime minister. Though he had not officially joined the opposition coalition, everyone knew that Hariri was no longer a friend of Damascus.

Still, the massive explosion on the Corniche that Valentine's Day in February came as a shock to the entire nation. Hundreds of thousands of Lebanese people came out on to the streets to express their shock and their rage at the attack, which was immediately blamed on Syria. The British reporter Robert Fisk, a resident of Beirut who lived just down the street from the spot where Hariri was assassinated, described Hariri's funeral as "an independent march in which hundreds of thousands of Muslims and Christians who were fighting to the death in the civil war walked together in shared mourning and friendship."⁸ This spirit of solidarity against Syria's presence in Lebanon grew and grew. Huge crowds of several hundred thousand took to the streets for months, protesting both Syria and the Lebanese government full of Syrian sympathizers. The government resigned later in the spring and the Syrian troops withdrew shortly thereafter, in late April 2005. A new government was formed in July, with a good friend of Rafic Hariri, Fouad Siniora, at the helm as prime minister.

This independence movement—more like an independence groundswell—that toppled the Syrian occupation of Lebanon, was a movement the like of which has rarely, if ever, been seen before in the Middle East. It is important to understand the different ways that these events were, and still are, perceived because these perceptions will influence how Lebanon transitions

⁸ Fisk, Robert. "In death, Hariri unites the Lebanese against Syria." *The Independent*, February 17, 2005 [on-line article] available from <http://news.independent.co.uk/world/fisk/story.jsp?story=611774>; accessed 8 December 2005.

into the post-Syrian future. Of particular importance is the American perspective, which can have huge impact on Lebanon's prospects. We will now examine and evaluate exactly how America, especially the United States government, interprets the events resulting from Rafic Hariri's brutal assassination.

The American Perspective and Its Complications

“In Lebanon, we see growing momentum for a ‘cedar revolution’ that is unifying the citizens of that nation to the cause of true democracy and freedom from foreign influence. Hopeful signs span the globe, and there should be no doubt that the years ahead will be great ones for the cause of freedom.”

-- U.S. Undersecretary of State Paula J. Dobriansky, 2005⁹

With this pronouncement on February 28th, 2005, the United States unveiled its interpretation of the Lebanese independence movement. The “cedar revolution” was coined during a State Department press release by Undersecretary of State for Global Affairs Paula J. Dobriansky as quoted above. The U.S. government saw the “cedar revolution” as a vivid and inspiring rebellion by the forces of Lebanese democracy against the old, corrupt system of Syrian domination. The name “cedar revolution” was designed to conjure up images of other recent revolutions. Undersecretary Dobriansky drew a clear path during that same press release from “a rose revolution in Georgia” to “an orange revolution in Ukraine” to “most recently, a purple revolution in Iraq.” She then introduced the term “cedar revolution” and linked it with these other recent revolutionary movements. The other so-called colored revolutions were popular uprisings against fraudulent elections and long entrenched corrupt regimes—all of them “hopeful

⁹ United States Department of State. *Remarks on Release of Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2004* [Govt. document online.] Available from <http://state.gov/g/rls/rm/2005/42793>. Internet. Accessed 24 November 2005.

signs” of the democratic wave that the Bush administration sees sweeping the world. By choosing to draw a parallel between these colored revolutions and the independence movement in Lebanon, the U.S. used the “cedar revolution” to bolster its claim that democracy was on the march around the globe.

However, in reality on the streets of Beirut where most of the protests were taking place, the movement was called by a very different name. On February 18th, as the protests and mourning for Hariri’s death continued to grow, the Lebanese opposition leaders called for an “intifada for independence”¹⁰ by the people of Lebanon. This “intifada” would be a peaceful uprising against the Syrian presence in Lebanon—in essence an independence movement against a brutal imperialist occupier who had brutalized the country for far too long. The use of the word “intifada”¹¹ had markedly different connotations from that of the “Cedar Rebellion.” “Intifada” was highly publicized in connection with Palestinian uprisings against Israeli occupation, especially after the most recent “intifada” in 2000. By logically extending this connotation, the Lebanese “independence intifada” drew a distinct parallel between the Syrian occupation of Lebanon and the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza strip. Considering Lebanon’s past history with Israeli invasion, this Israeli-Syrian parallel does not seem too far-fetched. In his article entitled “The Branding of Lebanon’s ‘Revolution’,” washingtonpost.com Staff Writer Jefferson Morley makes this same argument: “Given this history [of Lebanese antipathy toward Israel], the ‘Cedar Revolution’ brand is more congenial to the Bush administration.”¹² It is obvious that the “cedar revolution” was created to better fit the

¹⁰ Raad, Nada. “Opposition demands ‘intifada for independence’.” *The Daily Star*, February 19, 2005 [on-line article] available from http://www.dailystar.com.lb/printable.asp?art_12818&cat_ID=2.html; accessed 7 December 2005.

¹¹ *Intifada* means “shaking off” in Arabic

¹² Morley, Jefferson. “The Branding of Lebanon’s ‘Revolution’.” *Washingtonpost.com*, March 3, 2005 [on-line article] available from <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A1911-2005Mar2.html>; accessed 26 November 2005.

White House's interests in the Middle East. The use of the word "intifada" would at least semantically link Syria's misdeeds to those of Israel, which is something that the U.S. administration is not willing to do. Instead "cedar revolution" provides a nice, safe phrase that removes all linguistic incrimination of America's number one ally in the region.

The discrepancy between Lebanon's "intifada" and the U.S.'s "cedar revolution" is also of critical importance because it reveals a key facet of the American perspective in Lebanon: namely that America sees what it wants to see, rather than what is really there. By ignoring the "intifada" label in favor of the "cedar revolution," the U.S. government tried to re-define the aftermath of Hariri's assassination in a way that better fit its own political purposes. Instead of adopting the local language of the "independence intifada" and embracing Lebanon's desire for real freedom and sovereignty, the American government decided it had to give the situation a name that better suited its own interests. Thus the "cedar revolution" was born. One such political purpose was exposed in a March 9th article in the British newspaper Guardian. This article asserted: "White House officials have told journalists that the president sees some 'validation' for the Iraq invasion in the current democratic trend in such countries as Lebanon, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the Palestinian territories."¹³ If President Bush sees democratic trends in other Arab countries as some sort of validation for the Iraq invasion, then it is no wonder that his administration is doing everything possible to re-define the "independence intifada" as a forceful democratic "cedar revolution" in Lebanon. By interpreting the Lebanese independence movement as part of a democratic trend, the U.S. government's perspective is revealed for what it really is: a narrow, self-serving point of view that sees what it wants to see, rather than what is really there.

¹³ Borger, Julian. "Bush sees Lebanon changes as move to free Middle East." The Guardian, March 9, 2005 [on-line article] available from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/Syria/story/0,13031,1433437,00.html>; accessed 7 December 2005.

Not only does the American perspective invent a “cedar revolution” where there is in fact an “intifada,” it also ignores major issues that challenge its interpretation of events in Lebanon. On March 2, 2005, as the protests in Beirut continued to grow more powerful, the Subcommittee on the Middle East and Asia of the House Committee on International Relations met to discuss the final markup of House Congressional Resolutions 18 and 32. While speaking about the situation in Lebanon, Representative Adam B. Schiff of California commented, “the killing of Mr. Hariri has done what nothing else has been able to achieve. It has brought together Sunnis and Christians and Druze, all united in the same goal, and that is getting Syria the heck out of Lebanon.”¹⁴ While this statement is completely true—Hariri’s death did unite many opposing factions against Syrian occupation—the comment is more notable for what it leaves out. Rep. Schiff listed off the Sunnis, the Christians, and the Druze, but neglected to mention the most populous community in Lebanon: the Shi’ites. This Shi’ite Muslim community, over 1.14 million strong,¹⁵ is a huge issue that American perspective fails to appreciate.

Comprising around 40% of the Lebanese population by some estimates,¹⁶ the Shi’ites are a very strong force to be reckoned with in the south of the country, where their political/military organization Hezbollah fought a long and bloody resistance against the Israeli occupation. The Hezbollah is celebrated by Muslims for its role in this conflict and is regarded by many to be the first Muslim/Arab army to ever defeat the Israelis. According to British journalist

¹⁴ United States Congress, House Committee on International Relations, Subcommittee on the Middle East and Central Asia, Expressing the grave concern of Congress regarding the continuing gross violations of human rights and civil liberties of the Syrian and Lebanese people by the government of the Syrian Arab republic; and expressing the grave concern of Congress regarding the occupation of the Republic of Lebanon by the Syrian Arab Republic: markup before the Subcommittee on the Middle East and Central Asia of the Committee on International Relations, House of Representatives, One Hundred Ninth Congress, first session, on H. Con. Res. 18 and H. Con. Res. 32, March 2, 2005 (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2005), [govt. document online]; available from http://www.house.gov/international_relations/109/99591.PDF; accessed 24 November 2005. Aladin Database

¹⁵ 1991 estimates from Rolland, John C. (ed.) *Lebanon: Current Issues and Background*. New York: Nova Science Publishers, Inc, 2003. pp. 22

¹⁶ Same 1991 estimates as above. There has been no census in Lebanon since 1932 because any reapportionment of power between the different factions could spark another civil war. Robert Fisk, *Pity the Nation: The Abduction of Lebanon*, 4th ed. (New York, Thunder’s Mouth Press/Nation Books, 2002) pp. 67

Robert Fisk, with the Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon in 2000, “the Hizbollah had shown that you don’t have to surrender, that the Middle East’s most powerful army can be humbled.”¹⁷ But when American policymakers like Rep. Schiff discuss Lebanon, the conveniently forget about this potent force that calls southern Lebanon home—or when they do mention it, it is consistently regarded as a marginal terrorist group supported by Syria.

Because Syria considers itself to be one of the main defenders of the Arab/Muslim world against Israeli aggression, it is only natural that there be an alliance between the Hezbollah resistance in Lebanon and the Syrians across the border. But in its condemnation of the Syrian occupation, the U.S. government always attributes the power of Hezbollah to Syrian connivance and manipulation, not to homegrown sentiments held by the Shias of south Lebanon. In the same House Subcommittee discussion that Rep. Schiff contributed to, New York Representative Gary Ackerman said, “Syria must also stop supporting Hizbollah... and all the other terrorist groups that call Damascus home.”¹⁸ The U.S. perspective, exemplified by Rep. Ackerman’s statement, completely ignores the fact that Hezbollah is an inherently Lebanese movement. It minimizes the fact that this organization embodies the political will of most of the 1.14 million Shia in Lebanon and it blames religious Hezbollah’s actions on secular Syria, which in reality does not have that much control over the fervent Shi’ite believers who support Hezbollah (literally “Party of God” in Arabic). It fails to note that the organization, far from being a fringe

¹⁷ Ibid. 488

¹⁸ United States Congress, House Committee on International Relations, Subcommittee on the Middle East and Central Asia, Expressing the grave concern of Congress regarding the continuing gross violations of human rights and civil liberties of the Syrian and Lebanese people by the government of the Syrian Arab republic; and expressing the grave concern of Congress regarding the occupation of the Republic of Lebanon by the Syrian Arab Republic: markup before the Subcommittee on the Middle East and Central Asia of the Committee on International Relations, House of Representatives, One Hundred Ninth Congress, first session, on H. Con. Res. 18 and H. Con. Res. 32, March 2, 2005 (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2005), [govt. document online]; available from http://www.house.gov/international_relations/109/99591.PDF; accessed 24 November 2005. Aladin Database.

terrorist group, in fact controls a small but vocal bloc of 12 seats in the Lebanese parliament from which it legitimately—democratically—represents the will of many Lebanese Shi'a.

Conclusions

As the investigation into the horrific assassination of Rafic Hariri continues, Syrian culpability becomes more and more apparent. The Lebanese people have already thrown Syrian troops out of the country, and for the first time in many years, there is no occupying power directly influencing politics in Beirut. Lebanon's "independence intifada" has been a resounding success. It has shrugged off the yoke of Syrian imperialism and must now decide how to proceed with its sovereign, independent future.

The United States tried to use the "intifada" for its own purposes. It re-named it "cedar revolution" to protect Israel and to justify the invasion of Iraq. In America, this attempt largely succeeded and many people still remember the events of the spring of 2005 as the glorious "cedar revolution." But that does not change the fact that the Lebanese carried out their own "intifada," regardless of what the State Department called it, and were largely successful. The "cedar rebellion" never did appear in Lebanon, but the "independence intifada" flourished. The issue of Hezbollah has not subsided just because America has ignored it, but rather has become much more nuanced. Democratic reforms never took place; the government, constitution, and powerful men have all stayed the same, yet Syria has left. One Lebanese expatriate described the situation in this way: "At the beginning of the third millennium, it seems that Lebanon is destined to be dominated by the warlord-merchant establishment that has shaped the landscape

for the past 1,000 years.”¹⁹ Now that Syria is gone and the Lebanese people have witnessed what their collective will can achieve, perhaps there really will be a democratic “cedar revolution” that reforms the political system and opens up political participation to more people than just the rich and powerful. But despite the American perspective, this has not happened yet. The “independence intifada” was the opening act following the shocking death of Hariri, but it remains to be seen where Lebanon will go from here. One would hope that regardless of Lebanon’s future, the American government would refrain from distorting reality with its own limited, simplistic perspective—a perspective that does not fully appreciate the radical movement for independence that was sparked by the death of Rafic Hariri.

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¹⁹ Kamal Dib, *Warlords and Merchants: The Lebanese Business and Political Establishment* (Reading, U.K.: Garnet Publishing Limited, 2004), 291-298

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