

# **An Impossible Balancing Act**

*France and the Lebanese Civil War, 1975-1982*

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Cover photo: French paratroopers and Lebanese Army soldiers assuring the protection of the Palestinians fighters leaving Beirut. End of August 1982.

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## Abstract

When civil war broke out in Lebanon in April 1975, France, the former mandate power, found itself in a conundrum. Its centuries old connection to Lebanon as protector of the Maronite Christians meant much was expected from French authorities. At the same time France had established strong ties to the Palestine Liberation Organization another actor of the civil war.

This thesis studies France's involvement in the first half of the Lebanese Civil War, from 1975 to 1982. Officially France remained neutral in the conflict. The aim of this thesis is to look at the France's initiatives and the policies elaborated towards the different actors of the war. Yet, the many initiatives worked more as a show of presence and not many, if any, had a profound impact on the war. The vague French slogan of keeping Lebanon's integrity, sovereignty and unity became increasingly hard to follow. France also failed to deliver on its attempt to stay fully neutral. Sides were taken; however, depending on developments in Lebanon, it was sometimes towards the Maronites, sometimes towards the PLO. France found itself in an impossible balance, between old and new alliances, and as such was not able to change the course of war in any significant way.



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## Chapter 1 – Introduction

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The Lebanese Civil War was a civil, sectarian, and regional conflict in Lebanon that lasted from 1975 until 1990. It was a complex and multilayered struggle involving many actors. France was the former colonial power, and still held strong and long-lasting connections to the country. Therefore, when violence broke out, France tried to play a part in mitigating the conflict.<sup>1</sup>

Lebanon has often been called the Switzerland of the Middle East for its white mountain tops and place of refuge for the persecuted. As such, it is the home of many ethno-religious groups including Maronite Christians, Druze, Sunnis, Shiites, Greek Orthodox Christians, Greek Catholics. The political power was – and still is – based on a form of confessionalism in which the president is a Maronite, the prime minister a Sunni, and the president of the parliament a Shiite. This partition of power was based on the last census conducted in 1932. Since then, however, demographics have drastically changed, and the Christians have become a minority.<sup>2</sup> Lebanon is also home to hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees and, from 1970, the headquarters of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). With the influx of Palestinians and a sectarian socio-economic discontentment that had been brewing for years, Lebanon ultimately imploded in April 1975.<sup>3</sup>

Officially, the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs underlined its neutrality in the war.<sup>4</sup> French policy during the conflict could be characterized as “a policy of caution.”<sup>5</sup> What the ministry came up with was a three-word policy that would be reiterated throughout the war: France was underlining the importance of keeping Lebanon’s integrity, sovereignty and unity. Many French historians bring up these three points when mentioning French involvement in the conflict. At

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<sup>1</sup> Dima de Clerck and Stéphane Malsagne, *Le Liban en Guerre: 1975-1990* (Paris: Belin, 2020), 349; Ignace Dalle, *La Ve République et le monde arabe: Le désenchantement* (Paris: Fayard, 2014), 407-409; Roland Lombardi, *Les Trente Honteuses Aux origines de la fin de l'influence française dans le monde arabe et au Moyen-Orient*, (Versailles: V.A. Éditions, 2019), 195-225 & 238-244; Stéphane Malsagne, *Sous l'oeil de la diplomatie française: Le Liban de 1946 à 1990*, (Paris: Geuthner, 2017), 131-209; Georges Sadaka, *La Diplomatie Assassinée: La France dans la guerre du Liban, 1975-1985* (Beirut: Libania, 1986).

<sup>2</sup> Farid el-Khazen, *The Breakdown of the State in Lebanon, 1967-1976* (Cambridge (MA): Harvard University Press, 2000), 131; Hilde Henriksen Waage, *Konflikt og stormaktspolitikk i Midtøsten* (Kristiansand: Cappelen Damm, 2013), 219-220; Helena Cobban, *The Making of Modern Lebanon* (London: Hutchinson, 1987), 17-30.

<sup>3</sup> Waage, 227; Malsagne, *Sous l'oeil de la diplomatie française*, 137.

<sup>4</sup> De Clerck and Malsagne, *Le Liban en Guerre*, 349; Malsagne, 148.

<sup>5</sup> «une politique de prudence» in Walid Arbid, «France-Liban: Une nécessaire entente cordiale», In *Méditerranée, Moyen-Orient Deux siècles de relations internationales Recherches En Hommage à Jacques Thobie*, ed. W. Aarbid, S. Kancal, et al. (Paris: L'Harmattan, Institut Français D'études Anatoliennes D'Istanbul-Georges Dumézil), 2003, 9. (All translations are done by the author).

the time, they were also explicitly used during speeches and interviews, giving the impression of a slogan the ministry came up with to be restated at every turn.<sup>6</sup> The vagueness of the terms made them easy to mold or circumnavigate.

Thus, this study seeks to answer the following questions: What were French policies and initiatives in Lebanon during the civil war? How did France balance its newfound relationship with the Palestinians with its historic relationship to the Maronites? Did France manage to keep its official policy of neutrality? And did France try and achieve its policy goals to keep the integrity, sovereignty and unity of Lebanon?

Existing literature on the Lebanese Civil War has mainly focused on its chronological progression, the debate surrounding its nature and the reasons behind the conflict. In other words, why did the war start, and who was responsible? This is still heavily debated, especially when considering both internal and external causes.<sup>7</sup> Among the external actors, focus has been on direct participants such as Syria and Israel, but also indirect participants such as the US. Not much attention has been paid to France. The existing literature on France's policy towards Lebanon during the war is limited. Most of it is also old and in French. This thesis will therefore be able to widen the outreach, by connecting newer search based on French archival material, to a wider non-French reading audience. To come to a better understanding of the role of a self-proclaimed longtime friend of Lebanon and its ultimate failure to procure peace, it is useful to look at the initiatives taken by France. This thesis therefore focuses on understanding the French policy towards the Lebanese Civil War. It starts with the beginning of the fighting in April 1975, and ends in the summer of 1982, which both marks a halfway point in the war and a significant "Israelification" of the war.

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<sup>6</sup> Sometimes one of the three words is replaced with "independence". It was much reiterated in newer secondary literature and in documents at the time, see for example Sadaka, *La Diplomatie Assassinée*, 111-112; Bassma Kodmani-Darwish, «1981-1985: le recentrage de la politique française au Liban», *Politique étrangère*, No.2 -50e année (1985): 400, Accessed 30 April 2021, URL: <https://doi.org/10.3406/polit.1985.3469>; example in archives in Secret Telegram from Leclercq, Paris, 9 July 1978, MAE 1835INVA 409 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>7</sup> Historians highlighting external factors: Joseph Bayeh, *A History of Change and Stability in Lebanon* (London & New York: I.B. Tauris, 2017); Khazen, *The Breakdown of the State in Lebanon 1967-1976*; James R. Stocker, *Spheres of Intervention: US Foreign Policy and the Collapse of Lebanon, 1967-1976*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016). Historians highlighting internal factors: Fawwaz Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon* (London: Pluto Press, 2007), viii & 156.

## The Characteristics of French Foreign, Middle East and Lebanon Policies

As a prerogative of the presidential powers of the French Fifth Republic, foreign policy is very much in the hands of the president himself. This was also the case under Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, who was president from 1974 to 1981. The minister of foreign affairs functioned more as an assistant to the president.<sup>8</sup> The centrist Giscard d'Estaing considered foreign policy to be his “reserved area.”<sup>9</sup> As such, he held a certain mistrust of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which in his eyes also contained too many Gaullists.<sup>10</sup> Political scientist Alfred Grosser describes Giscard as trying to be the “friend of all.”<sup>11</sup> Giscard d'Estaing founded his international image as a friend of all world leaders, and by doing so avoiding any animosity and friction.<sup>12</sup>

French foreign policy in the twentieth century was fundamentally driven by the idea of French uniqueness. The vestiges of *la mission civilisatrice*, the civilizing mission of colonies through this French uniqueness, were still present. For Grosser, ensuring and strengthening France's place in the world was a key component of its foreign policy.<sup>13</sup> In the second half of the twentieth century, France, as Britain, asked itself: “how can I regain a global influence when I know, deep down, that I am no longer a world power?”<sup>14</sup>

Modern French Arab policies stem from President Charles de Gaulle's (1959-1969) *politique arabe*. This policy “placed emphasis on French exceptionalism; an independent role for France in the Middle East between the Cold War superpowers and close cultural ties with key Arab states.”<sup>15</sup> This in turn came from de Gaulle's policy of *Grandeur*. This was a belief in the grandness of France as a foundation of French foreign policy which was meant to make France's influence abroad great again.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Alfred Grosser, *Affaires Extérieures: La politique de la France 1944-1984* (Paris: Flammarion, 1984), 256-257.

<sup>9</sup> «domaine réservé» in Maurice Vaisse, *La Puissance ou l'Influence: La France dans le monde depuis 1958*, (Paris: Fayard, 2009), 23; Grosser, 255.

<sup>10</sup> Vaisse, 23.

<sup>11</sup> «ami de tous» in Grosser, *Affaires Extérieures*, 255.

<sup>12</sup> Grosser, 259.

<sup>13</sup> Grosser, 323.

<sup>14</sup> «Comment puis-je retrouver une influence mondiale alors que je sais, au fond, que je ne suis plus une puissance mondiale?» in Grosser, 11.

<sup>15</sup> Patrick Müller, “The Europeanization of France's foreign policy towards the Middle East conflict - from leadership to EU-accommodation”, *European Security*, Vol 22, No1 (2013): 117, Accessed 16 April 2021, DOI: 10.1080/09662839.2012.698266.

<sup>16</sup> Pernille Rieker, *French Foreign Policy in a Changing World: Practising Grandeur* (Milton Keynes: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 160.

Giscard d'Estaing did not change the long lines of the Fifth Republic in pursuing pro-Arab policies. It was, however, his style that was the change. He translated the Gaullist *Grandeur* into his own “‘radiation’ of France in the world”, more reliant on interdependence between countries.<sup>17</sup> Giscard was more positive than his predecessors when it came to cooperation with the United States and working through Europe.<sup>18</sup> This was also the case on issues relating to the Middle East and Lebanon, the key state for France.<sup>19</sup>

Lebanon, the hub of French language and culture in the Middle East, acted as an important bridge between France and the region. In 1975, around 60 percent of the Lebanese population could speak French.<sup>20</sup> Since its independence in 1943, Lebanon had maintained strong ties to Paris, being the only Arab country not breaking diplomatic relations over the Suez Crisis nor the Algerian War.<sup>21</sup> With the PLO's entry into Lebanon, Beirut would also become France's contact point with the Palestinians. In October 1974 Minister of Foreign Affairs Jean Sauvagnargues shook hands with Yasser Arafat in Beirut, cementing a French pro-Palestinian policy.<sup>22</sup> Since then the PLO would remain France's favorite way “to conduct a pro-Arab policy.”<sup>23</sup> Many French historians have pointed out the often-pro-Arab tendencies of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Quai d'Orsay.<sup>24</sup>

### **The Rise of Europe as a Vehicle for France's Middle East Policy**

President Giscard d'Estaing, while more open to cooperating with the US than his predecessors, was most of all a major proponent for European integration.<sup>25</sup> Gradually, French leaders would understand that the only way to keep French influence on the global scene alongside the two

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<sup>17</sup> «‘rayonnement’ de la France dans le monde» in Charles Hargrove, «Valéry Giscard d'Estaing», in *politique étrangère: 1936-1986, 50 ans de politique étrangère de la France*, ed. Dominique Moïsi (Paris: L'institut français des relations internationales, 1986), 119.

<sup>18</sup> Sadaka, *La Diplomatie Assassinée*, 56-57; Henry Kissinger, *Years of Renewal* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999), 621.

<sup>19</sup> Arbid, «France-Liban: Une nécessaire entente cordiale», 1.

<sup>20</sup> Note from Cerles, Paris, 21 October 1975, CADN, archives Liban (Ambassade), 91 PO/C 1.

<sup>21</sup> Arbid, «France-Liban: Une nécessaire entente cordiale», 6; Malsagne, *Sous l'oeil de la diplomatie française*, 12.

<sup>22</sup> Dalle, *La Ve République et le monde arabe*, 407.

<sup>23</sup> «pour mener une politique pro-arabe» in Sadaka, *La Diplomatie Assassinée*, 67; Lombardi, *Les Trente Honteuses*, 114.

<sup>24</sup> Sofia Papastamkou, «La France au Proche-Orient, 1950-1958 : Un intrus ou une puissance exclue?», *Bulletin de l'Institut Pierre Renouvin*, No. 25 (2007/1): 184, Accessed 2 April 2021, URL: <https://www.cairn.info/revue-bulletin-de-l-institut-pierre-renouvin1-2007-1-page-177.htm>; Vaïsse, *La Puissance ou l'Influence*, 352; Jacques Frémeaux, *Le monde Arabe et la sécurité de la France (1958-1991)* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1995), 279.

<sup>25</sup> Hargrove, *Valéry Giscard d'Estaing*, 125; Lombardi, *Les Trente Honteuses*, 111.

superpowers was through the European project. As Jimmy Carter's National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski saw it, France pursued "reincarnation as Europe."<sup>26</sup> This French move towards accepting a European compromise in its foreign policy, also meant recognizing "that national 'grandeur' was an outdated ideal."<sup>27</sup>

The European Political Co-operation (the EPC) was established in 1970 to further the goal of common foreign policy through the European Community (EC).<sup>28</sup> Through the EPC, France took a role of leadership when it came to funneling its Middle Eastern policies. In the aftermath of the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, the Gaullist government of Georges Pompidou (1969-1974) started on a path of Europeanizing its policies towards the Arab states. The Quai d'Orsay wanted to use the European Political Co-operation as a tool to align the other members of the EC to its more pro-Arab designs.<sup>29</sup> With the oil crisis, which ensued after the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, many EC countries were willing to change their stance and follow France to improve their relationship with the Arab countries.<sup>30</sup>

This shift towards a closer Europe-Arab relationship had started already in May 1971, when a first joint EC document on the Middle East was produced. It dealt with certain aspects of the Arab-Israeli conflict, such as border arrangements with Egypt and refugees. While the document would not take the form of an official EC declaration, it was proof of France's first success in promoting its views throughout Europe.<sup>31</sup> A strongly pro-Arab EC declaration came out two years later, on 6 November 1973 supporting among other things the "Arab stance on Palestine [recognizing] the issue as [...] political." This was also the first time "EC states [spoke] with a single voice on a major international issue."<sup>32</sup> In many ways, the oil crisis had "facilitated the Europeanisation of France's Arab and Middle East policies."<sup>33</sup>

Historian Aurélie Gfeller underlines that while the oil crisis facilitated the process of Europeanizing its Arab policy, it was not the prime initiator. French motivations lay with "concerns about shifting power relations" and potentially losing their sphere of influence in the

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<sup>26</sup> Müller, "The Europeanization of France's foreign policy towards the Middle East conflict", 117.

<sup>27</sup> Elisa Aurélie Gfeller, "A European voice in the Arab World: France, the superpowers, and the Middle East", *Cold War History*, Vol.11 No4 (November 2011): 662.

<sup>28</sup> Müller, "The Europeanization of France's foreign policy towards the Middle East conflict", 113; Simon J. Nuttal, *European Political Co-operation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 1 & 5.

<sup>29</sup> Gfeller, "A European voice in the Arab World", 662.

<sup>30</sup> Gfeller, 664.

<sup>31</sup> Müller, "The Europeanization of France's foreign policy towards the Middle East conflict", 118.

<sup>32</sup> Gfeller, "A European voice in the Arab World", 665.

<sup>33</sup> Gfeller, 667.

Middle East.<sup>34</sup> France realized that the EC could be the way to vehicle its Middle East policy. Therefore “the Europeanization of French foreign policy”, when it came to its Middle East policy, was in many ways more of a “Frenchization” of European foreign policy towards the Middle East.<sup>35</sup> When it came to the Lebanese Civil War, France would often use the EC as a tool to cement its views and initiatives.<sup>36</sup> With Europe at its back, France was closer to contend on the same playing field as the US in Lebanon.

## Primary Sources

This thesis predominantly relies on archival material. It uses material from the *Centre des Archives diplomatiques de La Courneuve* (MAE) and the *Centre des Archives diplomatiques de Nantes* (CADN). The documents found at MAE are from the diplomatic governmental archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The documents from CADN are from the embassy in Beirut. Due to the vast number of archival boxes available, a selection was made based on those concerned with the political progression of the war. In these boxes most documents are telegrams from and to the embassy in Beirut. Correspondence from the embassies in Damascus and Tel Aviv were also present. Other documents include mission reports, meeting notes, inter-departmental communication, letters, speeches and newspaper clippings. In analyzing archival material, it is important to be aware of possible biases of the personnel behind. French historian Roland Lombardi, in his reading of the diplomatic archives, points to a lack of understanding on the part of the French diplomats, and an often pro-Palestinian and anti-Christian viewpoint.<sup>37</sup> Lebanese newspapers, of which clippings are found throughout the archive boxes, act as a political barometer procuring insight into the views of the different actors. Telegrams, inter-departmental communication, and notes are read with a focus on contents. Whereas mission reports and speeches are as interesting by looking at the lexicon used, and thus what it reveals of the French diplomatic mentality at the time.

By and large, French archive materials have yet to be digitalized, which made a trip to France essential to be able to access documents. Some French documentation, mostly concerning

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<sup>34</sup> Gfeller, 668.

<sup>35</sup> Müller, “The Europeanization of France’s foreign policy towards the Middle East conflict”, 124.

<sup>36</sup> See for example: «Déclaration des ministres des affaires étrangères des neuf pays de la Communauté économique européenne», New York, 24 September 1975, MAE 1835INVA 395 (Liban 1973-1982); Bremen declaration in Secret Telegram from Leclercq, Paris, 9 July 1978, MAE 1835INVA 409 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>37</sup> Lombardi, *Les Trente Honteuses*, 201.



defense, are not accessible as they are still considered state secrets.<sup>38</sup> Diplomatic correspondence between the embassies in Tel Aviv, Damascus and Beirut with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs are essential to see the approach and efforts the French took throughout the war.

## Existing Literature

In this section, I will outline some of the relevant literature on France and the Lebanese Civil War itself, and how this contributes to our understanding of the conflict. Michel Chehdan-Kalife's *Les Relations entre la France et le Liban (1958-1978)* (1980) is a concise, relatively short book on the special relationship between Lebanon and France.<sup>39</sup> Still, he often paints a black and white tableau of complicated aspects. As it was written forty years ago, no archive sources were used. As the book uses mostly journalistic resources, especially *Le Monde* it does, however, give us a glimpse into the French press' view on the conflict at the time. Another example of relevant literature largely based on French newspapers is Georges Sadaka's *La Diplomatie Assassinée: La France dans la guerre du Liban, 1975-1985* (1986), a comprehensive study of the French policies during the civil war.<sup>40</sup> The book, however, is a clear product of its time: it is somewhat pro-Maronite, rather anti-American, and heavily critical of France during Giscard's presidency. Sadaka's book thus lacks the lenses which newer archival material provides. It is also more preoccupied with appraising France on its military effort than its other roles and initiatives. Still, the book provides useful insight in its comparison on the approaches taken by presidents Giscard and Mitterrand. By contrast, Paul-Marc Henry's *Les Jardiniers de l'enfer* (1984) provides a unique insight, as he was the French ambassador to Beirut in the years 1981 to 1983.<sup>41</sup> His focus lies on the years previous to and during his own ambassadorial tenure. Translated to "The Gardeners of Hell", the book describes the inner workings of the embassy during arguably the harshest years of the war.

All the aforementioned books, though relevant, are over thirty-five years old, and there is scarce newer French literature on France and the Lebanese Civil War. An exception is Marc Barronet's *Les Relations Franco-Libanaises* (2008), a short book providing an introduction to the historic

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<sup>38</sup> Certain "State secret" documents are subjected to a 50-year delay. See: <https://francearchives.fr/fr/article/26287562>.

<sup>39</sup> Michel Chehdan-Kalifé, *Les relations entre la France et le Liban (1958-1978)*, ([Paris]: Presses universitaires de France, 1983).

<sup>40</sup> Sadaka, *La Diplomatie Assassinée*.

<sup>41</sup> Paul-Marc Henry, *Les Jardiniers de l'Enfer*, (Paris: Olivier Orban, 1984).

French-Lebanese relationship.<sup>42</sup> Baronnet writes of the ancient connections between France and Lebanon dating back to antiquity, the Middle Ages and the Ottoman Empire. However, not much is said on the nature and shape of these relations during the war. Another notable exception is Roland Lombardi's book, *Les Trente Honteuses Aux origines de la fin de l'influence française dans le monde arabe et au Moyen-Orient* (2019), which, focusing on France's relationship to Lebanon, characterizes the years from the end of the Algerian War in 1962 to the end of the Lebanese Civil war in 1990 as thirty years of shame in terms of French loss of influence in the Arab world.<sup>43</sup> The book offers a somewhat pro-Maronite discourse to what is perceived as a lack of French involvement towards the Lebanese Christians. Consisting mainly of quoted work from older literature, especially Annie Laurent and Antoine Basbous's *Guerres secrètes au Liban* (1987), it nonetheless relies on some newer archival material.<sup>44</sup>

All in all, the most significant contributions to our understanding of France's role in the conflict are those by historian Stéphane Malsagne whose writings were of great help for writing up this thesis. Malsagne's work also relies on some of the same archival documents used for this thesis. His book *Sous l'oeil de la diplomatie française* (2017) specifically deals with France in Lebanon during the war years.<sup>45</sup> Malsagne offers a more objective take on France's involvement during the war, having succeeded in ridding himself of the often-pro-Maronite, and therefore critical of France position, that plagues much of the older literature.<sup>46</sup> In his work, however, it is the endeavors of the President, his ministers, political envoys and especially the different ambassadors that tend to be in focus.<sup>47</sup> His collaborative work with Dima de Clerck, *Le Liban en Guerre: 1975-1990* (2020), takes a more general look at the war both chronologically and thematically.<sup>48</sup>

Looking beyond the specific relationship between France and Lebanon, there is an abundance of literature available on the wider relationship between France and the Middle East. Ignace Dalle's book *La Ve République et le monde arabe* (2014) about the Fifth Republic and the Arab

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<sup>42</sup> Marc Barronet, *Les relations franco-libanaises*, (Middletown (DE): Lulu.com, 2008).

<sup>43</sup> Lombardi, *Les Trente Honteuses*, 11.

<sup>44</sup> Annie Laurent and Antoine Basbous, *Guerres secrètes au Liban* (Paris: Gallimard, 1987).

<sup>45</sup> Malsagne, *Sous l'oeil de la diplomatie française*.

<sup>46</sup> Here I specifically think of Laurent and Basbous, *Guerres secrètes au Liban*; Sadaka, *La Diplomatie Assassinée*; but also to a certain degree Lombardi, *Les Trente Honteuses*.

<sup>47</sup> Malsagne, *Sous l'oeil de la diplomatie française*, 303.

<sup>48</sup> De Clerck and Malsagne, *Le Liban en Guerre*.

world, for example, takes a look at French policy towards Lebanon among others.<sup>49</sup> Dalle has a subchapter dedicated to President Giscard d'Estaing and the relationship to the PLO.<sup>50</sup>

An extensive number of books and articles about the civil war itself are also available. Lebanese historian Farid el-Khazen's book *The Breakdown of the State in Lebanon* (2000) deals with the fissuring of the state of Lebanon in the years leading up to the civil war.<sup>51</sup> One of his main arguments is that the Arab-Israeli conflict is mostly to blame for the civil war, and that Lebanon's problems are of a regional order. Another Lebanese historian, Fawwaz Traboulsi, in his book *A Modern History of Lebanon* (2007), takes a much broader approach to the last 500 years of Lebanese history and focuses mostly on the civil war's internal factors.<sup>52</sup> This practice of putting socio-economic and internal sectarian factors first and the regional factors as secondary, provides us with a different perspective on the conflict.

British journalist Edgar O'Ballance does a more classic rendition of the conflict in his 1998 book *Civil War in Lebanon 1975-92*.<sup>53</sup> He recounts the military progression of the war focusing on day-to-day events. Marius Deeb's *The Lebanese Civil War* (1980), though old, provides an insight into the first two years of the war and a detailed look at the different factions.<sup>54</sup> Both these books are useful to get in-detail accounts of the war progression. American historian James R. Stocker's *Spheres of intervention: US foreign policy and the collapse of Lebanon 1967-1976* (2016), is an example of a book looking at one specific actor of the civil war.<sup>55</sup> While still telling the story of the collapse in the years before the war, the main focus lies on the US. Stocker argues that American policy towards the Palestinians and the region in general indirectly contributed to the conflict.

Unlike all the literature cited, this thesis focuses on the short period 1975 to 1982, and uses newer archival resources that have only become gradually available during the last twenty-five years. While I build on this existing literature, I am also less preoccupied with appraising France's military involvement or the lack thereof. Rather, I argue that France pursued an impossible balance between their traditional allies, the Maronites, and their wish to pursue a more pro-Arab and pro-Palestinian policy in the Middle East. As such their alleged neutrality became an illusion. France might have had a genuine wish to intervene in the accelerating civil

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<sup>49</sup> Dalle, *La Ve République et le monde arabe*.

<sup>50</sup> Dalle, 146-14 & 406-407.

<sup>51</sup> Khazen, *The Breakdown of the State*.

<sup>52</sup> Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon*.

<sup>53</sup> Edgar O'Ballance, *Civil War in Lebanon, 1975-92*, (New York: Palgrave, 1998).

<sup>54</sup> Marius Deeb, *The Lebanese Civil War*, (New York: Praeger, 1980).

<sup>55</sup> Stocker, *Spheres of Intervention*.

war and to establish their so-called “integrity, sovereignty and unity”, but this wish ended up being limited to its rhetorical use. Initiatives and much diplomatic activity was done, but in the end there was little concrete actions undertaken.

### **Structure of the Thesis**

The thesis is a chronological undertaking of the period spanning the first half of the civil war (1975-1982). In the second chapter, I provide a background overview of the relationship between France and Lebanon between 1920 and 1975. In the third chapter, I examine the period from the start of the war in April 1975 to the Syrian invasion in June 1976, and how France had an intense period of initiatives which was punctuated by the West’s permission for Syria to intervene. In the fourth chapter, I study the years from June 1976 until May 1981, the remaining years of the Giscard d’Estaing presidency, and how France gradually retreated from the scene. In the fifth chapter, I scrutinize the period from May 1981 until the Israeli invasion in June 1982, and how Mitterrand tackled a wave of anti-French attacks and the Israeli invasion. Lastly, I end with a concluding chapter summarizing the findings. Chapters three to five constitute the core of my thesis and are based on French archival material.

## Chapter 2 – 1920 to 1975

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### France and Lebanon: from Mandate to Madness

The Lebanese, free and proud, are the only people in the history of the world, throughout the centuries, [...] whose heart never stopped beating at the same rhythm as the heart of France.<sup>56</sup>

General Charles De Gaulle, 27 of July 1941

Throughout the centuries, Lebanon distinguished itself from its neighboring countries by having a large Christian population. The first Christians settled in Lebanon in the sixth century AD. They were the Maronites, named after a priest, Maron, from whose monastery in Syria they came from. As many other religious groups over the years, they sought refuge in the mountain range of Mount Lebanon.<sup>57</sup> It was the Maronites, more than any other community, who forged Lebanon's relationship with France. French interest in the Levant, and Lebanon in particular, dates back around a thousand years to the crusades, of which the French were among the most fervent participants. In 1182 the Maronite Church entered into a communion with the pope, the Catholic Church and the Vatican, and thereby with France; self-proclaimed protector and "oldest daughter of the Catholic Church".<sup>58</sup> In the 13<sup>th</sup> century king Saint Louis had asserted that France must always be of help to the Lebanese. Later kings would, to emulate the holiest of French kings, abide by this "promise" to always be of assistance.<sup>59</sup> This was the start of France's role as protector of the Maronite community in Lebanon; a role that France would continue to exercise into the twentieth century. To understand the dynamics of the Lebanese Civil War, one has to understand the foundation of the Lebanese state. Why does a country such as Lebanon exist, as sectarian and multifaceted as it is? Likewise, to understand French

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<sup>56</sup> «Les Libanais, libres et fiers, ont été le seul peuple dans l'histoire du monde, à travers les siècles, [...] dont jamais le coeur n'a cessé de battre au rythme du coeur de la France» in Dalle, *La Vème République et le Monde Arabe*, 399.

<sup>57</sup> Waage, *Konflikt og stormaktspolitikk i Midtøsten*, 210; Cobban, *The Making of Modern Lebanon*, 17; Lombardi, *Les Trente Honteuses*, 161.

<sup>58</sup> Sadaka, *La Diplomatie Assassinée*, 33-34; Barronet, *Les Relations Franco-Libanaises*, 13-14; Waage, 210.

<sup>59</sup> Lombardi, *Les Trente Honteuses*, 162.

motivations and thoughts around the civil war, the historic relationship between the two countries has to be looked into and explained. How did this special relationship take shape?

### **The Mandate Period and the Sectarian Division**

With the end of the First World War, the Ottoman Empire disintegrated. Already in 1916, the Sykes Picot Agreement between France and Great Britain, stipulated that when the war was to end, control over the regions of Syria and Lebanon were going to France. In 1922, to make the takeover seem more legitimate, France got a formal mandate from the League of Nations.<sup>60</sup> Unlike downright colonies, mandates were supposed to be a temporary solution. By being a mandate and not a colony, France was only supposed to “help” Lebanon transition towards a promised independence. In the French view, it was after all a great burden, but one they were willing to take, to carry *la mission civilisatrice* to the people of the Middle East. Many leaders and intellectuals in Syria and Lebanon would have preferred to have the United States as mandate power, instead of France, who was considered too much of an old school colonialist.<sup>61</sup>

On the request of their longtime Maronite friends, France carved out what today constitutes Lebanon from the rest of the Syrian Mandate. The establishment of Greater Lebanon was proclaimed on 1 September 1920 by General Henri Gouraud in Beirut at the palatial building of the *Résidence de Pins*, which would later house the French Embassy.<sup>62</sup> This Greater Lebanon mandate consisted not only of the Lebanon mountains, but also of the important port cities of Beirut, Saida, Tripoli and Tyre, and the lush Bekaa valley in the east. This aggrandizement meant an even more sectarian diverse land. The Maronites were the largest ethno-religious group, making up around 30 percent of the population.<sup>63</sup> Overall, the Christians were in the majority, something the Sunni Muslim population were especially dissatisfied with. They, along with other non-Maronite groups, would rather have been a part of a pan-Arab, greater Syrian state. While gaining more autonomy and status as a republic in 1926, Lebanon remained under French tutelage in affairs of foreign and military policy. There was still major French influence in the domains of governance and “the French high-commissary had the right to

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<sup>60</sup> Waage, *Konflikt og stormaktspolitikk i Midtøsten*, 216; Elizabeth Picard, *Lebanon A Shattered Country: Myths and Realities of the Wars in Lebanon*, trans. by Philip (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1996), 29; Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon*, 75.

<sup>61</sup> Elizabeth Picard, *Liban, Etat de discorde* (Paris: Flammarion, 1988), 31.

<sup>62</sup> Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon*, 80; Malsagne, *Sous l'oeil de la diplomatie française*, 24.

<sup>63</sup> Waage, *Konflikt og stormaktspolitikk i Midtøsten*, 216-217; Traboulsi, 80; B.J. Odeh, *Lebanon Dynamics of Conflict* (London: Zed Books, 1985), 40-41.

dissolve the parliament and set aside the constitution.” Three times in 1932, 1934 and 1939 France would intervene to dissolve the parliament.<sup>64</sup> The Maronites were, however, not the marionettes of the French, as Anne Elvestad concludes in her master thesis on the subject. They knew how to manipulate French desire for, among other things, port access in the eastern Mediterranean to get what they wanted.<sup>65</sup>

As the ethno-religious tensions in Lebanon became central to the civil war, the issue of censuses was fundamental. In both 1922, by 55 to 45 percent, and 1932, by 51 to 49 percent, a census revealed that the Christians were in the majority.<sup>66</sup> This last census was controversial and its results ambiguous. Since then, no new census has ever been conducted. The Maronites and other Christian minorities, afraid the numbers would show an increase in the Muslim population, would not allow new ones. With the nature of the political power being divided by sectarian lines, newer censuses would have meant drastic change in power dynamics, to the disfavor of the Maronites and their French allies. As historian Hilde Henriksen Waage writes; “it was already in 1932 clear that Lebanon could not be Christian and large at the same time.”<sup>67</sup> In 1937 Lebanese president Emile Eddé chose a Sunni Muslim as prime minister. From then on, the principle that the prime minister would always be a Sunni and the president a Maronite was established.<sup>68</sup>

During the Second World War, Vichy France maintained control over France’s colonies for some time before gradually losing them to the troops of Charles de Gaulle. This was also the case in Lebanon, where in the summer of 1941, British and Free French Forces invaded. While promising independence to Lebanon and Syria, de Gaulle was still reluctant to give up the territories. Under pressure he gave way, and elections were held in August 1943 to determine the fate of Lebanon. Independence won out, and Bishara al-Khury became the first elected president of the independent Lebanese republic. The National Pact of 1943 determined that Lebanon would be an independent state, which meant that it would not fuse with any of its Arab neighbors. It also determined, to satisfy the Muslim population, “that Lebanon would be a

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<sup>64</sup> «hadde den franske høykomissæren rett til å oppløse parlamentet og tilsidesette grunnloven» in Waage, 217-218; Stéphane Malsagne, «Intérêts et engagements de la France au Moyen-Orient de la fin du XIXe siècle à 2017», *L'ENA hors les murs*, No. 476 (December 2017): 18; Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon*, 80-81 & 89-90.

<sup>65</sup> Anne Elvestad, «Frankrikes Maronittiske Marionetter? Fransk-maronittiske forhold 1918–1937», Master thesis (University of Oslo, Spring 2012), 86 & 89-90.

<sup>66</sup> Waage, *Konflikt og stormaktspolitikk i Midtøsten*, 217-218; Picard, *Lebanon A Shattered Country*, 32-33 & 66.

<sup>67</sup> «Var det allerede i 1932 tydelig at Libanon ikke kunne være både kristent og stort på en gang» in Waage, 217-218.

<sup>68</sup> Waage, 218; Cobban, *The Making of Modern Lebanon*, 67.

country with an Arab face”, a claim which was rather vague.<sup>69</sup> The National Pact, while stating that the government should work towards a nonsectarian system, in reality cemented the sectarian power division. The major ethno-religious groups all had to be represented in parliament and government, and the president of the national assembly should always be a Shia. The division of power was based on the 1932 census and was already then, as it is today, outdated.<sup>70</sup> The last French troops left Lebanon on 31 December 1946, formally ending the French presence in the region.<sup>71</sup>

### **The Fourth Republic and Lebanon’s Struggle Between Western Friendship and Pan-Arabism**

After 1946, France felt excluded from the Middle East. For the next ten years, it would try to reclaim some of its lost prestige in the region, so that it could be perceived as a third major player alongside Britain and the United States.<sup>72</sup> Excluded from British-American military cooperation in the region, France focused on the sales of arms as a way of gaining political influence.<sup>73</sup>

In the late 1940s and 1950s Lebanon became a prosperous economical liberal haven. As its Arab neighbors of Egypt, Syria and Iraq chose paths of planned economies, Lebanon became the place to do investments in the Arab World.<sup>74</sup> In the 1950s and 60s France was economically and technically involved in Lebanon through modernization projects in electrification, planification and transportation.<sup>75</sup> At the time Beirut was one of the cities in the world with the fastest growth.<sup>76</sup> In 1952, Camille Chamoun was elected president. Chamoun was pro-Western and pro-business, and sought the entry of Lebanon into a Western alliance.<sup>77</sup> Lebanon received economic and military help from the US, and they signed a commercial treaty in 1955. While tempted to join, Chamoun, however, kept Lebanon out of the anti-communist Baghdad Pact.

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<sup>69</sup> «At Libanon skulle være et land med et arabisk ansikt» in Waage, 219; Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon*, 104-110.

<sup>70</sup> Waage, 219-220; Traboulsi, 109-111; Odeh, *Lebanon Dynamics of Conflict*, 42-43.

<sup>71</sup> Bayeh, *A History of Change and Stability in Lebanon* (London & New York: I.B. Tauris, 2017), 107.

<sup>72</sup> «Afin de se faire reconnaître comme le troisième Grand, en s’introduisant dans le couple anglo-américain» in Papastamkou, «La France au Proche-Orient», 178.

<sup>73</sup> Papastamkou, 180.

<sup>74</sup> Henry Laurens, «Le Liban et l’occident. Récit d’un parcours», *Vingtième Siècle revue d’histoire*, No.32 (October-December 1991): 30, Accessed 11 April 2021, URL: <https://doi.org/10.3406/xxs.1991.2451>.

<sup>75</sup> Chehdan-Kalifé, *Les relations entre la France et le Liban*, 39.

<sup>76</sup> Henry, *Les Jardiniers de l’Enfer*, 41.

<sup>77</sup> Waage, *Konflikt og stormaktspolitikk i Midtøsten*, 220.



He also kept the country out of the Egypt-Saudi-Arabia-Syria Arab defense pact, which was created as a counter to the Baghdad Pact.<sup>78</sup>

Finding itself sidelined by the Baghdad Pact, France, under the government of Pierre Mendès-France (1954-55), had three anchors of support in the region: Israel, Egypt, and Syria. The strengthening of ties with these countries was done primarily through the sale of arms.<sup>79</sup> France could act as a possible third supplier which was neither the Soviet Union nor the United States. The gradual strengthening of the French relationship with Israel, and Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser's foraging into the Algerian War would, however, sour the Franco-Egyptian relationship.<sup>80</sup> Eventually it was the 1956 Suez Crisis that marked the transition from a Middle East where France and Britain were the primary Western powers, to one where the US dominated. France's diplomatic relationship with Syria and Egypt came to a stop. Lebanon was the only Arab country that did not sever ties with France during the Suez crisis.<sup>81</sup>

President Chamoun wanted to safeguard Lebanon from both Soviet and Nasserist influence. Along with the Maronite elite, he feared the effects those influences could have on Lebanese sovereignty. Chamoun's policies, which reeked of neo-colonial influence, were not popular among most of the population. This was especially the case by those parts of the Muslim communities who held Nasser and his policies in high regards. Chamoun feared these pan-Arab currents.<sup>82</sup> In 1957, Chamoun won reelection as president; the only problem was that he had changed the part of the constitution which said that a president could only sit one six-year term. He won the reelection by being helped by the CIA and thereby barred entry for Nasser-friendly politicians to parliament. This did not sit well with the Muslim population. The mounting resentment against Chamoun, and the difference in living standards between the Christian and Muslim population, eventually lead to clashes in May 1958.<sup>83</sup>

Chamoun eventually contacted the US for help under the auspices of the Eisenhower doctrine, which, as a containment doctrine, promised military help to whichever Middle Eastern country felt threatened by "international communism." For the US government, a pan-Arab Nasserist movement was clearly communist, and so on 15 July, 15 000 American troops arrived in Lebanon. The tensions soon subsided. The flare up of a sectarian civil war had been a real threat,

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<sup>78</sup> Waage, 221; Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon*, 130-131.

<sup>79</sup> Papastamkou, «La France au Proche-Orient, 1950-1958», 183.

<sup>80</sup> Papastamkou, 185-186.

<sup>81</sup> Arbid, «France-Liban : Une nécessaire entente cordiale», 6.

<sup>82</sup> Waage, *Konflikt og stormaktspolitikk i Midtøsten*, 221.

<sup>83</sup> Waage, 221; Cobban, *The Making of Modern Lebanon*, 87-88.

but the withdrawal of the US forces and the eventual bow out of President Chamoun momentarily stumped the tinder. General Fuad Chehab, who as head of the Lebanese Army had refused to crush the resistance, took over as president.<sup>84</sup> While the American intervention in Lebanon was taking place, France did not partake. President Charles de Gaulle did think of the possibility of a French military intervention.<sup>85</sup> However, stuck in the Algerian War quagmire the French “did not have the possibility, nor the political will, of doing an intervention in the same way as its allies”, the US.<sup>86</sup> The 1958 Lebanon crisis was the prime conflict in Lebanon before the civil war erupted in 1975 and showcased a sample of the sectarian discontentment, and what could happen if it translated into action. It also stands as an example of the big-power game unfolding in Lebanon. This interventionist tendency would continue during the civil war.

During the first years of the Cold War France was looking to keep influence in Syria and Lebanon.<sup>87</sup> Historian Walid Arbid asserts that even though French troops left the region in 1946, “France was able to maintain most of its economic interests through the permanency of its cultural influence.”<sup>88</sup> Nonetheless, the Middle East, while holding these important cultural and economic ties, came as a secondary focus for France. It placed itself behind Great Britain and the United States, as its primary focus lay in North Africa.<sup>89</sup> From 1954 until 1962 French policies in the Middle East were saturated by the ongoing conflict taking place in Algeria. At the height of the Algerian War, Lebanon, to the contrary of the other countries of the Arab League, did not breach its relations with France.<sup>90</sup> The weakness of the French Fourth Republic, whose governments rarely lasted for more than a year, was reflected in the weakness of the French foreign policy conducted in the Middle East.

### **The Fifth Republic: From *Grandeur* to *Realpolitik***

After the end of its fourth Republic in 1958, France was in an all-time low standing among Arab countries. Both the Algerian War and the Suez Crisis had tarnished their reputation in the region. To restore French stature, President de Gaulle established a foreign policy of *Grandeur*

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<sup>84</sup> Waage, 222-223.

<sup>85</sup> Arbid, «France-Liban: Une nécessaire entente cordiale», 6.

<sup>86</sup> «N’avait pas la possibilité d’effectuer une intervention au même titre que ses alliés ni, en outre, une volonté politique marquée pour le faire» in Papastamkou, «La France au Proche-Orient, 1950-1958», 187; Lombardi, *Les Trente Honteuses*, 189.

<sup>87</sup> Malsagne, «Intérêts et engagements de la France au Moyen-Orient de la fin du XIXe siècle à 2017», 18.

<sup>88</sup> «La France parvient [...] à sauvegarder l’essentiel de ses intérêts économiques à travers la permanence de son influence culturelle», in Arbid, «France-Liban: Une nécessaire entente cordiale», 5-6.

<sup>89</sup> Papastamkou, «La France au Proche-Orient, 1950-1958», 177-178.

<sup>90</sup> Malsagne, *Sous l’oeil de la diplomatie française*, 12.

based on French exceptionalism.<sup>91</sup> De Gaulle certainly did not believe that France should let go of its global influence, including in the Middle East, despite the Cold War bipolarization. *Grandeur* has since lingered in French Foreign policy psyche long after de Gaulle. He also feared the competition and imperialism of the two superpowers in the Mediterranean and Lebanon, which were traditional French strongholds.<sup>92</sup> To counter this, French diplomatic relations, which had been frozen since the Suez crisis, were restored with Syria in 1962, and with Egypt in 1963.<sup>93</sup>

During the de Gaulle presidency, France would support the Lebanese Army by delivering Mirage III planes in 1966 and Crotale missiles in 1969.<sup>94</sup> The de Gaulle years would be characterized by an unconditional support for Lebanon. He would serve as a “guide” and have great influence on Lebanese foreign policy.<sup>95</sup> After President Chamoun’s resignation, it was the Francophile president Fuad Chehab (1958-1964) that permitted France a great deal of influence.<sup>96</sup> Chehab worked to make Lebanon into a modern nation state, based on the values of the west. By choosing to work with France, Chehab could choose a third path away from the US and Soviet Union.<sup>97</sup> Youssef Salem, a Lebanese minister of foreign affairs, stated in 1969 that “France does not need Lebanon, but Lebanon needs France.”<sup>98</sup> This underlines the asymmetry of this relationship between one strong and one weak country, where the junior partner, Lebanon, saw this relationship as fundamental to its survival as an autonomous state. With the presidencies of Fuad Chehab and Charles Hélou (1964-1970) France recovered its influence after the British American turn of the Chamoun presidency.<sup>99</sup>

In June 1967 six days of war between Israel and its Arab neighbors shook the world. A resounding Israeli victory resulted in sizable territorial gains. De Gaulle feared that escalation in the conflict could destabilize the Maghreb and francophone Africa, and was therefore de openly critical of Israeli actions during the War.<sup>100</sup> This elevated his, and France’s, status in

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<sup>91</sup> Rieker, *French Foreign Policy in a Changing World*, 160.

<sup>92</sup> Chehdan-Kalifé, *Les relations entre la France et le Liban*, 27-28.

<sup>93</sup> Gfeller, “A European voice in the Arab World”, 660.

<sup>94</sup> Chehdan-Kalifé, *Les relations entre la France et le Liban*, 46.

<sup>95</sup> Chehdan-Kalifé, 34, 51.

<sup>96</sup> Malsagne, «Intérêts et engagements de la France au Moyen-Orient de la fin du XIXe siècle à 2017», 16.

<sup>97</sup> Sadaka, *La Diplomatie Assassinée*, 41.

<sup>98</sup> «La France n’a pas besoin du Liban, mais le Liban a besoin de la France» in *Le Monde* 1 September 1969 cited in Chehdan-Kalifé, *Les relations entre la France et le Liban*, 12.

<sup>99</sup> Chehdan-Kalifé, 16-18 & 43.

<sup>100</sup> Edward A. Kolodziej, “French Mediterranean Policy: The Politics of Weakness”, *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944)*, Vol. 47, No. 3 (July 1971): 507, Accessed 25 March 2021, URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2614437>.

many Arab countries.<sup>101</sup> In December 1968 de Gaulle subsequently established an embargo on French weapons towards Israel.<sup>102</sup> The embargo would last until 1993.<sup>103</sup> This was not insignificant for either part since France had been Israel's primary weapons provider before 1967.<sup>104</sup> After the war Israel would gradually turn more towards the US.<sup>105</sup>

The implementation of UN resolution 242 which "called for Israel's withdrawal from the occupied territories" would lay the foundation for France's subsequent Palestinian policy.<sup>106</sup> However, UN resolution 242 had a significant design flaw. The French and English versions were fundamentally different. In English the resolution called for a "withdrawal from occupied territories", but in French the translation called for a "withdrawal from *the* occupied territories." The difference lay in a withdrawal from a vague definition of territories versus a complete withdrawal from all annexed territories. Naturally France recognized the meaning of the French text, thus a more pro-Palestinian stance.<sup>107</sup>

As historian Aurélie Elisa Gfeller asserts "the 1967 Six Day War [...] marked a 'turning point' in the French-Israeli relationship."<sup>108</sup> This break-up opened the road to further a pro-Arab rapprochement. With the resignation of de Gaulle in 1969, a new phase in the Franco-Lebanese relationship developed. His successors would go from what had been an unconditional support to a more "limited support" towards Lebanon.<sup>109</sup> However, in many ways, the rapprochement to the Arab world soured France's relationship to Lebanon as it happened through the PLO; at that time a foreign entity on Lebanese soil.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Malsagne, «Intérêts et engagements de la France au Moyen-Orient de la fin du XIXe siècle à 2017», 18.

<sup>102</sup> Arbid, «France-Liban: Une nécessaire entente cordiale», 8.

<sup>103</sup> Lombardi, *Les Trente Honteuses*, 235.

<sup>104</sup> «le premier fournisseur d'armes à Israël avant la guerre de 1967», in Chehdan-Kalifé, *Les relations entre la France et le Liban*, 46.

<sup>105</sup> Jacques Frémeaux, «La France et les exportations d'armements au Proche-orient de la fin de la guerre d'Algérie à la première guerre du Golfe», *Revue historique des armées*, No.246 (2007): 2, Accessed 24 March 2021, URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/rha/2273>.

<sup>106</sup> «demandant le retrait d'Israël des territoires occupés» in Franck Orban, *La France et la puissance : Perspectives et stratégies de politique étrangère (1945-1995)* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2011), 270.

<sup>107</sup> Jean-Pierre Filiu, *Mitterrand et la Palestine: L'ami d'Israël qui sauva par trois fois Yasser Arafat* (France: Fayard, 2005), 41; Lombardi, *Les Trente Honteuses*, 101.

<sup>108</sup> Gfeller, "A European voice in the Arab World", 661.

<sup>109</sup> "Un soutien limité" in Chehdan-Kalifé, *Les relations entre la France et le Liban*, 51.

<sup>110</sup> Chehdan-Kalifé, 68.

## The Emergence of the French-Palestinian Relationship

After the loss of the 1948 Arab Israel War approximately 130 000 Palestinians refugees fled to Lebanon, the first of several such waves of refugees towards the country.<sup>111</sup> Most would settle in makeshift camps in the outskirts of Beirut. The 1967 Six-Day War would bring another wave of approximately 35 000 Palestinians to Lebanon.<sup>112</sup> In September 1970, a civil war between the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and the authorities erupted in Jordan. The PLO had a firm presence inside the Palestinian refugee camps in Jordan, from which they recruited and then attacked Israel through guerilla warfare. Due to massive Israeli retaliation and the many independent guerilla groups, tensions rose with the Jordanian Army.<sup>113</sup> What came to be known as “Black September” resulted in the ousting of the PLO from Jordan. This is an important event to understand the Lebanese Civil War since the PLO would move its headquarters to Lebanon. In Lebanon the organization benefited from more freedom of action. In Syria and Egypt, the authorities demanded allegiance, and thereby did not permit “independent PLO activities across their borders” as these could inadvertently result in Israeli retaliation.<sup>114</sup> By contrast, from southern Lebanon, the PLO held an independent position and frequently attacked Israel. Their autonomy was strengthened by the Cairo Agreements of 1969 which stipulated that the PLO gained control over Palestinian refugee camps and the authorization to “maintain a military presence” while under some strict limits.<sup>115</sup> This effectively created a state within a state. Journalists Annie Laurent and Antoine Basbous claim that because of the absence of the West, and especially of de Gaulle and the unconditional support he had held for the country, a weakened Lebanon found itself having to sign the Cairo Agreements. This was also the sentiment of Lebanon’s president Héliou.<sup>116</sup> However, historian Roland Lombardi, commenting on this claim, asserts that de Gaulle, had he still been president, would probably have done nothing; France’s new regional interests now came first.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Waage, *Konflikt og stormaktspolitikk i Midtøsten*, 224.

<sup>112</sup> Jaber Suleiman, “Marginalised Community: The Case of Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon”, Development Research Centre on Migration, Globalisation and Poverty University of Sussex, April 2006, 8. Accessed 23 May 2021. URL:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a08c4be5274a31e0001112/JaberEdited.pdf?fbclid=IwAR3b\\_Kv1CtQVtQ41KkkdDg5Hd6ZkeKoLfrHKidcPosfyhytTUxFDhVTOPiA](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a08c4be5274a31e0001112/JaberEdited.pdf?fbclid=IwAR3b_Kv1CtQVtQ41KkkdDg5Hd6ZkeKoLfrHKidcPosfyhytTUxFDhVTOPiA).

<sup>113</sup> Waage, *Konflikt og stormaktspolitikk i Midtøsten*, 307.

<sup>114</sup> Bayeh, *A History of Change and Stability in Lebanon*, 140-141.

<sup>115</sup> Cobban, *The Making of Modern Lebanon*, 109-110; Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon*, 154.

<sup>116</sup> Laurent and Basbous, *Guerres secrètes au Liban*, 29, 268; Chehdan-Kalifé, *Les relations entre la France et le Liban*, 51-52.

<sup>117</sup> Lombardi, *Les Trente Honteuses*, 198.

Not much happened in France's relationship with the Palestinians before 1967. Both presidents de Gaulle and Pompidou had recognized the plight of the Palestinian refugees. Since 1969, there had also been Palestinian representation in Paris.<sup>118</sup> In 1973 it was through a French initiative that the nine members of the European Community signed a text reaffirming "that the security of all states in the region can only be guaranteed through the rigorous and full implementation of resolution 242, while taking into account the 'legitimate rights' of the Palestinians."<sup>119</sup> France, thereby, changed the European stance to a more overtly pro-Palestinian one.

With the post de Gaulle period, *realpolitik* and economic interests gradually became more central to France's relationship to Lebanon. On 6 October 1973 Egyptian and Syrian forces attacked Israel, eager to take back the Golan Heights and the Sinai peninsula lost in the 1967 War. Supporting their allies in the fight against Israel, the Arab oil-producing countries implemented restrictions and increased the oil prices.<sup>120</sup> This was bad news for France, which in the beginning of the 1970s, imported 75 percent of its oil from the Middle East. The oil shock and the ensuing petrodollar surge were important factors in shaping the new direction of Franco-Arab and Franco-Palestinian relationships under President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing (1974-1981).<sup>121</sup> With the new presidency there was an official strengthening of the ties with the Palestinians. Through the Palestinians, Giscard hoped to gain the favor of the Arab countries and consequently their oil.<sup>122</sup> As a reaction to the war, France's minister of foreign affairs Michel Jobert even declared: "Does trying to return home necessarily constitute an unforeseen assault?"<sup>123</sup> Journalists Laurent and Basbous claim that from 1974 onwards Giscard tried "to seduce the PLO and its Arab allies, even at the detriment of the Lebanese sovereignty."<sup>124</sup> Lebanese journalist Georges Sadaka also asserts that France started showing a disinterest towards Lebanon because its focus was now on oil-producing Middle Eastern countries, particularly in the Gulf.<sup>125</sup> Alternatively, Laurent and Basbous argue that strong ties to the PLO

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<sup>118</sup> Dalle, *La Vème République et le Monde Arabe*, 429-432.

<sup>119</sup> «que la sécurité de tous les États de la région ne peut être garantie que par l'application rigoureuse et complète de la résolution 242, tout en tenant compte des 'droits légitimes' des Palestiniens» in Dalle, 433.

<sup>120</sup> Vincent Nouzille, *Des secrets si bien gardés: Les dossiers de la Maison-Blanche et de la CIA sur la France et ses présidents 1958-1981* (Mayenne : Fayard, 2009), 349-350.

<sup>121</sup> Arbid, «France-Liban: Une nécessaire entente cordiale», 8.

<sup>122</sup> Sadaka, *La Diplomatie Assassinée*, 63 & 67; Lombardi, *Les Trente Honteuses*, 199.

<sup>123</sup> «Est-ce que tenter de remettre les pieds chez soi constitue forcément une agression imprévue ?» in Lombardi, 102.

<sup>124</sup> «Pour séduire l'OLP et ses soutiens arabes, fût-ce au détriment de la souveraineté libanaise» in Laurent and Basbous, *Guerres secrètes au Liban*, 269.

<sup>125</sup> Sadaka, *La Diplomatie Assassinée*, 31.

were maintained to avoid terrorist attacks on French soil.<sup>126</sup> Their claim is supported by French historian Roland Lombardi, who even goes as far as asserting that France had a discreet accord with the PLO stipulating no attacks in France in exchange for French Pro-Palestinians positions.<sup>127</sup>

Giscard was no heavyweight when it came to foreign and Middle Eastern affairs. He had, however, learned the importance of a good relationship with the Arab states after the explosion of the oil prices, which effectively rung the end of *Les Trente Glorieuses*, the thirty years of unprecedented economic growth that had followed the world war. Historian Ignace Dalle qualifies Giscard as the French president “who did the most to advance the Palestinian cause.”<sup>128</sup> He continued the policies of his predecessors, by maintaining focus on Palestinian rights. He also supported the PLO as a legitimate representation of the Palestinians. Nonetheless his entourage could be qualified as close to or friends of Israel.<sup>129</sup>

In October 1974 the relationship between France and the PLO would reach new heights. On 13 October, 106 member states of the UN, France among them, recognized the PLO.<sup>130</sup> A few days later, on 21 October, a meeting was arranged in Beirut between Yasser Arafat, chairman of the PLO and French minister of foreign affairs Jean Sauvagnargues. This was Arafat’s first meeting with a Western leader. As a symbol of the French’s newfound respect and intentions, Sauvagnargues even used the words “Mr. President” when addressing Arafat.<sup>131</sup> The Israelis showed their dissatisfaction with the French actions by flying their planes over Beirut during the meeting.<sup>132</sup> In a press conference on 24 October, after multiple and excessive reactions to the handshake, Giscard felt the need to defend the meeting. In a statement he said: “there can be no lasting peace [...] unless the Palestinian question is resolved.”<sup>133</sup> Subsequently, a bureau of information with the PLO opened in Paris a year after the Arafat-Sauvagnargues meeting.<sup>134</sup> This approach was a fundamentally different approach than the US, who held no official contact

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<sup>126</sup> Laurent and Basbous, *Guerres secrètes au Liban*, 274.

<sup>127</sup> Lombardi, *Les Trente Honteuses*, 117-118.

<sup>128</sup> «qui a le plus fait progresser la cause palestinienne» in Dalle, *La Vème République et le Monde Arabe*, 434.

<sup>129</sup> Dalle, 132-134 & 149.

<sup>130</sup> Chehdan-Kalifé, *Les relations entre la France et le Liban*, 67.

<sup>131</sup> «Monsieur le Président» in Laurent and Basbous, *Guerres secrètes au Liban*, 269.

<sup>132</sup> Diplomatic news report on «Réactions au voyage du Ministre au Liban et en Jordanie», Damascus, 25 October 1974, MAE 1835INVA 415 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>133</sup> «Il ne peut y avoir de paix durable, [...] que si la question palestinienne fait l’objet d’un règlement» in *Le Monde*, 26 October 1974, cited in Dalle, *La Vème République et le Monde Arabe*, 134.

<sup>134</sup> Dalle, 435; Chehdan-Kalifé, *Les relations entre la France et le Liban*, 71.

with the PLO until the late 1980s. In 1975, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger had even installed a “ban on discussing with the organization.”<sup>135</sup>

The gradual change in French Palestine policies would impact France’s relationship to Lebanon. Since 1969, France always tried to find a middle ground in its image, and not endorse Lebanon’s Christian or Muslim side publicly.<sup>136</sup> At the outbreak of the war in 1975 there were close to 300 000 Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, making up about 10 percent of the country’s population.<sup>137</sup>

The underlying causes for the Lebanese Civil War, while still heatedly debated, are not the focus of this thesis. Yet, they are essential to understand the conflict. Although there were other factors, historian Stéphane Malsagne underlines three major parameters; two internal and one external. The first factor underlined by Malsagne was the minimal control held by the authorities. Clan and community leaders still held much control over people. The second factor were the socio-economic inequalities. Combined with a massive rural flight towards Beirut, a proletariat emerged, which overwhelmingly turned towards alternative factions of society such as religious institutions. The third factor was the regional context of the Israel-Palestine conflict.<sup>138</sup> The influx of numerous Palestinians and, especially since September 1970, of the armed PLO brought the Lebanese cauldron closer to boiling. In April 1975, the tinder that had laid more or less dormant since 1958, exploded leading to a civil war that would last fifteen years and kill 145 000 people.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Seth Anziska, *Preventing Palestine: A political history from Camp David to Oslo* (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2018), 26. See Jørgen Jensehaugen, “A Palestinian window of opportunity? The PLO, the US and the Iranian hostage crisis”, *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* (2019), Accessed 13 May 2021, DOI: 10.1080/13530194.2019.1661646, for the behind-the-scenes contact kept between the US and the PLO from 1969 to 1979.

<sup>136</sup> Laurent and Basbous, *Guerres secrètes au Liban*, 270.

<sup>137</sup> De Clerk and Malsagne, *Le Liban en guerre*, 33; Waage, *Konflikt og stormaktspolitikk i Midtøsten*, 227.

<sup>138</sup> Malsagne, *Sous l’oeil de la diplomatie française*, 137.

<sup>139</sup> Malsagne, 304.



## Chapter 3 – April 1975 to June 1976

### Initial French Initiatives and Unexpected Alliances

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I have been told that at the time when “the mountain” was preparing to come down to the rescue of the Phalangists of Beirut, an elder exclaimed in front of the assembly of his village: “but why don't you call Paris?”<sup>140</sup>

Michel Fontaine, France's ambassador to Lebanon (1972-1975)

On 13 April 1975 years of discontentment and pent-up hostility ignited. A Palestinian attack which resulted in the death of three people, one of them Maronite leader Pierre Gemayel's bodyguard, was met with retaliation in the killing of twenty-eight Palestinians. These events are seen by most historians as the start of the Lebanese Civil War.<sup>141</sup> From April to July the fighting would be one between the Maronite militias, the Phalangists chief among them, and the Palestinian groups. With a fragile cease fire between them in July, it was Lebanese Muslim and Maronite militias who would dig up the battle axe in the next phase of the war starting in late August 1975.<sup>142</sup> After a gradual and more or less covert intervention during the first half of 1976, Syria invaded Lebanon with 15 000 troops arriving in June.<sup>143</sup> This first year of the war was characterized by heavy losses, substantial material destruction and changing alliances. France would take a leading role among the international community, and, contrary to the claims of journalist Georges Sadaka, this thesis argues that the first phase of the war would mark the height of France's attempts to mitigate in the conflict.<sup>144</sup> What were French positions in the early stages of the war? What were France's initiatives and how did they pan out? And why did France in the end acquiesce to the Syrian intervention?

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<sup>140</sup> «On m'a rapporté qu'au moment où 'la montagne' se préparait à descendre à la rescousse des phalangistes de Beyrouth un ancien s'est exclamé devant l'assemblée de son village: 'mais pourquoi ne téléphonez-vous pas à Paris ?'» in Michel Fontaine, «Rapport de fin de mission», Beirut, 15 May 1975, MAE 1835INVA 410 (Liban 1973-1982). The mountain here refers to the Maronites of Mount Lebanon, their “core area”.

<sup>141</sup> For example, Deeb, *The Lebanese Civil War*, 1; Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon*, 187; Malsagne, *Sous l'oeil de la diplomatie française*, 132.

<sup>142</sup> Deeb, 1 & 4; O'Ballance, *Civil War in Lebanon*, 17-19.

<sup>143</sup> Deeb, 5 & 9-11; O'Ballance, 49-52; Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon*, 199.

<sup>144</sup> Chehdan-Kalifé, *Les relations entre la France et le Liban*, 77; as opposed to George Sadaka's view, *La Diplomatie Assassinée*, 107.

## Actors

For decades, if not centuries, Lebanese politics had been dominated by a handful of big families and clans.<sup>145</sup> To understand the currents of the war it is important to discern who these groups were, and what they stood for.

The Phalangists were a right-wing Maronite militia inspired, in name and style, by fascist/Francoist groups. They were led by Pierre Gemayel who founded the Phalangist or *Kataeb* party back in 1936, and formed their own militia in the 1960s.<sup>146</sup> Two of Gemayel's sons, Bashir and Amine, would eventually play major roles in the war. Another Maronite militia was the Tigers, led by former president Camille Chamoun. As the president of the National Liberal Party (NLP), and retainer of diverse ministerial posts at the start of the war, he still held much power in Lebanese politics. The Tigers and the Phalangists formed a coalition in 1976, which became known as the Lebanese Front.<sup>147</sup>

The Lebanese National Movement (LNM) was a multi-sectarian, anti-governmental movement comprised of a multitude of left-wing groups, Nasser supporters, and communist groups. At its core was the Druze militia of Kamal Jumblatt, who fronted the LNM.<sup>148</sup> Jumblatt came from a prominent Druze family and had created the Progressive Socialist Party back in 1949. He advocated for the formation of a secular Lebanon without the National Pact and confessionally divided society.<sup>149</sup> He was also a staunch supporter of the Palestinian resistance.<sup>150</sup> In much of the literature, and among the diplomats of the Quai d'Orsay, the LNM camp is described as "progressives." Yet, the use of this term is problematic as the LNM did not necessarily strive for social justice.<sup>151</sup> This is emphasized by historian Roland Lombardi who criticizes the frequent use of the term "Muslim-progressive" by the French diplomats of the as a biased term.<sup>152</sup> While the war has often been portrayed as a fight between Muslims and Christians, neither side was homogeneously composed. Many upper-class Muslims supported the status-quo rather than a victory by the LNM and Palestinians. On the other hand, many Christian atheists supported the LNM.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Henry, *Les Jardiniers de l'Enfer*, 47.

<sup>146</sup> Waage, *Konflikt og stormaktspolitikk i Midtøsten*, 226; Deeb, *The Lebanese Civil War*, 21-25.

<sup>147</sup> Waage, 226-227; Deeb, 25; Cobban, *The Making of Modern Lebanon*, 133.

<sup>148</sup> Waage, 221; Deeb, 63-69. The Druze are one of Lebanon's many ethnoreligious groups.

<sup>149</sup> Deeb, 64.

<sup>150</sup> Picard, *Lebanon A Shattered Country*, 100-101.

<sup>151</sup> Lombardi, *Les Trente Honteuses*, 198.

<sup>152</sup> «islamo-progressiste» in Lombardi, 201.

<sup>153</sup> Lombardi, 197-198.

Among the impoverished Shia Muslims residing in South Lebanon, the personage of Musa al-Sadr emerged. He was the founder of the *Amal* movement, and became a prominent figure of defense for the poor and exploited even outside of the Shia community.<sup>154</sup> He was also an ally of the Palestinians and strong supporter of their struggle.<sup>155</sup>

At the outbreak of the war the Lebanese president was Suleiman Frangieh. As the National Pact demands, he was a Maronite. He was also the leader of a prominent clan.<sup>156</sup> Frangieh maintained his country's traditional opening towards the West while also paving the way for an opening towards the Arab world, and especially Syria. He felt the moment was suitable with the ascension of Hafez al-Assad in Syria, who he personally knew before becoming president, and the death of Nasser in Egypt in 1970.<sup>157</sup> France, however, did not support Frangieh when elected in 1970. After his ascension there were "rumors [circulating] concerning misunderstandings in the relationship between the new regime and the French Embassy."<sup>158</sup> This strenuous relationship would continue to affect the bond between the two countries during his entire presidency.

Also present in the civil war, though not Lebanese, were the Palestinians. With the Cairo Accords of 1969 they had gained substantial independence in Lebanon. The accords gave the PLO control over the Palestinian camps, as well as the right to bear arms and to continue the fight against Israel. The PLO acted as an umbrella organization for different factions and parties. Yasser Arafat presided over the biggest party *Fatah* and the PLO itself. *Fatah*'s main rival inside the PLO was the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) led by the Christian Palestinian George Habash. It represented the Marxist-Leninist wing of the organization.<sup>159</sup> The Saiqa was another member of the PLO, but acted as a satellite organization for the Syrians in Lebanon.<sup>160</sup> These five or six actors would come to play the leading roles in the first phase of the war.

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<sup>154</sup> Deeb, *The Lebanese Civil War*, 69; Rapport de fin de mission Fontaine, Beirut, 15 May 1975, MAE 1835INVA 410 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>155</sup> Malsagne, *Sous l'oeil de la diplomatie française*, 131.

<sup>156</sup> Deeb, *The Lebanese Civil War*, 28.

<sup>157</sup> Chehdan-Kalifé, *Les relations entre la France et le Liban*, 56; Khazen, *The Breakdown of the State*, 193.

<sup>158</sup> «Des rumeurs concernant des malentendus dans les relations entre le nouveau régime et l'ambassade de France» in *Le Monde*, 4 November 1970 cited in Chehdan-Kalifé, 55.

<sup>159</sup> Osamah F. Khalil, "The Radical Crescent: The United States, the Palestine Liberation Organisation, and the Lebanese civil War, 1973-1978", *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, Vol. 27, No. 3 (2016): 497, Accessed 25 April 2021, DOI: 10.1080/09592296.2016.119607.

<sup>160</sup> De Clerck and Malsagne, *Le Liban en Guerre*, 46.

## A Cold War Proxy Conflict? The France-US Relationship

The relaxation of the Cold War enabled the Soviet Union and the United States to ease their concerns and not preoccupy themselves about Lebanon, as they had done in 1958. For the Americans this was a byproduct of the Nixon doctrine, “which reaffirmed US defense commitments worldwide, but which made it clear that the US would never again ‘Americanize’ a ground war on an ally’s behalf.”<sup>161</sup> The US had after all just gotten out of the quagmire of the Vietnam War and were not too keen on a new intervention abroad. Historian Joseph Bayeh writes that “a contingent systemic pattern of Détente between the contending superpowers enabled a descent into instability in Lebanon, triggering the 1975-1990 war.”<sup>162</sup> In other words, Bayeh sees the lack of intervention from the two superpowers as a factor which allowed Lebanon to inflame. When Lebanon’s most perilous moment came, it was left out of the superpowers priorities.

US diplomacy was more focused on the fallout of the Arab-Israeli War of 1973. The US, to avoid jeopardizing the ongoing second Egyptian-Israeli agreement talks in which Secretary of State Henry Kissinger was heavily involved, did not look for any peace agreements in Lebanon.<sup>163</sup> Historian Michel Chehdan-Kalifé describes the American policy as a way “to ignite and maintain the tension and the conflict, during the Egyptian-Israeli negotiations, to drag all Arabs into this conflict, without however letting it end in a partition of the country which could end the war in Lebanon.”<sup>164</sup> France, on the other hand, saw that a dismemberment of Lebanon could have grave regional consequences, and thus wanted an end to the conflict.<sup>165</sup>

While neither wanted the disappearance of the state of Lebanon, French and American goals were therefore fundamentally different. French authorities did not want to go down the route of Kissinger’s so called “shuttle diplomacy.” This was part of Kissinger’s “small steps” policy which aimed to achieve peace between Israel and its neighbors which was dependent “primarily on recognition of the state of Israel by the Arab countries.”<sup>166</sup> This would then be achieved by

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<sup>161</sup> Bayeh, *A History of Change and Stability in Lebanon*, 131.

<sup>162</sup> Bayeh, 109.

<sup>163</sup> Hilde Henriksen Waage and Geir Bergersen Huse, “A Careful Minuet: The United States, Israel, Syria and the Lebanese Civil War, 1975-1976”, *The International History Review* (20 October 2019): 4, Accessed 24 May 2021, DOI: 10. 1080/07075332.2019.1678507.

<sup>164</sup> «Consistait à enflammer et à maintenir la tension et le conflit, durant les négociations égypto-israéliennes, pour entraîner tous les Arabes dans ce conflit, sans laisser pourtant celui-ci aboutir à une partition du pays qui pourrait mettre fin à la guerre au Liban» in Chehdan-Kalifé, *Les relations entre la France et le Liban*, 71.

<sup>165</sup> Malsagne, *Sous l’œil de la diplomatie française*, 140.

<sup>166</sup> «en premier lieu d’une reconnaissance de l’État d’Israël par les pays arabes» in Lombardi, *Les Trente Honteuses*, 210.

“shuttling” and taking on one country at the time. France wanted to find a more comprehensive solution that did not ignore the Palestinians, who were forgotten in Kissinger’s shuttle diplomacy.<sup>167</sup> Not wanting to damage years of French-Arab rapprochement, or impair its special relationship to Lebanon, France found itself in an impasse. Its goal was to find an agreement inside the country while crucially maintaining Lebanon’s independence. Not agreeing with the United States’ methods of proceeding, but unable to outwardly express this disagreement, “French diplomacy had to use discretion.”<sup>168</sup> Meanwhile, the vacuum left by US diplomatic absence, opened the way for French initiatives. Due to the regional situation, the Lebanese were scared of making too much of a choice and wanted to balance their relationship with the US and Soviet Union. France could still play a safer third way.<sup>169</sup>

### **Palestinians against Maronites**

The events of 13 April 1975 marked the start of the fifteen years of civil war. In only five days, the fighting that ensued in Beirut, between the Palestinians and the Maronite militias, left approximately 400 dead and a thousand injured before one of many short and inconsequential cease fires was installed.<sup>170</sup>

Before leaving office two months after the start of the war, French ambassador Michel Fontaine would shine light on some of his personal feelings and thoughts on the events of the 13<sup>th</sup>. He wrote that “for a long time there will be a discussion about ‘who started’ despite that in the first hour there were about thirty dead on one side (Palestinian) and one dead on the other.”<sup>171</sup> Fontaine clearly felt that the retaliation from the Maronite side was disproportionate. He followed up by blaming the escalating situation on, among other things, the increase in weaponry among the different militias. According to Fontaine and the Ministry of the Interior there were two million weapons in Lebanon for less than three million people. Fontaine also

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<sup>167</sup> Huse, “A Dangerous Sideshow: The US and the Lebanese Civil War 1975-1976”, Master thesis (University of Oslo, Fall 2014), 28.

<sup>168</sup> «La diplomatie française devait utiliser de la discrétion» in Chehdan-Kalifé, *Les relations entre la France et le Liban*, 70.

<sup>169</sup> Fontaine to Jobert, Beirut, 26 July 1973, MAE 1835INVA 414 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>170</sup> Malsagne, *Sous l’œil de la diplomatie française*, 133.

<sup>171</sup> «On discutera longtemps de ‘qui à commencé’ en dépit que dans la première heure il y avait une trentaine de morts d’un côté (palestinien) et un de l’autre» in Michel Fontaine, «Rapport de fin de mission», Beirut, 15 May 1975, MAE 1835INVA 410 (Liban 1973-1982).

remarked that both the police and military, who had received order not to step in, were largely absent in the first days.<sup>172</sup>

The diplomatic correspondence between Paris and Beirut was hectic even before the outbreak of the war. The sheer number of meetings between the French ambassador and the Lebanese minister of foreign affairs or prime minister were substantial – and there is no doubt that France held a privileged as interlocutor in Lebanon. On the other hand, only rarely did the Lebanese ambassador get to meet the French minister of foreign affairs or prime minister directly: he mostly had to go through the bureaucrats in the Quai d’Orsay.<sup>173</sup> France’s place on the ladder of importance for Lebanese authorities was explicitly stated by Ambassador Fontaine after a meeting between ambassadors and the Lebanese prime minister: “The prime minister received me after my American and Soviet colleagues and before the English and the Chinese.”<sup>174</sup>

Up until 13 April it was business as usual for the embassy. While the war itself came as a surprise, France had been aware of the brewing discontentment in Lebanon. Already two years earlier, Ambassador Fontaine asserted that it was “government inaction which allowed the social situation to slowly rot.”<sup>175</sup> The strain between the Frangieh presidency and the French Embassy was clearly visible from his words. For Fontaine, change in the political system was seen as nearly impossible. He noted that Lebanon showed an “inability to reform itself on the political, economic and social level.”<sup>176</sup>

Already a few weeks into the war, France seemed to represent a possible savior in the mind of many Lebanese.<sup>177</sup> Fontaine wrote that subconsciously, for many Christians, France still represented “the miracle solution that one is entitled to expect when in need.”<sup>178</sup> The Maronites remembered the 1860 Mount Lebanon Civil War, by some called the First Lebanese Civil War, which profoundly shaped the French influence in the region.<sup>179</sup> At the time Napoleon III,

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<sup>172</sup> Michel Fontaine, «Rapport de fin de mission», Beirut, 15 May 1975, MAE 1835INVA 410 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>173</sup> This emerges from the totality of the consulted material in the French archives.

<sup>174</sup> «Le Président du Conseil m’a reçu après mes collègues Américains et Soviétiques et avant l’Anglais et le Chinois» in Telegram from Fontaine, Beirut, 20 June 1974, MAE 1835INVA 416 (Liban 1973-1982). The term *President of the council* is used in French for describing the Prime minister.

<sup>175</sup> «immobilisme du gouvernement qui laisse pourrir lentement la situation sociale» in Telegram from Fontaine, Beirut, 20 March 1973, MAE 1835INVA 414BIS (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>176</sup> «incapacité à se reformer lui-même sur les plans politique, économique et social» in Note on «Observations sur le Liban et les relations franco-libanaises en rapport avec la visite du Ministre», Beirut, 18 February 1974, MAE1835INVA 414 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>177</sup> Malsagne, *Sous l’œil de la diplomatie française*, 140; Exemplified in the Fontaine’s anecdote, reference 140.

<sup>178</sup> «la solution-miracle qu’on est en droit d’escompter dans le besoin» in Michel Fontaine, «Rapport de fin de mission», Beirut, 15 May 1975, MAE 1835INVA 410 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>179</sup> Malsagne, *Sous l’œil de la diplomatie française*, 140.

pressured by French Catholics at home, sent 6 000 troops to the region to protect Christian lives.<sup>180</sup> Would France do something similar a 110 years later?

In the second month of the war, on 15 May, the government of Prime Minister Rachid Solh stepped down. For the first four weeks of the crisis, the government had not assembled. Its members were scared of fracturing if they were to convene.<sup>181</sup> But ironically, it might have been precisely because the government did not gather that it dissolved. President Frangieh selected a military government, comprised of only one civil minister, to take over. This new government would only live for a couple of days.<sup>182</sup> This was a clear indication of the fragility of the Lebanese state. An important factor of further destabilization was the gradual disintegration of the Lebanese Army during the spring. Many soldiers simply left to join the different militias. The LNM and PLO feared that an army controlled by Maronites at the top would be used against the Palestinians. On both sides, the army quickly lost credibility.<sup>183</sup>

Interestingly, among documents of the French diplomatic corps the term “civil war” was first used in November.<sup>184</sup> Before November it was described more as a serious crisis, but which did not stand out as particularly different to previous ones. Having seen anger blossom before, France still hoped the situation would calm down.

### **The Lebanese National Movement against the Lebanese Front**

A cease fire on the first days of July 1975 installed a certain calm until the end of August. It was signed between the PLO and the new prime minister Rachid Karami, mediated through the Syrians.<sup>185</sup> Arafat generally managed to hold his troops away from the fighting, and the conflict gradually became one between the Lebanese National Movement and the Lebanese Front.<sup>186</sup> In October the new French ambassador, Hubert Argod, informed Paris that Karami no longer made

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<sup>180</sup> Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon*, 37.

<sup>181</sup> Michel Fontaine, «Rapport de fin de mission», Beirut, 15 May 1975, MAE 1835INVA 410 (Liban 1973-1982); Cobban, *The Making of Modern Lebanon*, 126-127.

<sup>182</sup> Malsagne, *Sous l'oeil de la diplomatie française*, 138; Deeb, *The Lebanese Civil War*, 2.

<sup>183</sup> De Clerck & Malsagne, *Le Liban en Guerre*, 224-225.

<sup>184</sup> Note on «La France et la crise libanaise», Paris, 5 November 1975, MAE 1835 INVA 395 (Liban 1973-1982). This is at least going through the selected archival boxes of the *Centre des archives diplomatiques de la Courneuve* and CADN.

<sup>185</sup> Deeb, *The Lebanese Civil War*, 2-3; Cobban, *The Making of Modern Lebanon*, 128.

<sup>186</sup> Cobban, 128-129.

any decision without Arafat's acquiescence.<sup>187</sup> A highlight of how much power and influence Arafat and the Palestinians had in Lebanon at that time.

The day after the cease fire President Giscard d'Estaing issued a statement where he recalled "the importance that France attaches to the stability and unity of Lebanon."<sup>188</sup> The integrity, unity and independence of Lebanon were objectives that France highlighted as important. But more fundamentally the French wanted to guarantee a continued Lebanese existence because of France's historic role in shaping the Lebanese state.<sup>189</sup> A partition would be the ultimate symbol of a failed French mandate in the Middle East. After all, in 1975, only twenty-nine years had passed since the last French troops had left Lebanon. Adding to this, French historian Jean-René Belliard asserts that French authorities feared a dismemberment of Lebanon would mean a mass exodus of its Maronite population towards France, similar to the one of the French *pieds-noirs* from Algeria in 1962.<sup>190</sup> A humanitarian disaster in Lebanon could therefore mean tangible consequences for France.

In late August fighting began between the Maronite militias, mainly the Lebanese Front, and Muslim militias, mainly the LNM.<sup>191</sup> As the conflict went from one comprising a foreign entity, the PLO, to a civil war involving strictly Lebanese factions, the situation only became more disorienting. Ambassador Argod wrote: "as for the militias, they are so prolific that it is impossible to count them."<sup>192</sup> At the forefront of international mediation attempts between the different parts were the Syrians. According to the French ambassador, by September, the Syrian minister of foreign affairs Abdul Halim Khaddam had already made five trips to Lebanon over the past six months.<sup>193</sup>

On 17 September France once again reaffirmed its support for the preservation of Lebanon's independence.<sup>194</sup> This was reiterated the next week in a declaration of the EC members at the UN.<sup>195</sup> With European support France hoped that its words would carry more weight. Yet, the

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<sup>187</sup> Note by Argod «Situation au Liban», Beirut, 16 October 1975, CADN, archives Liban (Ambassade), 91 PO/C 1.

<sup>188</sup> «l'importance que la France attache a la stabilité et à l'unité du Liban» in Telegram from Honnorat, Paris, 2 July 1975, MAE 1835INVA 394 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>189</sup> Arbid, «France-Liban: Une nécessaire entente cordiale», 9; Note on «Relations franco-libanaises», Paris, 25 May 1982, MAE 1835INA 414 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>190</sup> Jean-René Belliard, *Beyrouth: L'enfer des espions* ([Paris]: Nouveau Monde Éditions, 2010), 10.

<sup>191</sup> Deeb, *The Lebanese Civil War*, 3-4; O'Ballance, *Civil War in Lebanon*, 17-19.

<sup>192</sup> «Quant aux milices, elles pullulent à tel point qu'il est impossible d'en faire le compte» in Argod to Sauvagnargues, Beirut, 23 September 1975, CADN, archives Liban (Ambassade), 91PO/C 57.

<sup>193</sup> Argod to Sauvagnargues, Beirut, 23 September 1975, CADN, archives Liban (Ambassade), 91PO/C 57.

<sup>194</sup> «Déclaration du Conseil des ministres», 17 September 1975, MAE 1835INVA 395 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>195</sup> «Déclaration des ministres des affaires étrangères des neuf pays de la Communauté économique européenne», New York, 24 September 1975, MAE 1835INVA 395 (Liban 1973-1982).



Quai d'Orsay pointed to a difficult dilemma; "whether or not France should assert its particular responsibilities towards" Lebanon.<sup>196</sup> The French openly admitted to having responsibilities, but did ask themselves explicitly what they consisted of, and were unsure whether to uphold them. They held rather good relations with the Lebanese in general and especially the Maronites due to their historic relationship. The relationship with the Palestinians, through which they spearheaded their Arab policy, was also good. Realizing the gravitas of the situation, they knew they were in a special position and had the means to do something. Therefore, they looked into different options to intervene diplomatically, not just through declarations. The active diplomatic correspondence shows that France wanted to help, but was searching for the exact way to proceed. In the fall of 1975, France for example thought about engendering discussions with other countries to make them incite moderation over the conflict in Lebanon. They also looked at the possibility of continuing declarations and pressure the European way. They likewise saw reaching out through the UN as a real option. Plans were thereby set up for a French initiative at the Security Council, in accordance with Lebanese authorities, to make a declaration or appeal for peace and a return to "normal functioning of the institutions."<sup>197</sup> However, divided Lebanese authorities did not manage to reach an agreement which resulted in a lack of concrete outcomes.<sup>198</sup> French influence was not the same as it had been under de Gaulle. France had to balance its interests to both the Maronites, the Palestinians and the Arab world at large, and as such struggled with deciding on how to intervene.<sup>199</sup>

In October 1975 French authorities purposefully cancelled a visit from the Maronite Patriarch, so as not to give the impression of standing against Lebanon's Muslim communities.<sup>200</sup> Indeed, France had to carefully balance its role in Lebanon if it wanted to maintain its neutrality. Historian James R. Stocker claims that, during that same month, a French official in Paris inquired the US ambassador on their thoughts on initiating a joint international mission of French, US and Soviet soldiers to Lebanon. However, the Americans were negative. They were not interested in any intervention from their part, alone or with the Soviets.<sup>201</sup> This initiative,

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<sup>196</sup> «si la France doit ou non affirmer ses responsabilités particulières à l'égard» in Note on «La France et la crise libanaise», Paris, 20 October 1975, MAE 1835INVA 414 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>197</sup> «fonctionnement normal des institutions» in Note on «La France et la crise libanaise», Paris, 20 October 1975, MAE 1835INVA 414 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>198</sup> Telegram from Courcel, Paris, 16 April 1976, MAE 1835INVA 394 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>199</sup> Lombardi, *Les Trente Honteuses*, 213.

<sup>200</sup> «Entretien avec l'Ambassadeur du Liban», Paris, 13 October 1975, MAE 1835INVA 394 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>201</sup> Stocker, *Spheres of Intervention*, 159.

interestingly, does not appear in the diplomatic documents of the Quai d'Orsay. If plans for such an intervention were thought of, they were quickly dismissed or hidden away.

Israel looked at the conflict enflaming its northern neighbor with great worry. Through the years the country had maintained a strong relationship with the Lebanese Maronite community.<sup>202</sup> A victory by the LNM-PLO coalition was the last thing the Israeli authorities wished for. As such Israel procured the Maronite militias with shipment of arms, of which the first was organized in September 1975.<sup>203</sup> If France intervened on the side of the Christians, they would do Israel's bidding in Lebanon. Therefore, Israel's prime minister Yitzhak Rabin expressed his astonishment "at the silence of the Christians of the world."<sup>204</sup> As Israel saw it, the only Christian bastion in the Middle East was left without any help from Europe. In a meeting with the French ambassador to Israel, the Israeli general secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Avraham Kidron, expressed his incredulousness to French non-intervention. How could France not uphold its historic position as defender of the Christians of Lebanon? As Kidron saw it, France was "on very good terms with both camps [and] was the only country that could usefully try to restore peace."<sup>205</sup> He finished by saying to the ambassador that it was imperative to "tell Paris that only France could do something."<sup>206</sup> This truly shows the unique positioning of France as an actor in this conflict. Above all, Israel wanted France to intervene in their favor in order to avoid strengthening the PLO's position in Lebanon. Better to have a chaotic, but Christian dominated Lebanon, than a partitioned Lebanon where the radicals and Palestinians held the south, a scenario which would be intolerable for Israel.

### **The Couve de Murville Mission**

On 19 November 1975 Maurice Couve de Murville, who was at that time president of the commission on foreign affairs at the French National Assembly, arrived in Beirut. His mission was to gather information on the conflict and to meet with all the factions.<sup>207</sup> De Murville was

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<sup>202</sup> Avner Yaniv, *Dilemmas of Security: Politics, Strategy, and the Israeli Experience in Lebanon* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 29-36.

<sup>203</sup> Lombardi, *Les Trente Honteuses*, 272.

<sup>204</sup> «du silence des chrétiens du monde entier» in Telegram from Herly, Tel-Aviv, 13 October 1975, MAE 1669INVA 302 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>205</sup> «en très bons termes avec les deux camps, était le seul pays a pouvoir utilement tenter de faire revenir la paix» in Telegram from Herly, Tel-Aviv, 9 October 1975, MAE 1669INVA 302 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>206</sup> «Dites bien à Paris que seule la France peut faire quelque chose» in Telegram from Herly, Tel-Aviv, 9 October 1975, MAE 1669INVA 302 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>207</sup> Malsagne, *Sous l'oeil de la diplomatie française*, 141; Telegram from Courcel, Paris, 13 November 1975, MAE 1835INVA 416 (Liban 1973-1982).

an imposing figure of French political life. He had been de Gaulle's minister of foreign affairs for around ten years and then prime minister for a short period in the late 1960s. Furthermore, biographer Jean-Philippe de Garate qualifies de Murville as one of the principal founders of de Gaulle's Arab policy.<sup>208</sup>

In an official declaration the mission was characterized as a "mission of friendship."<sup>209</sup> Mentioned once again was the "major interest France holds in maintaining the independence, unity and integrity of Lebanon."<sup>210</sup> However, the exact purpose of the trip remained vague. The secretary general of the Quai d'Orsay thanked Syrian efforts for mediation and denied any French intentions to pose as moderator in the conflict. It was simply a mission set in place to "contribute to the creation of a more favorable climate."<sup>211</sup> Journalist Georges Sadaka claims that the use of the word "mission", instead of "mediation", was an explicit choice, to hide behind in case of failure.<sup>212</sup> France also wanted to stay neutral and let the Lebanese find a solution; therefore, calling it "mediation" would have implied a certain involvement. De Murville was supposed to lay the groundwork for talks, not to resolve the crisis. It was equally important for French authorities to distance themselves from neo-colonialist tendencies, of which they would be criticized by some, at home and abroad.<sup>213</sup> The Americans did not want any radical change in the region and supported the French mission.<sup>214</sup> The Soviets, seeing the US behind France, were more critical. Both the Soviet newspaper *Pravda*, and the communist Lebanese newspaper *al-Nida*, accused France of "interference in Lebanese internal affairs."<sup>215</sup>

Suggestions for a French initiative were first made by the Lebanese government in late October. The Quai d'Orsay stated that: "the government of Beirut would be very happy to welcome a French mission [...] chaired by a minister [...] or former prime minister" and wished "that this mission should not only go to Beirut but also to Damascus."<sup>216</sup> Thus, the de Murville mission

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<sup>208</sup> Jean-Phillipe de Garate, *Couve de Murville (1907-1999): Un Président impossible*, (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2007), 255-256; Lombardi, *Les Trente Honteuses*, 87.

<sup>209</sup> «mission d'amitié» in «Déclaration», Paris, 13 November 1975, MAE 1835INVA 394 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>210</sup> «l'intérêt majeur que porte la France au maintien de l'indépendance, de l'unité et de l'intégrité du Liban» in «Déclaration», Paris, 13 November 1975, MAE 1835INVA 394 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>211</sup> «contribuer à la création d'un climat plus favorable» in Telegram from Courcel, Paris, 13 November 1975, MAE 1835INVA 416 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>212</sup> Sadaka, *La Diplomatie Assassinée*, 148.

<sup>213</sup> Malsagne, *Sous l'oeil de la diplomatie française*, 141; De Clerk and Malsagne, *Le Liban en guerre*, 349.

<sup>214</sup> Chehdan-Kalifé, *Les relations entre la France et le Liban*, 71.

<sup>215</sup> «ingérence dans les affaires intérieures libanaises» in Telegram from Argod, Beirut, 4 December 1975, MAE 1835INVA 416 (Liban 1973-1982); Telegram from Vimont, Moscow, 1 December 1975, MAE 1835INVA 416 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>216</sup> «Le gouvernement de Beyrouth serait très heureux d'accueillir une mission française [...] présidée par un ministre [...] ou par un ancien Premier ministre» & «que cette mission devrait se rendre non seulement à

was in many ways born out of a Lebanese initiative.<sup>217</sup> The French also thought the Lebanese authorities would approve of only a French mission since, in the words of the Quai d'Orsay, France was "the only major-power member of the Security Council capable of appearing as an objective mediator, free from any hegemonic temptation."<sup>218</sup> While the validity of such a claim is debatable, many Lebanese and Palestinian held a great mistrust for the two superpowers. As such they favored a French initiative; a solution they would see as devoid of ulterior motives.

From 13 to 30 November de Murville met with all the leaders, religious as well as secular, of the different Lebanese factions. In these meetings the Lebanese presented their views on the origins of the conflict and how to resolve it.<sup>219</sup> It was essential for the French that the mission did not show any religious favoritism. Some of the faction leaders also pointed out how France could help. Musa al-Sadr, the Shiite leader, said of France that "she alone could get Lebanon out of its crisis, and in this she had a big responsibility."<sup>220</sup> The suspicion the Lebanese and other Arab leaders held towards each other, made them less suspicious of an eventual French initiative compared to one coming from a neighboring country.

Before de Murville left Lebanon, he presented his conclusions and suggestions to Prime Minister Karami and President Frangieh. This marked a shift from what had been an abstract mission to a concrete initiative. First of all, dialogue between the factions needed to be restored. Then economic, social and political issues needed to be addressed. Furthermore, there was a need to make an arrangement with the Palestinians. De Murville also hoped that both Karami and Frangieh would lance an appeal to the nation. He thus had made a project for a declaration that he gave to Karami for comments.<sup>221</sup> On 29 November Prime Minister Karami addressed the nation, and as Ambassador Argod described it, the speech repeated "almost word for word the text prepared by [...] Couve de Murville."<sup>222</sup> President Frangieh also delivered a message

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Beyrouth mais aussi à Damas» in Note from Cerles «Perspective d'une intervention française au Liban», 30 October 1975, CADN, archives Liban (Ambassade), 91PO/C 1.

<sup>217</sup> In the way that the idea of such a mission did not appear in any of the selected archive sources before the 30 October 1975.

<sup>218</sup> «la seule grande puissance membre du Conseil de Sécurité susceptible d'apparaître comme un médiateur objectif, libre de toute tentation hégémonique» in «La France et la crise libanaise», Paris, 5 November 1975, MAE 1835INVA 395 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>219</sup> See the meeting notes with the different Lebanese personalities from the 20 November 1975 to the 24 November 1975 in MAE 1835INVA 416 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>220</sup> «Elle seule peut sortir le Liban de sa crise, et en cela elle a une grosse responsabilité» in «Entretien de M. Couve de Murville avec l'Imam Moussa el-Sadr, chef de la communauté Chiite, au siège du conseil supérieur à Hazmieh», 22 November 1975, MAE 1835INVA 416 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>221</sup> «Deuxième entretien de M. Couve de Murville avec M. Rachid Karamé», 25 November 1975, MAE 1835INVA 416 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>222</sup> «presque mot à mot le texte qu'avait préparé [...] Couve de Murville» in Telegram from Argod, Beirut, 30 November 1975, MAE 1835INVA 416 (Liban 1973-1982).

earlier in the day. That was the first time he spoke directly to the nation since the crisis started seven months earlier.<sup>223</sup> But what power, as a simple envoy of France, did de Murville have to suggest statements to the Lebanese president and prime minister? Could it have been an outcome of the lingering influence of de Gaulle in Lebanon, conveyed through his former minister of foreign affairs?

Karami and Frangieh eventually arrived at an agreement which led to a certain relaxation.<sup>224</sup> Couve de Murville himself was happy with the immediate outcomes.<sup>225</sup> To begin with, it looked like the mission had succeeded. The left-wing Israeli newspaper *al-Hamishmar* wrote:

The truce, if it is maintained in Lebanon, will be the greatest success of M. Couve de Murville. He will have obtained the impossible: a compromise, between Christians, Muslims, and Palestinians. [...] If he succeeded, it is because France no longer unconditionally supports the Maronites and that it has declared itself in favor of a more equitable distribution of political privileges.<sup>226</sup>

Yet, the calm would not last. Not long after de Murville left the troubles started again. Consequently, most literature describes the French initiative of November 1975 as a failure.<sup>227</sup> The cease fire was brief, and ended up becoming just one of the many non-consequential cease fires of the war. The mission would, however, bring closer the traditional enemies Syria and the Maronite militia of the Phalangists. De Murville left for Damascus after his time in Lebanon. There he met with President Hafez al-Assad. He knew that Syrian authorities were a big player in the conflict and could play an even bigger part. Historian Jean-René Belliard wonders if Couve de Murville might have “convinced [Assad] to talk to Pierre Gemayel, the Phalangist leader.”<sup>228</sup> It was only a matter of days from when de Murville left Damascus to when Gemayel arrived in the city on 6 December.<sup>229</sup> This new relationship would have catastrophic consequences for the PLO.

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<sup>223</sup> Telegram from Argod, Beirut, 30 November 1975, MAE 1835INVA 416 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>224</sup> Chehdan-Kalifé, *Les relations entre la France et le Liban*, 72.

<sup>225</sup> *Le Figaro*, 1 December 1975, cited in Chehdan-Kalifé, 72.

<sup>226</sup> «la ‘trêve, si elle est maintenue au Liban, sera le plus beau succès de M. Couve de Murville. Il aura obtenu l’impossible: un compromis, entre chrétiens, musulmans et palestiniens. [...] S’il a réussi, c’est que la France ne soutient plus inconditionnellement les maronites et qu’elle s’est déclarée en faveur d’une répartition plus équitable des privilèges politiques’» in Telegram from Herly, Tel-Aviv, 3 December 1975, MAE 1835INVA 416 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>227</sup> Huse, “A Dangerous Sideshow”, 53; Deeb, *The Lebanese Civil War*, 6; de Clerck and Malsagne, *Le Liban en guerre*, 350; Cobban, *The Making of Modern Lebanon*, 130.

<sup>228</sup> «convaincu [Assad] de dialoguer avec Pierre Gemayel, le leader phalangiste» in Belliard, *Beyrouth: L’enfer des espions*, 11-12; Malsagne, *Sous l’oeil de la diplomatie française*, 141 & 143.

<sup>229</sup> Cobban, *The Making of Modern Lebanon*, 130.

## The Escalation in the First Months of 1976

The fighting escalated in January 1976. Camille Chamoun's Tigers and Pierre Gemayel's Phalangists, soon allied under the banner of the Lebanese Front, laid siege to the Palestinian camps of Tel al-Zaatar and Jisr al-Basha.<sup>230</sup> Yasser Arafat, who had been reluctant to join the fighting since the cease fire in July, was now under such pressure that the PLO gradually reentered the fighting.<sup>231</sup> The Beirut neighborhoods of Karantina and Maslakh, suspected of harboring PLO fighters, were also attacked by the Maronite militias. The LNM-PLO alliance retorted by laying siege to the mostly Maronite coastal city of Damur. Both places saw massacres committed, with around 500 people killed in Damur and Karantina respectively.<sup>232</sup> Many Christians in Damur hoped in vain for a French rescue.<sup>233</sup> Historian Roland Lombardi suggests that "France had always feared appearing to defend the Christian point of view against that of Lebanese Islam, which, for some, could have seriously damaged its Arab policy."<sup>234</sup> Journalist Laurent and Basbous suggest that Giscard might have taken a page from Napoleon, who had declared to his troops during his campaign in the region: "whatever you do, you can be sure that the Christians will always be on your side. So, do not hesitate to always give preference to Muslims over Christians."<sup>235</sup> Was Giscard betting on that whatever pro-Palestinian policies France followed, they would never actually lose their friendship with the Maronites?

In a meeting in Paris on 20 January between Minister of Foreign Affairs Sauvagnargues and the American ambassador to France, the US wanted to find a solution alongside the French. The Americans thought only France could take an initiative that they could rigorously support, and pushed for a French initiative that would also have the support of the European Community.<sup>236</sup> The French were conscious of ongoing Syrian mediation efforts and wanted to see how these went before taking any decisions. However, on the 21<sup>st</sup>, France announced that they were ready to mediate if the Syrian efforts were to fail.<sup>237</sup> It was Syrian minister of foreign affairs Khaddam

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<sup>230</sup> Cobban, 131-132.

<sup>231</sup> Cobban, 128 & 132.

<sup>232</sup> Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon*, 192-193; Cobban, 128 & 132.

<sup>233</sup> Lombardi, *Les Trente Honteuses*, 205.

<sup>234</sup> «la France a toujours craint de paraître défendre le point de vue chrétien face à celui de l'Islam libanais, ce qui, pour certains, aurait gravement pu nuire à sa politique arabe» in Lombardi, 205.

<sup>235</sup> «Quoi que vous fassiez, soyez sûrs que toujours les chrétiens seront pour vous. N'hésitez pas à toujours donner les préférences aux musulmans sur les chrétiens» in Laurent and Basbous, *Guerres secrètes au Liban*, 271.

<sup>236</sup> Secret Note on «Entretien du Ministre avec l'Ambassadeur des Etats-Unis», Paris, 21 January 1976, MAE 1835INVA 416 (Liban 1973-1982). See Huse, "A Dangerous Sideshow", 63 for the US perspective on these meetings.

<sup>237</sup> Stocker, *Spheres of Intervention*, 167.

that was once again hastily dispatched to Lebanon to try to find a solution. His efforts momentarily paid off as a cease fire was signed on 22 January. Not long after, both President Frangieh and Prime Minister Karami visited Damascus to discuss reform in Lebanon with Assad.<sup>238</sup> The result was a so called “Constitutional document” made to update the National Pact of 1943. Much criticized, especially by Kamal Jumblatt for not being radical enough, the effort led to naught.<sup>239</sup> It was, however, clear that Syria had come to play a larger role towards its neighbor. From January onwards, the number of Saiqa affiliated fighters, the Palestinian group under Damascus’s command, increased in Lebanon. Through them, Syria gradually asserted its position.<sup>240</sup> France knew that Syrian activity in Lebanon had reached such a point that it would be difficult for them to leave.<sup>241</sup>

During the first half of 1976, the PLO-LNM alliance was making substantial military gains on the Maronite militias.<sup>242</sup> The PLO understood that the disappearance of Lebanon would mean an Israeli invasion and occupation of the country. Therefore, their goal was reform rather than the partition or disappearance of Lebanon.<sup>243</sup> According to Ambassador Argod, the Palestinian groups were controlling two thirds of the country by the beginning of February. However, he stated that, “within the Palestinian resistance, organizations obeying Syria” such as Saiqa were starting to assert predominance.<sup>244</sup> Assad wanted to get control over non confirmatory Palestinian factions in Lebanon.<sup>245</sup> The Syrian stance had gradually shifted “from supporter of radicals and Palestinian guerrillas” over to support for the Christians.<sup>246</sup> Three main elements guided Assad’s change: the isolation caused by the Israeli-Egyptian talks, the vulnerability posed by an Israeli attack through a non-friendly Lebanon, and the threat of a Palestinian victory in Lebanon which would inevitably result in an Israeli invasion.<sup>247</sup>

France had long thought a limited Syrian intervention could be a viable option for Lebanon.<sup>248</sup> In a meeting between Secretary of State Kissinger and Sauvagnargues in September 1975, the French minister of foreign affairs asked “whether Israel would intervene” if there was a limited

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<sup>238</sup> Cobban, *The Making of Modern Lebanon*, 133.

<sup>239</sup> Cobban, 133-134.

<sup>240</sup> Khalil, “The Radical Crescent”, 505.

<sup>241</sup> Telegram from Clement, Beirut, 23 January 1976, MAE 1835INVA 416 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>242</sup> Cobban, *The Making of Modern Lebanon*, 138-139; Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon*, 198.

<sup>243</sup> «Entretien de M. Couve de Murville avec M. Kamal El-Assad», 20 November 1975, MAE 1835INVA 416 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>244</sup> «Au sein même de la Résistance palestinienne, les organisations d’obédience syrienne» in Argod to Sauvagnargues, 6 February 1976, CADN, archives Liban (Ambassade), 91PO/C 57.

<sup>245</sup> Cobban, *The Making of Modern Lebanon*, 136-137.

<sup>246</sup> Waage and Huse, “A Careful Minuet”, 8.

<sup>247</sup> Waage and Huse, 8.

<sup>248</sup> Malsagne, *Sous l’oeil de la diplomatie française*, 140.

Syrian intervention in Lebanon, which Kissinger confirmative. Sauvagnargues would continue to pry the Americans for a Syrian intervention for the next months.<sup>249</sup> However, fearing a PLO-NLM victory, Kissinger did change his mind on a possible Syrian intervention.<sup>250</sup> From March 1976, as the war regionalized, the US also became more involved.<sup>251</sup> By mid-March, they had gotten reports of Syrian consideration for a large invasion.<sup>252</sup> At the end of the month, France once again asked the US to cease their opposition to a narrow Syrian intervention. The French proposed that “international guarantees [could] be issued via the UN Security Council.”<sup>253</sup> However, because of Israeli opposition this was rejected by US officials.<sup>254</sup> Above all things the US wanted to avoid a new regional war. An Israeli invasion of South Lebanon could be just that igniting element and thus needed to be impeded.<sup>255</sup>

To avoid a possible war between Syria and Israel over Lebanon, in early 1976, Tel Aviv and Damascus came to a so called “red line agreement.” Kissinger had worked as the principal mediator. While its exact nature and delimitations are debated, the agreement delved into what Israel would allow in case of a Syrian intervention in Lebanon. Historians Hilde Henriksen Waage and Geir Bergersen Huse have characterized the red line agreement as a “marriage of convenience” between Israel and Syria.<sup>256</sup> It would be a short-lived accord, in both parts best interest against a common adversary: the PLO.

When it came to the establishment of the red line agreement, France played a go-between role in the communications between US and Syrian authorities. In a late March meeting between the political director of the Quai d’Orsay and the Israeli Chargé d’affaires, the director revealed that:

we played an intermediary role between Damascus and Washington at the request of the Syrians. They had asked us to question the US government on its feelings on the possibility of an Israeli reaction to a Syrian armed intervention in Lebanon. We received the response. We forwarded it to Damascus.<sup>257</sup>

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<sup>249</sup> Stocker, *Spheres of Intervention*, 157.

<sup>250</sup> Kissinger changed his mind in October 1975 according to Khalil, “The Radical Crescent”, 504; Kissinger changed his mind in March 1976 according to Waage and Huse, “A Careful Minuet”, 9-10.

<sup>251</sup> De Clerck and Malsagne, *Le Liban en Guerre*, 335.

<sup>252</sup> Khalil, “The Radical Crescent”, 505.

<sup>253</sup> Stocker, *Spheres of Intervention*, 178.

<sup>254</sup> Stocker, 178.

<sup>255</sup> Khalil, “The Radical Crescent”, 506.

<sup>256</sup> Waage and Huse, “A Careful Minuet”, 1.

<sup>257</sup> «nous avons joué un rôle d’intermédiaire entre Damas et Washington à la demande des Syriens. Ceux-ci nous avaient demandé d’interroger le gouvernement américain sur ses sentiments quant à l’éventualité d’une réaction israélienne dans le cas d’une intervention armée syrienne au Liban. Nous avons reçu sa réponse. Nous l’avons transmise à Damas» in «Entretien avec le Chargé d’affaires Israélien Crise libanaise», 30 March 1976, MAE 1669INVA 302 (Liban 1973-1982).



France's role in these talks would, however, not go much further than that. From the same meeting emerged a line seemingly encapsulating the French effort at this moment of the war. The political director indicated to the Israeli representative that the French authorities did not have a plan, but were available.<sup>258</sup> In other words, for the moment, France stood on the sidelines, and by their silence, they were acquiescing to the American and Syrian initiatives.

After having changed their mind on the utility of a Syrian invasion, "Israel publicly declared that Lebanon's Litani River was a 'red line' for Syrian forces."<sup>259</sup> The Litani river runs its course from the Lebanese mountains out into the Mediterranean north of Tyr, but south of Sidon, effectively dividing South Lebanon in two. As long as Syrian troops did not cross the river, Israel would not intervene.

### **Giscard's Willingness for Intervention in the Spring of 1976**

In the spring of 1976 France and the US sent new envoys, Georges Gorse and Dean Brown. Once again the nature of the mission was vague. Gorse proposed, if possible, to implement "a system to monitor security" in Lebanon in which France could partake, but the plans received little support.<sup>260</sup> However, historian Michel Chehdan-Khalifé claims that the real objective of both Gorse and Brown was to "prepare favorable circumstances for the presidential elections" that were to be held in Lebanon.<sup>261</sup> The US understood that Syria held the cards in Lebanon and could stabilize the country, and therefore wanted to ensure the election of a pro-Syrian president.<sup>262</sup> Subsequently, on 8 May Elias Sarkis, Syria's favorite, was elected president of Lebanon. The French congratulations were the first the new president received.<sup>263</sup>

In early April, the Maronites' representative in France sent a letter to President Giscard asking for a French intervention. He wrote that if so happens, "in the eyes of the world and of History, France would have once again saved Lebanon."<sup>264</sup> The Maronites had started to tremble and

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<sup>258</sup> «Entretien avec le Chargé d'affaires Israélien Crise libanaise», 30 March 1976, MAE 1669INVA 302 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>259</sup> Khalil, "The Radical Crescent", 506.

<sup>260</sup> «un système de surveillance de la sécurité» in Lombardi, *Les Trente Honteuses*, 216; Telegram from Argod, Beirut, 15 April 1976, MAE 1835INVA 216 (Liban 1973-1982). Georges Gorse had previously accompanied de Murville during his mission in November 1975.

<sup>261</sup> «De préparer des circonstances favorables aux élections présidentielles» in Chehdan-Kalifé, *Les relations entre la France et le Liban*, 73.

<sup>262</sup> Chehdan-Kalifé, 73.

<sup>263</sup> Telegram from Argod, Beirut, 11 May 1976, MAE 1835INVA 416 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>264</sup> «Aux yeux du monde et de l'Histoire, la France aura encore une fois sauvé le Liban» in Letter from Rizkallah Maklouf to President Giscard d'Estaing, 7 April 1976, MAE 1835INVA 416 (Liban 1973-1982).

needed allies were they to avoid losing out to the advancing PLO-LNM offensive. The idea of French troops coming to the rescue was not too farfetched in the mind of many Maronite Lebanese. In April, rumors mentioned in a Phalangist television program said that “France would be ready to send forces to Lebanon to maintain order ‘in case the Security Council decided to send Arab and international forces to Lebanon’”.<sup>265</sup> While these were only rumors, some Christian factions did hope to influence France in the direction of a more direct involvement.

On 18 May 1976 President Giscard explicitly stated that he would not intervene in Lebanon.<sup>266</sup> However, while visiting the United States just two days later, President Giscard unexpectedly declared that circumstances looked favorable and that they could “send 5 000 French soldiers within the next 48 hours.”<sup>267</sup> This was an unexpected and substantial turnaround: for the first time a major power had proposed to send soldiers to Lebanon. It was, however, an ignorant statement as large parts of all factions in the conflict, from the PLO to most Maronite militias, were not keen on the idea. Historian Ignace Dalle writes that this confused statement arose due to Giscard being “most likely misinformed.”<sup>268</sup> Giscard’s gaffe could be attributed to a lack of confidence and coordination between the Quai d’Orsay and the President.<sup>269</sup> Or it could, as journalist Georges Sadaka theorized, be interpreted as an American push to get France involved instead of themselves.<sup>270</sup>

Documents of the Quai d’Orsay show us that France did take steps to follow up on a possible military intervention. Just a few days after the declaration Minister of Foreign Affairs Sauvagnargues wrote that “the French government would be ready, if the Lebanese authorities appealed to it and subject to the acquiescence of the parties involved, to send to Lebanon a French force whose mission would be to strengthen security in a period of consolidation of the cease-fire.”<sup>271</sup> Already on 24 May France received information that Prime Minister Karami and

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<sup>265</sup> «la France serait prête à envoyer des forces au Liban pour y maintenir l’ordre ‘au cas où le conseil de sécurité déciderait l’envoi de forces arabes et internationales au Liban’» in Telegram from Argod, Beirut, 3 April 1976, MAE 1835INVA 416 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>266</sup> Sadaka, *La Diplomatie Assassinée*, 155.

<sup>267</sup> «envoyer 5000 soldats français en 48 h» in Lombardi, *Les Trente Honteuses*, 204; Chehdan-Kalifé, *Les relations entre la France et le Liban*, 75.

<sup>268</sup> «Sans doute mal informé» in Dalle, *La Vème République et le Monde Arabe*, 407.

<sup>269</sup> Vaïsse, *La Puissance ou l’Influence*, 24.

<sup>270</sup> Sadaka, *La Diplomatie Assassinée*, 155.

<sup>271</sup> «le gouvernement français serait disposé, si les autorités libanaises faisaient appel à lui et sous réserve de l’acquiescement des parties intéressées, à envoyer au Liban une force française qui aurait pour mission de renforcer la sécurité dans une période de consolidation du cessez-le-feu» in Telegram from Sauvagnargues, Paris to Beirut, 22 May 1976, MAE 1835INVA 414 (Liban 1973-1982).

LNM leader Jumblatt were both opposed to the French eventually being sending troops.<sup>272</sup> As all parties needed to acquiesce, the initiative was thus abandoned in less than four days. The French were disappointed by the Lebanese response. The Palestinians were also negative to a French intervention.<sup>273</sup> President-elect Sarkis, who would not take his post before Frangieh's term officially ended in September, wanted French plans to be put away until consultations had been made with the different sides.<sup>274</sup> This was either way a prerequisite for France.

Giscard's openness to send French troops, was equally met with skepticism in the press of the Arab world.<sup>275</sup> That he said this while in the United States could have implied a benediction by the Americans. This in turn complicated how the initiative was viewed by the actors in Lebanon: not as France acting independently, but as France ally of the United States. The *Pakistan times*, close to Arab journalistic doctrine, used the apt formulation: "to use France as a cat's paw for American designs."<sup>276</sup> In Israel, the press was also critical of the French initiative. Some papers reminded the public of "the 'historic' responsibility of France, as a mandatory power, in the Lebanese imbroglio, and ironized about [the] country's claim to still want to be a great power."<sup>277</sup> As the French ambassador to Israel himself pointed out, this strongly contrasted with what had been said for months in the Israeli press of the so called "cowardice of Christian nations, and of France in particular."<sup>278</sup> The Israeli authorities, unlike the press, kept their silence – still assessing the French declaration's fallout.<sup>279</sup> But the tentative plan was also splitting public opinion inside of France. Whereas the Right largely supported it, the Left saw in the proposed intervention a continuity with the country's colonial endeavors and thereby opposed it.<sup>280</sup>

Kissinger, visiting France in May, discouraged the French initiative, and thereby put an end to the French suggestion of intervention.<sup>281</sup> This dismisses the theory that Giscard's declaration was being orchestrated by the US. That Kissinger had the final word also illustrates the reality

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<sup>272</sup> Telegram from Beaumarchais, London, 24 May 1976, MAE 1835INVA 414 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>273</sup> Chehdan-Kalifé, *Les relations entre la France et le Liban*, 75.

<sup>274</sup> Chehdan-Kalifé, 75.

<sup>275</sup> Telegram from Geara, Abu Dhabi, 25 May 1976; Le Gourrierc to Sauvagnargues, Islamabad, 28 May 1976; Telegram from Le Nail, Rabat, 31 May 1976; Telegram from De Commines, Alger, 5 June 1976. All MAE 1835 414 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>276</sup> Le Gourrierc to Sauvagnargues, Islamabad, 28 May 1976, MAE 1835INVA 414 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>277</sup> «la responsabilité 'historique' de la France, en tant que puissance mandataire, dans l'imbroglio libanais, et ironisent sur la prétention [...] pays à vouloir encore faire figure de grande puissance» in Telegram from Herly, Tel-Aviv, 24 May 1976, MAE 1669INVA 302 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>278</sup> «l'achaté des nations chrétiennes, et de la France en particulier» in Telegram from Herly, Tel-Aviv, 24 May 1976, MAE 1669INVA 302 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>279</sup> Telegram from Herly, Tel-Aviv, 24 May 1976, MAE 1669INVA 302 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>280</sup> Chehdan-Kalifé, *Les relations entre la France et le Liban*, 76.

<sup>281</sup> Chehdan-Kalifé, 75.

in which the French found themselves; having to answer and listen to the Americans, a reality far removed from de Gaulle's days of *Grandeur*. The Americans "preferred [to utilize] Syria to France when it came to an intervention in Lebanon."<sup>282</sup> In the end this came down to what the US' allies, the Israelis, preferred. Israel held the final say.

### **The Syrian Intervention: Replacing France as Protector in Chief**

In April 1976 special envoy Georges Gorse, wrote back to France that he had "the feeling that the Syrians might engage in a large-scale military action in Lebanon any day soon."<sup>283</sup> President Frangieh welcomed further Syrian intervention and explicitly asked for it.<sup>284</sup> Around the same time Phalangist leader Pierre Gemayel called on Syria to intervene to quell the civil war.<sup>285</sup> The Maronites pleas for international, but first and foremost French help, had been unanswered. With the LNM-PLO alliance advancing the Maronites turned towards an unlikely ally: the Syrians.

Assad had watched the development in Lebanon with worried eyes. The substantial gains made by the Palestinians and LNM risked defeating the Maronite militias to whom the Syrian stance had gradually shifted. The gradual covert infiltration of Syrians and Saiqa fighters was not enough. To stop a Lebanese dismemberment and thereby an Israeli reaction Syria needed a bigger intervention. To gain the trust of all the Lebanese, "Syria dreamt of attracting the Christians by saving them" from the chaos.<sup>286</sup> Historians Moshe Efrat and Jacob Bercovitch claim that France "acquiesced in the Syrian action in April."<sup>287</sup> However, this French agreement does not appear in the archival material examined. But, as previously seen, France had been pressing the US for a limited Syrian involvement for months, making a French acquiescent to Syrian intervention highly possible.

On 1 June 1976 Syria intervened militarily and in large scale against Jumblatt's LNM and the Palestinian resistance. In the first few days 15 000 troops crossed the border.<sup>288</sup> Syria's goal

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<sup>282</sup> «Préfèrent la Syrie à la France pour intervenir au Liban» in Chehdan-Kalifé, 76.

<sup>283</sup> «le sentiment que les Syriens peuvent engager d'un jour à l'autre au Liban une action militaire de grande envergure» in Telegram from Gorse via Argod, Beirut, 10 April 1976, MAE 1835INVA 416 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>284</sup> Malsagne, *Sous l'oeil de la diplomatie française*, 146.

<sup>285</sup> Chehdan-Kalifé, *Les relations entre la France et le Liban*, 73.

<sup>286</sup> «La Syrie rêvait d'attirer les chrétiens vers elle, en les sauvant» in Chehdan-Kalifé, *Les relations entre la France et le Liban*, 74.

<sup>287</sup> Moshe Efrat and Jacob Bercovitch, *Superpowers and Client States in the Middle East* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), 221.

<sup>288</sup> Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon*, 199.

was “to reinstate security and put an end to civil strife in Lebanon.”<sup>289</sup> Assad had to tread carefully to respect the red line agreement and not be dragged into a potential war with Israel because of the Palestinians.<sup>290</sup> Historian Chehdan-Kahlifé claims that the Syrians and French needed each other in Syria. While Syria sought to take France’s place as protector of Lebanon, they needed the French “to convince the Christian Lebanese to accept it.” And France, while fearing complete Syrian dominance in Lebanon, needed the Syrians “to be accepted by the Palestinians and progressives.”<sup>291</sup>

Interestingly, it does seem like a French intervention was still possible even after the Syrian intervention. Ten days after the Syrian invasion, the Kuwaiti ambassador to Paris asked if France was going to procure the Syrians with backup. The French reminded their interlocutor of the three things that needed to be in place for a French participation: “an effective ceasefire; request from the legal authorities of Lebanon; acquiescence of all the parties concerned, which naturally include the Arab countries directly concerned.”<sup>292</sup> This would, however, make a French intervention impossible. The first point of a ceasefire was hard to realize. The second point begs the question of who the legal authorities really were. Was it approval from Frangieh and Karami? Or would President-elect Sarkis’ approval be enough? The third point was also impossible as many Arab countries, the LNM, and the Palestinians did not necessarily want France.

Chehdan-Kalifé qualifies this failure to decisively act as a juncture in France’s Lebanon policy; from that point onwards, France would make itself less conspicuous.<sup>293</sup> France had made the choice to support the Syrian intervention and to save the Maronites from losing out. The realization of their powerlessness resulted in a tacit shift in France’s self-image as protector. As Giscard d’Estaing himself stated in October 1976: “there has not been, there will not be, there is no need to have a French initiative.”<sup>294</sup> This was a big change from his statement in May

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<sup>289</sup> Deeb, *The Lebanese Civil War*, 10.

<sup>290</sup> Chehdan-Kalifé, *Les relations entre la France et le Liban*, 78.

<sup>291</sup> «Pour convaincre les Chrétiens libanais à l’accepter» & «pour être acceptée par les palestino-progressistes» in Chehdan-Kalifé, 78.

<sup>292</sup> «un cessez-le-feu effectif; demande des autorités légales du Liban; acquiescement de toutes les parties concernées parmi lesquelles figurent naturellement les pays arabes directement intéressés» in Note from Cerles on «Entretien du Secrétaire d’Etat avec l’Ambassadeur du Koweït: Liban», 10 June 1976, MAE 1835INVA 394 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>293</sup> Chehdan-Kalifé, *Les relations entre la France et le Liban*, 77.

<sup>294</sup> «Il n’y a pas eu, il n’y aura pas, il n’y a pas lieu d’avoir une initiative française» in *L’Economie*, 19 October 1976 cited in Chehdan-Kalifé, 78.

about being ready to send troops. The tables had turned. Syria was now in command, and had replaced France as protector of the Maronites.

## Chapter 4 – June 1976 to May 1981

### France, the *Pax Syriana*, and the Turn Towards South Lebanon

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No country has done as much as France for the restoration of peace in Lebanon. I repeat, no other country.<sup>295</sup>

President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, during a press conference 21 November 1978

With the Syrian intervention in June 1976, Damascus became the major player on Lebanese soil. Under the blessing of France, the US and even a reluctant Israel, Syria had come to reinstate security.<sup>296</sup> The Syrian Army pushed the PLO on a retreat and a cease fire was forcibly signed on 21 October in Riyadh.<sup>297</sup> A “Syrian peace”, a *Pax Syriana*, was installed. With the cease fire came calmer months, where the hindering of major incidents was safeguarded by a fragile balance between the different camps. For the new president Elias Sarkis there was one priority: the reconstruction of the country.<sup>298</sup> The focus of the conflict then turned to the south, with a gradual increase of violence during 1977. The Maronite militia of the South Lebanese Army (SLA) clashed with the PLO and the Shiite *Amal* movement. In March 1978, as a reaction to a Palestinian terrorist attack in Israel, the Israeli Army invaded Lebanon up to the Litani river. Through the resulting creation of the UNIFIL forces, France found a new way to provide help. In that same year both the forced unification of the Maronite militias and the breakdown of the fragile Syrian-Maronite relationship resumed the war in Beirut and in the north.<sup>299</sup> The alliances shaped in 1976 had by 1978 been reversed.<sup>300</sup> The French presidential election of 1981 marked an end to the realist Giscard d'Estaing, and brought new vigor to the Quai d'Orsay in the form of the 5<sup>th</sup> Republic's first socialist president, François Mitterrand. How did France act

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<sup>295</sup> «Aucun pays n'a fait autant que la France pour la restauration de la paix au Liban. Je dis bien, aucun pays» in Document «Conférence de presse de M. Le Président de la République», 21 November 1978, CADN, archives Liban (Ambassade), 91 PO/C 2.

<sup>296</sup> Waage and Huse, “Careful Minuet”, 2; Efrat and Bercovitch, *Superpowers and Client States in the Middle East*, 221.

<sup>297</sup> Waage, *Konflikt og stormaktspolitikk i Midtøsten*, 230; Waage and Huse, 13

<sup>298</sup> Waage, 230; Telegram from Argod, Beirut, 27 September 1976, MAE 1835INVA 416 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>299</sup> Waage, Hilde Henriksen and Mathias Nesthun Sønsteby, “The Grimness of the Alternatives: Carter, Israel, and the Civil War in Lebanon”, draft article, unpublished paper, 20; de Clerck and Malsagne, *Le Liban en guerre*, 56-57.

<sup>300</sup> Waage and Sønsteby, 8; de Clerck and Malsagne, 56.

toward the Syrians after their invasion? Why did the relationship with the Maronites become even more strained? What were the French attitudes towards the conflict in South Lebanon?

### **From Syrian Intervention to the Creation of the Arab Deterrent Force**

In the first few months after the intervention in June 1976, Syria worked on establishing international support for its occupation of Lebanon. The Syrian minister of foreign affairs Abdul Halim Khaddam visited France already the day after the intervention. Historian Marius Deeb claims that Khaddam received what he was looking for: a communiqué issuing official French support for the Syrians as long as the sovereignty and integrity of Lebanon was preserved.<sup>301</sup> Yet, the documents of the French diplomatic archives make it clear that France wanted to avoid showing public support for the intervention.<sup>302</sup> This is also the assertion of historians Dima de Clerck and Stéphane Malsagne.<sup>303</sup> Either way, this meant a French support for Syria and the Maronites, not the PLO. According to the historian James R. Stocker, French authorities also “offered the use of French troops as peacekeepers to Khaddam in Paris, but the Syrian foreign minister rejected this offer.”<sup>304</sup> There is, however, no mention of this offer in the French diplomatic archives.<sup>305</sup> France’s definition of Lebanese sovereignty did not seem to include the unavoidable influence that Syria would now get in the country. There was a fine line between letting Lebanon lose its integrity to the Syrians, or letting the Palestinians win the civil war. French, American, and Lebanese authorities saw a limited Syrian intervention as the only option. A PLO victory would inevitably have triggered an Israeli invasion, which in turn could have led to a new major Middle Eastern war.<sup>306</sup> The PLO was considered a threat to Israel’s safety, and a Palestinian hold on Lebanon would therefore have been unacceptable for Israel.

The Soviet Union found itself in a difficult position as it now supported two opposite factions of the war: Syria and the PLO, which used to be allies.<sup>307</sup> While a longtime ally of the Syrians, the Soviets chose in this instance to back the PLO and Kamal Jumblatt’s LNM forces. They were the only major power “to openly criticize the regime in Damascus” for the intervention.<sup>308</sup> The Lebanese National Movement, through Jumblatt’s right hand man Abbas Khalaf, asked

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<sup>301</sup> Deeb, *The Lebanese Civil War*, 10.

<sup>302</sup> Note, Paris, 15 June 1976, CADN, archives Liban (Ambassade), 91 PO/C 2.

<sup>303</sup> De Clerck & Malsagne, *Le Liban en Guerre*, 350.

<sup>304</sup> *New York Times*, 4 June 1976 in Stocker, *Spheres of Intervention*, 198.

<sup>305</sup> When it comes to the selected archive boxes from the diplomatic archives of Nantes and la Courneuve.

<sup>306</sup> Waage and Huse, *A Careful Minuet*, 1 & 8-9.

<sup>307</sup> Chehdan-Kalifé, *Les relations entre la France et le Liban*, 76.

<sup>308</sup> «à critiquer ouvertement le régime de Damas» in de Clerck & Malsagne, *Le Liban en Guerre*, 338.



France to play a more active role in Lebanon. Khalaf wanted the French to put pressure on the Syrians. According to him, Syria's ultimate aim was to exert full control over Lebanon. If France were to stand by their policy of keeping Lebanon's integrity, sovereignty and unity they naturally could not let this Syrian takeover happen.<sup>309</sup> France, however, kept its resolve for the Syrian effort and thereby the immediate rescue of the Maronites. The PLO-LNM alliance also came with pleas to regional powers. PLO leader Yasser Arafat quickly called upon a meeting of the Arab League to pressure Syria into showing restraint. He knew that his plea stood strong, especially among some of the more radical leftist Arab countries such as Algeria or Libya. Iraq, ruled by a Ba'athist party rival to the one in Syria, accused "Syria of betraying the Palestinian cause and cooperating with the United States."<sup>310</sup> Thus, while backed by France and the US, Syria received much criticism for its intervention against the Palestinians.

In June, Hafez al-Assad became the first Syrian leader to visit France. At the Quai d'Orsay, the officials worried that Assad coming to France after the invasion would put the French in "an embarrassing situation" as it might publicly seem that they endorsed the Syrian intervention in Lebanon.<sup>311</sup> Historians de Clerck and Malsagne note that while France might have shunned an official support for Syria, the visit either way signified a "more than implicit support from France for the Syrian military intervention."<sup>312</sup> Additionally, it seemed like the Quai d'Orsay feared that Assad might take up on President Giscard's former propositions made a month earlier, and ask for French troops to be sent.<sup>313</sup> This was because the Syrians now could actually make the three French prerogatives of a ceasefire, a request from Lebanese legal authorities and an approval of all the parties concerned, come to fruition before asking for French intervention. This was something France now wanted to avoid. Since the Syrian intervention, the situation on the ground had substantially changed. A French operation would be difficult militarily and pose diplomatic problems, as it would look like an explicit assistance to the Syrians. From the internal discussions in the Quai d'Orsay, it also appears that Kamal Jumblatt, who had refused Giscard's proposition to send French troops in May, did ask for a French intervention after all.<sup>314</sup> This was perhaps because he realized it would now be preferable, as he was getting beaten back by the Syrians. It was not before eight months later that the French minister of foreign

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<sup>309</sup> Note from Cerles on «Entretien du 2 juillet avec M. Abbas Khalaf, adjoint de M. Joumlatt», Paris, 6 July 1976, MAE 1835INVA 394 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>310</sup> Deeb, *The Lebanese Civil War*, 10.

<sup>311</sup> «une situation embarrassante» in Note, Paris, 15 June 1976, CADN, archives Liban (Ambassade), 91 PO/C 2.

<sup>312</sup> «un soutien plus qu'implicite de la France à l'intervention militaire syrienne» in de Clerck & Malsagne, *Le Liban en Guerre*, 350.

<sup>313</sup> Note, Paris, 15 June 1976, CADN, archives Liban (Ambassade), 91 PO/C 2.

<sup>314</sup> Note, Paris, 15 June 1976, CADN, archives Liban (Ambassade), 91 PO/C 2.

affairs, “publicly approved for the first time of the Syrian aid to the government in Beirut.”<sup>315</sup> The use of the euphemism “aid” describes how the French viewed the Syrian intervention. France thought that by maintaining a good relationship with Syria and supporting their efforts in Lebanon, they could keep Lebanon’s integrity.<sup>316</sup> This was, however, to the obvious chagrin of its sovereignty.

In June 1976, just after the Syrian intervention, France wanted to take initiative and propose a conference on Lebanon with the different parties in Paris.<sup>317</sup> The French sought a global solution for Lebanon and the Middle East which would include the Palestinians. This was a different approach to the one of the Americans. The idea of a round table meeting remained all the way up until at least November 1978, but never materialized due to the lack of enthusiasm from the different Lebanese actors.<sup>318</sup>

On 16 June the American ambassador to Lebanon, Francis Meloy, was assassinated.<sup>319</sup> The Israelis blamed the PLO for the murder.<sup>320</sup> The PLO contrarily accused the Syrians.<sup>321</sup> The complex constellation of the many actors made finding the culprit difficult. As the newly appointed ambassador, Meloy was assassinated before he had the chance to present his credentials to Suleiman Frangieh or Elias Sarkis.<sup>322</sup> From May until September a general confusion reigned over who the president of Lebanon really was; the elected Sarkis or the resigning Frangieh? Frangieh was expected to step down immediately when Sarkis was elected, but did not.<sup>323</sup> The US wanted Frangieh to leave before the end of his mandate, to facilitate the job of Sarkis; a president both the US and Syria wanted.<sup>324</sup> The French were not too fond of Frangieh either. The working relationship with the French Embassy had been tumultuous, and

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<sup>315</sup> «approuvé pour la première fois publiquement l'aide apportée par les Syriens au gouvernement de Beyrouth» in *Le Monde*, 20-21 February 1977 cited in Chehdan-Kalifé, *Les relations entre la France et le Liban*, 80.

<sup>316</sup> Chehdan-Kalifé, 80.

<sup>317</sup> Note, Paris, 15 June 1976, CADN, archives Liban (Ambassade), 91 PO/C 2.

<sup>318</sup> Examples include: Telegram from Butin, Tel-Aviv, 6 August 1976 MAE 1835INVA 394 (Liban 1973-1982); Y. Moubarac, «Note sur la situation au Liban», 7 October 1976 MAE 1835INVA 394 (Liban 1973-1982); Note d’entretien, «Visite à Paris de M. Elias Sarkis, Président de la République Libanaise», 25 November 1978, CADN, archives Liban (Ambassade), 91 PO/C 37.

<sup>319</sup> De Clerck & Malsagne, *Le Liban en Guerre*, 337.

<sup>320</sup> Telegram de Herly, Tel-Aviv, 21 June 1976, MAE 1669INVA 302 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>321</sup> Confidential Note on «Proche-Orient, Liban. Conversations entre le Président de la République et M. Kissinger le 21 juin au matin, entre M. Sauvagnargues et M. Kissinger le 21 juin dans l’après-midi», 22 June 1976, MAE 1835INVA 394 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>322</sup> Stocker, *Spheres of Intervention*, 198 & 202.

<sup>323</sup> O’Ballance, *Civil War in Lebanon*, 51.

<sup>324</sup> Stocker, *Spheres of Intervention*, 191-192; de Clerck & Malsagne, *Le Liban en Guerre: 1975-1990*, 339. Here versions differ as Stocker writes that it is unclear and US Special Envoy Brown “felt that the US embassy should stay out of the election”, while de Clerck and Malsagne explicitly state that Sarkis was “chosen by Dean Brown in accord with Syria.”

President Giscard had called Frangieh “a very foolish man who has done harm.”<sup>325</sup> The French president was more open to help Sarkis. In a meeting between Giscard and Henry Kissinger, the French president reiterated that French forces could be sent to “be at the service of President Sarkis.”<sup>326</sup> Kissinger did provide his approbation, but in the end no French troops were sent to assist Sarkis.<sup>327</sup> With the murder of its top diplomat, the US judged Beirut too unsafe for its citizens. On 20 June 1976 the US evacuated their diplomats and citizens.<sup>328</sup> The assassination of the ambassador and the evacuation of its mission and citizens meant the US lost most of its presence in the country. This vacuum did, however, allow for France and Europe to play a bigger role.

France was among the few countries not to close its diplomatic mission in Lebanon following the assassination of Francis Meloy, though the embassy did facilitate the process for the French citizens who wanted to leave.<sup>329</sup> During the war, while others shunned Lebanon, and particularly Beirut, French diplomats, companies and banks stayed. Historian Chehdan-Khalifé notes that “the French-Lebanese Bank [...] played a considerable role in the economic life of the country.”<sup>330</sup> Nonetheless, the French embassy, the imposing *Résidence des Pin* building as it was known, was to be heavily damaged during the war. In August Chargé d’affaires Bertrand de Lataillade could report to Paris that “fifty-two bombshells had exploded within the perimeter of the chancellery.”<sup>331</sup>

On 29 July a Syrian-Palestinian agreement imposed an end to the fighting and a reiteration that the Palestinian presence in Lebanon should be dependent on the 1969 Cairo Accords, in which the PLO was granted control over Palestinian camps and the authorization to perform guerilla activities in and from Lebanon.<sup>332</sup> At an Arab league conference in Riyadh on 15 October, the PLO and Syria signed a cease-fire that started a week later. One of the conditions for the cease

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<sup>325</sup> Stocker, 192-193; Chehdan-Kalifé, *Les relations entre la France et le Liban*, 55.

<sup>326</sup> «être mise au service du Président Sarkis» in Confidential Note on «Proche-Orient, Liban. Conversations entre le Président de la République et M. Kissinger le 21 juin au matin, entre M. Sauvagnargues et M. Kissinger le 21 juin dans l’après-midi», 22 June 1976, MAE 1835INVA 394 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>327</sup> Confidential Note on «Proche-Orient, Liban. Conversations entre le Président de la République et M. Kissinger le 21 juin au matin, entre M. Sauvagnargues et M. Kissinger le 21 juin dans l’après-midi», 22 June 1976, MAE 1835INVA 394 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>328</sup> Stocker, *Spheres of Intervention*, 203. Interestingly, the PLO provided security and logistical support for this evacuation – See Jensehaugen “A Palestinian window of opportunity?”, 5.

<sup>329</sup> *Revue du Liban* edition 19 February 1977, MAE 1835INVA 410 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>330</sup> «La Banque Franco-Libanaise a [...] joué un rôle extrêmement considérable dans la vie économique du pays» in Chehdan-Kalifé, *Les relations entre la France et le Liban*, 78.

<sup>331</sup> «cinquante deux obus ont explosé dans le périmètre de la chancellerie» in Telegram from Lataillade, Beirut, 17 August 1976, MAE 1835INVA 428 (Liban 1973-1982); See for example, Malsagne, *Sous l’oeil de la diplomatie française*, 196.

<sup>332</sup> Deeb, *The Lebanese Civil War*, 11.

fire was the subsequent stationing of a 30 000-man strong Arab Deterrence Force (ADF). In reality the force was mostly comprised of Syrian soldiers.<sup>333</sup> This gave legitimization to the Syrian intervention. The force was created to restore order and security in Lebanon. The PLO and LNM welcomed this Arabization of the conflict.<sup>334</sup>

In Beirut the major development was the continued siege laid by the Lebanese Front, the united Maronite militias, upon the Palestinian refugee camp of Tel al-Zaatar. The siege lasted seven months until the camp fell on 12 August. Out of a population of 20 000 to 50 000, according to varying accounts, 2 000 people, mostly young men, were killed.<sup>335</sup> After the fall of the camp Bashir Gemayel, son of Phalangist leader Pierre, created the Lebanese Forces militia out of the Lebanese Front elements.<sup>336</sup> Weakened by the Syrian invasion, the PLO lost out in the battle of the camps.

The Christian conservatives' narrative now insisted that no solution between the Lebanese could be found before the Palestinian problem had been solved. According to them, contentions between the Lebanese factions would be solvable once the Palestinians had left the country. Many among the Lebanese Maronite leaders also argued concrete societal reform could only take place following, the re-establishment of the state and army, and a resolution with the Palestinians.<sup>337</sup> And so, as no Palestinian solution looked feasible, no reforms were done.

Elias Sarkis finally took office in September 1976. Sarkis went regularly to Damascus and clearly needed Syrian backing to be able to exercise his presidency.<sup>338</sup> France emphasized its support for the new government, to show that they believed in its message of reconstruction.<sup>339</sup> Yet, France's future ambassador to Lebanon, Paul-Marc Henry, recognized that Sarkis did not have much leeway when it came to exercising his function.<sup>340</sup> Through Sarkis, France therefore indirectly supported Syrian involvement in Lebanon. To avoid showing any favoritism to any

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<sup>333</sup> Waage, *Konflikt og stormaktspolitikk i Midtøsten*, 230; Odeh, *Lebanon: Dynamcis of Conflict*, 183.

<sup>334</sup> Deeb, *The Lebanese Civil War*, 10-11.

<sup>335</sup> 20 000 people in Waage, *Konflikt og stormaktspolitikk i Midtøsten*, 229; 50 000 in Malsagne, *Sous l'oeil de la diplomatie française*, 145

<sup>336</sup> Malsagne, 145.

<sup>337</sup> O'Ballance, *Civil War in Lebanon*, 42 & 56; Telegram from Jeantelot, Beirut, 4 October 1976, MAE 1835INVA 395 (Liban 1973-1982); Telegram from Jeantelot, Beirut, 4 October 1976, MAE 1835 INVA 416 (Liban 1973-1982); Telegram from Argod, Beirut, 27 September 1976 MAE 1835INVA 416 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>338</sup> Telegram from Argod, Beirut, 4 September 1976 MAE 1835INVA 416 (Liban 1973-1982); Mordechai Nisan, *Politics and War in Lebanon: Unraveling the Enigma* (London: Routledge, 2015), 105-106.

<sup>339</sup> Argod to Guiringaud, Beirut, «Conférence de presse du ministre», 18 February 1977, MAE 1835 INVA 415 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>340</sup> Malsagne, *Sous l'oeil de la diplomatie française*, 194.

of the militias, and abiding to their official stance of neutrality, France would continue endorsing the Lebanese legal authorities and President Sarkis throughout his tenure.<sup>341</sup>

In October Kamal Jumblatt met with the new French minister of foreign affairs, Louis de Guiringaud.<sup>342</sup> He came to Paris to once again “request a more active policy” from France.<sup>343</sup> Additionally the PLO, through Farouk Kaddoumi, chief of the political department, may have wanted French involvement to put pressure on the Syrians. In a phone call with the Quai d’Orsay, Kaddoumi underlined the insufficient numbers of soldiers in the ADF to which could be added French troops. However, he did not go into detail on what the PLO wanted from French troops and France more generally.<sup>344</sup> On the Maronite side, Abou Slimane, the president of the Maronite League organization, not trusting the Syrians, also asked for a French armed presence alongside the ADF.<sup>345</sup> As we see, France was sought after by the PLO and the Muslim Left, as much as by the Maronites, albeit for different reasons.

During his visit to Paris Kamal Jumblatt had also met with the leader of the French socialist party (PS) and future president François Mitterrand.<sup>346</sup> While the leaders of the PS did not see the LNM as close enough to the European Left, they gradually embraced Kamal Jumblatt and his ideas.<sup>347</sup> In September 1976 the Socialist Party pronounced that they wanted the Syrians out of Lebanon.<sup>348</sup> Thereby they opposed the more or less tacit support for Syria given by Giscard and the Quai d’Orsay.

On 15 November 1976 the mostly Syrian Arab Deterrent Force arrived in Beirut.<sup>349</sup> The cease fire that came out of the Riyadh conference, and the accompanying ADF, eased off the conflict. In February 1977 France’s ambassador Argod speculated in “already seeing the end of the war which he attributed to the merits of French diplomacy in Lebanon.”<sup>350</sup> This was a bold statement, since it was after all the Arab countries themselves who were responsible for the ADF, not the French. Assad had, for the moment, won his bet. He had accomplished his three

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<sup>341</sup> Malsagne, 140-141, 152 & 176; Argod to Guiringaud on «Conférence de presse du ministre», Beirut, 18 February 1977, MAE 1835 INVA 415 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>342</sup> Telegram from Leprette, Paris, 5 October 1976, MAE 1835INVA 414BIS (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>343</sup> «solliciter une politique plus active» in Laurent and Basbous, *Guerres secrètes au Liban*, 270; Odeh, *Lebanon: Dynamics of Conflict*, 182.

<sup>344</sup> Telegram from Cerles, Paris, 30 September 1976, MAE 1835INVA 394 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>345</sup> Note «Entretien du Directeur d’Afrique du Nord-Levant avec le Dr Khazen et M. Abou Slimane», 20 September 1976, MAE 1835INVA 394 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>346</sup> Filiu, *Mitterrand et la Palestine*, 49.

<sup>347</sup> Filiu, 47.

<sup>348</sup> Filiu, 48-49.

<sup>349</sup> O’Ballance, *Civil War in Lebanon*, 60.

<sup>350</sup> «y voir déjà la fin de la guerre qu’il attribue aux mérites de la diplomatie française au Liban» in Malsagne, *Sous l’oeil de la diplomatie française*, 149.

goals: the preservation of Lebanon as a state, Syrian influence in the country and avoidance of war with Israel.<sup>351</sup> This marked a new chapter for Lebanon. The French Historian Ignace Dalle writes that “with the support of the West, the United States and France in front, the Syrian forces settled in Lebanon for close to thirty years.”<sup>352</sup> Syria had become the uncontested major player in Lebanon.

### **The French Effort for Reconstruction**

France played a role in the reconstruction of Lebanon after the first year of the war. It would provide help with rebuilding the cities, but also help in the domains of education and army. The damages were enormous. The Lebanese minister of foreign affairs Fouad Boutros estimated that the reconstruction would cost between two and a half and three billion dollars.<sup>353</sup> France understood early on that they could play a central role in the coordination of the reconstruction of Lebanon.<sup>354</sup> Thereby a first French mission was sent to Lebanon in February 1976 to assess the damages. However, due to the continuity of the fighting its work was promptly terminated.<sup>355</sup> In November 1976 Lebanese authorities, hoping the worst of the conflict was behind them, once again asked for a for a French “high-level” mission to look at and evaluate the problems of reconstruction.<sup>356</sup> The mission, which arrived in January 1977 was focused on “city planning, spatial planning and means of communication.”<sup>357</sup> The French patrimony in Lebanon, of owned land and buildings, was of 620 000m<sup>2</sup>, which was not negligible.<sup>358</sup> Thereby a lot of the reconstruction would also go directly to France’s own patrimony. French help was likewise given to the many Lebanese fleeing the war. For instance, in mid-1976, 25 000 Lebanese nationals, who had escaped the war were estimated to have fled to France.<sup>359</sup> From

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<sup>351</sup> Waage, *Konflikt og stormaktspolitikk i Midtøsten*, 230.

<sup>352</sup> «Avec l’appui des Occidentaux, Etats-Unis et France en tête, les forces syriennes s’installent alors au Liban pour un trentaine d’années» in Dalle, *La Vème République et le Monde Arabe*, 139.

<sup>353</sup> Note «Entretien avec M. Fouad Boutros», 4 May 1977, MAE 1835INVA 394 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>354</sup> Telegram from Argod, Beirut, réservé, 3 February 1976, MAE 1835INVA 416 (Liban 1973-1982); Confidential Note from Cerles, Paris, «La France et le Liban», 5 February 1976, MAE 1835INVA 414 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>355</sup> Malsagne, *Sous l’oeil de la diplomatie française*, 150-151; Telegram for Laboulaye, Paris, 11 March 1976, MAE 1835INVA 394 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>356</sup> «de haut niveauuse [Sic]» in Note «Situation au Liban», 7 December 1976, MAE 1669INVA 302 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>357</sup> «d’urbanisme, d’aménagement du territoire et de voies de communication» in Document «Compte-rendu des entretiens de M. Weitnauer, Secrétaire Général du Département fédéral suisse ave M. De Laboulaye, Directeur des Affaires Politiques», 29 December 1976, MAE 1835INVA 395 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>358</sup> Note «Biens domaniaux de l’Etat français au Liban», October 1974, MAE 1835INVA 415 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>359</sup> Malsagne, *Sous l’oeil de la diplomatie française*, 151; Baronnet, *Les Relations Franco-Libanaises*, 29.

late June they were even given “exceptional authorization” to work in France. Plans were also set in place to find housing for those who needed it.<sup>360</sup>

France also participated in the reconstruction of the Lebanese Army. For the Lebanese authorities the rebuilding of a strong army capable of keeping the peace among the militias was imperative. It could then replace the ADF which would become superfluous. President Sarkis had made this one of his top priorities.<sup>361</sup> During the two first years of the war the army was met with some opposition as the top postings were attributed solely to Christians. For the Muslim leaders, concrete reform was needed.<sup>362</sup> The creation and reform of a capable army commandment took time and had been delayed due to conflicts between Muslims and Christians on its sectarian composition.<sup>363</sup> The lack of trust from the Muslim communities also meant a lack of trust in the field. How could a national army function without the support of over half the population? Sarkis’ plan was to send the army southwards, to remove the area’s Palestinian fighters before their actions triggered a *casus belli* for Israel.<sup>364</sup> For this endeavor the Lebanese Army would need the support of the local, mostly Shiite, population.

The Lebanese authorities wanted France to send a couple of officers to help with the reconstruction of the army.<sup>365</sup> When Minister of Foreign Affairs de Guiringaud visited Beirut in February 1977, the purpose was to discuss how France could help with reconstructing the country.<sup>366</sup> This was no public secret, de Guiringaud explicitly said in a press conference that France was ready to send military experts to Lebanon.<sup>367</sup> France had already back in 1975 signed protocols for “the sending of French technical advisers to the Lebanese Army.”<sup>368</sup> In the end, they made only two technical military officers available, with one arriving in August 1977 and one in January 1978.<sup>369</sup> These were low numbers for a country that wished to play a role in

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<sup>360</sup> «autorisation exceptionnelle» in From Sadaka to Sauvagnargues, 8 July 1976, MAE 1835INVA 409 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>361</sup> De Clerk and Malsagne, *Le Liban en guerre*, 230-231; Waage and Sønsteby, “The Grimness of the Alternatives”, 9.

<sup>362</sup> De Clerk and Malsagne, 222-223 & 225.

<sup>363</sup> De Clerk and Malsagne, 222-223; Note de Synthèse «Liban», 22 October 1978, CADN, archives Liban (Ambassade) 91 PO/C 37.

<sup>364</sup> Waage and Sønsteby, “The Grimness of the Alternatives”, 9.

<sup>365</sup> Operational Note from Cerles on «Entretien du Ministre à Beyrouth», Paris, 14 February 1977, MAE 1835INVA 395 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>366</sup> Letter from Giscard d’Estaing to Sarkis, 14 February 1977 MAE 1835INVA 415 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>367</sup> Argod to Guiringaud, Beirut, «Conférence de presse du ministre», 18 february 1977, MAE 1835INVA 415 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>368</sup> «l’envoi de conseillers techniques français auprès de l’armée libanaise» in Note on «Vente d’armements français au Liban», 24 October 1978, CADN, archives Liban (Ambassade), 91 PO/C 37.

<sup>369</sup> Note, «Coopération militaire technique avec le Liban», 22 November 1978, CADN, archives Liban (Ambassade) 91 PO/C 37. Only two officers appear among the archival material that has been looked at for this thesis; however, there might have been more through non-disclosed contracts.

reconstructing the Lebanese Army. Yet, as part of this rebuild, a few hundred Lebanese officers went to traineeships in France.<sup>370</sup>

In September 1976 Camille Chamoun, leader of the Maronite NLP militia, sent an envoy to Paris inquiring why a scheduled ammunition delivery for the Lebanese Army had not been made. The French, knowing the ammunition would probably not go to the army but to the militias, had stopped the shipment. The French made it clear that these were only temporary measures, dependent on the progression of the war. Chamoun's envoy was unequivocal that the enemy of Lebanon was "the occupier", the Palestinians, and that there was no battle among the Lebanese themselves. This was the Maronite viewpoint, and one which they tried to propagate overseas. Still, the Quai d'Orsay, citing the wish for an "opening of a political dialogue between the components of the Lebanese community", did not budge.<sup>371</sup> France, in line with its neutral positions, did not want to supply one group over another.

After 1976, perhaps due to newfound faith in the reconstruction of the Army, new contracts were made with Lebanon for "ammunition and small arms." The purchase of French material consisted of 80 percent of the Lebanese Defense budget for 1977.<sup>372</sup> Later, in 1980, France sold six Puma helicopters to Lebanon and donated tanks and armored vehicles to the army.<sup>373</sup> However, France feared losing out to the Americans who were helping the Lebanese with financial aid and had procured them with diverse defense material.<sup>374</sup> The US remained, since 1958, Lebanon's biggest arms contributors.<sup>375</sup> For instance, in July 1977 the US Congress approved for twenty-five million dollars to rebuild the Lebanese army.<sup>376</sup> So, while France largely participated in the Lebanese reconstruction, their contribution to the Lebanese military remained significantly inferior to that of the US.

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<sup>370</sup> Note «Aide militaire à l'Armée libanaise», 24 June 1977 MAE 1835INVA, 428 (Liban 1973-1982); Malsagne, *Sous l'oeil de la diplomatie*, 154.

<sup>371</sup> «l'ouverture d'un dialogue politique entre les composantes de la communauté libanaise» in Confidential Note «Entretien avec M. Victor Moussa», 16 September 1976, MAE INVA1835 409 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>372</sup> «des munitions et d'armes légères» in Note «Vente d'armements français au Liban», 24 October 1978, CADN, archives Liban (Ambassade), 91 PO/C 37.

<sup>373</sup> Malsagne, *Sous l'oeil de la diplomatie française*, 176.

<sup>374</sup> Note «Vente d'armements français au Liban», 24 October 1978, CADN, archives Liban (Ambassade), 91 PO/C 37.

<sup>375</sup> Lombardi, *Les Trente Honteuses*, 214.

<sup>376</sup> Waage and Sønsteby, "The Grimness of the Alternatives", 8.



## Escalation in the South Lebanon in 1977

While the first year of the war took place in the whole country, but especially in and around Beirut, the next phase of the war would be concentrated in South Lebanon. This region was called *Fatah land* due to the prominence of Palestinian guerrillas, primarily *Fatah* troops. It had traditionally been the core territory of the Shiite population of Lebanon with a certain number of Christian villages spread around.<sup>377</sup> The Palestinians had since their arrival, and with the support of the Cairo Accords, cemented themselves in South Lebanon. As stately control of Southern Lebanon remained elusive, three actors held control: the Shiite *Amal* movement, the Palestinian organizations, and their adversary Saad Haddad's SLA Maronite militia.<sup>378</sup> The SLA functioned as an Israeli proxy in South Lebanon.<sup>379</sup> It became clear in April that the Syrian controlled Palestinian Saiqa militia did take part in combat alongside the other Palestinians in South Lebanon. This meant also that the Syrians did have their own proxy militia South of the Litani. Syria had started to deviate from its support of the Maronites over to its former allies the Palestinians.<sup>380</sup>

Israel had orchestrated a policy of "open border" towards the Christian villages in South Lebanon.<sup>381</sup> It provided these villages with arms and materials, while the Lebanese villagers could cross into Israel for work and medical aid. The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) was also present on the Lebanese side of the border through patrols and instructors working with the SLA.<sup>382</sup> In 1977 the question on everyone's mind was; would the Israelis intervene if the SLA were losing? Israel's minister of foreign affairs Yigal Allon made a public declaration in April saying, "that Israel would not let the Christian populations of southern Lebanon be massacred."<sup>383</sup> However, the claims of imminent peril for the Christian enclaves in the South were "not backed by Israeli intelligence."<sup>384</sup> Still, the Israeli knew the need for a good pretext. French officials denoted that the Israelis would benefit from a fractured and regionalized

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<sup>377</sup> Lombardi, *Les Trente Honteuses*, 194; O'Ballance, *Civil War in Lebanon*, 64; Cobban, *The Making of Modern Lebanon*, 17-18 & 157-158.

<sup>378</sup> Interestingly, Lombardi asserts that the SLA was actually, to the contrary of popular belief, composed more of Shias than Maronites, in Lombardi, 254.

<sup>379</sup> O'Ballance, *Civil War in Lebanon*, 71.

<sup>380</sup> O'Ballance, 66-67; Telegram from Argod, Beirut, 8 April 1977, MAE 1669INVA 302 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>381</sup> Telegram from Herly, Tel-Aviv, 15 September 1976, MAE 1669INVA 302 (Liban 1973-1982). The French operated with the term "good border". Waage and Sønsteby use the term "good fence" in their article "The Grimness of the Alternatives", 9.

<sup>382</sup> Malsagne, *Sous l'oeil de la diplomatie française*, 158; Telegram from Herly, Tel-Aviv, 17 March 1977 MAE 1669INVA 302; Waage and Sønsteby, 9.

<sup>383</sup> «qu'Israël ne laisserait pas massacrer les populations Chrétiennes du Sud Liban» in Telegram from Leclercq, Paris, 18 April 1977, MAE 1669INVA 302 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>384</sup> Waage and Sønsteby, "The Grimness of the Alternatives", 10.

Lebanon since “a small Christian Lebanon would inevitably be destined to maintain privileged relations with” Israel.<sup>385</sup> To create such a small and Christian Lebanon, or at least a more federated Lebanon, was also pondered upon by some of the Maronite leaders. In February 1977, Dany Chamoun, son of Camille and official leader of the NPL militia, claimed to the Quai d’Orsay officials that he had the support of the different Christian leaders, among them Pierre Gemayel, for a plan of regionalization where confessionalism would be “brought down to the regional level.”<sup>386</sup> Bashir Gemayel also considered a federal system where Lebanon would be divided in three: a mostly Christian mountain, a mostly Shiite South and a mostly Sunni North. Special status would be granted to Beirut. The minorities would not be thrown out, but respected and could participate in the assemblies. Conversely, he wished for the Palestinians to leave Lebanon.<sup>387</sup>

The fighting in South Lebanon between the Maronites, with their Israeli weapons, and the Palestinians, had by the end of March resulted in the mass fleeing of 35 000 people, mainly Shiite.<sup>388</sup> There was an impasse as no troops could, or would, be sent to South Lebanon. The Arab Deterrence Force and Syrians could not be sent because of the red line agreement, which stipulated the limits for Syrian involvement in Lebanon, and the inevitable Israeli retaliations a breach would generate. An Israeli intervention would in turn be infringing upon the border. An intervention by a UN force was not wanted either, especially by the Israelis.<sup>389</sup> Furthermore, the Lebanese Army was still not capable of assembling enough robust forces.

On 16 March Kamal Jumblatt, the Druze LNM leader, was killed. While the Druze went on a revenge rampage killing multiple Christians, the perpetrators were most likely Syrians. His son, Walid, succeeded him at the head of the Progressive Socialist Party and the LNM.<sup>390</sup> But the coalition was weakened by the assassination of their charismatic leader and struggled with organizing themselves.<sup>391</sup> His death was also the loss of one of the most prominent Muslim

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<sup>385</sup> «un petit Liban chrétien serait fatalement destiné à entretenir [...] des relations privilégiées» in Note from Cerles on «Situation au Sud-Liban», Paris, 15 April 1977, MAE 1669INVA 302 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>386</sup> «ramené à l’échelon de la région» in Note from Cerles on «Entretien du Directeur d’Afrique du Nord et Levant avec M. Dany Chamoun», 3 February 1977, CADN, archives Liban (Ambassade) 91 PO/C 2.

<sup>387</sup> Malsagne, *Sous l’oeil de la diplomatie française*, 155.

<sup>388</sup> Note on «Situation au Sud-Liban», Cerles, 21 March 1977, MAE 1669INVA 302 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>389</sup> Note by Cerles on «Situation au Sud-Liban», Paris, 21 March 1977, MAE 1669INVA 302 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>390</sup> Cobban, *The Making of Modern Lebanon*, 154-155.

<sup>391</sup> Note on «Entretien de M. Le Président de la République avec S.B Mgr. Antoine-Pierre Khoraihe», 22 September 1977, MAE 1835INVA 394 (Liban 1973-1982).

leaders in Lebanon. Walid Jumblatt understood the assassination as a clear message by Damascus to choose sides, and subsequently aligned himself with Syria.<sup>392</sup>

On 25 July 1977 the Shtaura Accords were signed between the Palestinians, the Lebanese, and the Syrian authorities. If implemented, they would have provided for a withdrawal of the Palestinian fighting forces from the border which would be supervised and replaced by the new Lebanese Army.<sup>393</sup> Historians Hilde Henriksen Waage and Mathias Nesthun Sønsteby assert that Arafat's hands were most likely forced to sign by the Syrians, as he now needed closer cooperation with Damascus due to the disharmony plaguing his allies the LNM.<sup>394</sup> The accords would, however, prove hard to implement. Saad Haddad's SLA militia was also to be disarmed.<sup>395</sup> President Sarkis could not allow a Lebanese officer, who had been suspended in 1976, to hold control over an enclave while falsely saying he was still part of the Lebanese Army.<sup>396</sup> Nonetheless, Haddad claimed to be supported, non-officially, by Sarkis.<sup>397</sup> The sources analyzed in this thesis, however, cast doubt, on the validity of this claim – as Sarkis' support for Haddad was never mentioned in communications with the French at least.<sup>398</sup> On the other hand, Israel and the new right-wing government of Menachem Begin intended to destroy the Shtaura Agreement. They supported the SLA's presence in the South. Ultimately, scared of an Israeli intervention, the still weak Lebanese Army did not travel southwards, and the PLO and SLA remained. By September, the Shtaura Accords had become a definite fiasco.<sup>399</sup> Not unlike the 1969 Cairo Accords, the attempt to regulate the PLO inside Lebanon was once again a failure.

In September 1977 in Paris, responding to an invitation by President Giscard, Maronite Patriarch Anthony Peter Khoraish asked for French support. The historian Michel Chehdan-Kalifé asserts that Khoraish “wanted to ask France to detach or somehow liberate his country from the Syrians.”<sup>400</sup> However, the Quai d'Orsay officials succeeded in tempering the Patriarch's demands down to “a gesture of support from France” to not return “empty

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<sup>392</sup> De Clerck and Malsagne, *Le Liban en guerre*, 55.

<sup>393</sup> Waage and Sønsteby, “The Grimness of the alternatives”, 9.

<sup>394</sup> Waage and Sønsteby, 9.

<sup>395</sup> Waage and Sønsteby, 9.

<sup>396</sup> Note on «La France et le Liban», 11 March 1981, MAE 1835INVA 395 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>397</sup> Telegram from Bonnefous, Tel-Aviv, 2 April 1981, MAE 1669INVA 302 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>398</sup> Among the selected boxes of CADN and MAE used for this thesis.

<sup>399</sup> Waage and Sønsteby, “The Grimness of the alternatives”, 10-11.

<sup>400</sup> «Demander à la France de détacher ou en quelque sorte de libérer son pays des Syriens» in Chehdan-Kalifé, *Les relations entre la France et le Liban*, 80.

handed”.<sup>401</sup> Journalist Georges Sadaka claims that the Maronites were disappointed, and that this episode would stand as a symbol of the French breach with the community.<sup>402</sup> Nevertheless, the Patriarch had to understand the realities of the French position. France clearly wanted to avoid giving its support to any of the various actors; only support to the government itself was acceptable and important. The Quai d’Orsay, however, recommended that France should exercise pressure on Khoraish to influence the path of Pierre Gemayel especially.<sup>403</sup> Gemayel’s Phalangists still represented the core of the Lebanese Front. The other Maronite militia leaders, former presidents Suleiman Frangieh and Camille Chamoun, could not accomplish much on their own without the Gemayels. All along Khoraish had been a voice of moderation calling for unity, and as the Patriarch he had substantial power to influence the Maronite leaders.<sup>404</sup> With neither France nor the US capable or willing of doing something concrete the fighting continued in South Lebanon for the rest of 1977.<sup>405</sup>

### **The Israeli Invasion of March 1978 and the Creation of UNIFIL**

The Palestinians had been pushed towards the Israeli border by the Syrian invasion in 1976. There, south of the Litani river, due to the red line agreement, the Syrians could not reach them. The SLA controlled enclave did not stretch more than sixteen kilometers north from the border with Israel. This meant that between the Litani and the SLA enclave, the PLO operated unimpeded. This unintentional consequence deeply frustrated Israel as PLO attacks over to Israel could be resumed in force.<sup>406</sup>

France knew of possible Israeli plans of invading South Lebanon already back in the summer of 1974. The Lebanese ambassador to Paris had then told the French of information coming from “‘a country very close to Israel’ according to which Israel prepared to invade southern

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<sup>401</sup> «Il attend de la France un geste de soutien» & «les mains vides» in Note on «Entretien avec M.le Président de la République avec le Patriarche maronite», 23 September 1977, MAE 1835INVA 394 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>402</sup> Sadaka, *La Diplomatie Assassinée*, 116-117.

<sup>403</sup> Note «Entretien de M. Le Président de la République avec S.B. Mgr. Antoine-Pierre Khoraiche», 22 September 1977, MAE 1835INVA 394 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>404</sup> Note «Entretien de M. Le Président de la République avec S.B. Mgr. Antoine-Pierre Khoraiche», 22 September 1977, MAE 1835INVA 394 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>405</sup> Waage and Sønsteby, “The Grimness of the Alternatives”, 13.

<sup>406</sup> Waage and Sønsteby, 7.

Lebanon in the event of a new Fedayeen incursion.”<sup>407</sup> The Israeli knew the possibility of resurfacing border raids.

On 14 March 1978, three days after a bloody Palestinian terrorist attack in Israel, the IDF invaded South Lebanon. Operation Litani brought 25 000 Israeli troops over the border. Their goal was to wipe out resistance in the border zone and delegate control over to their proxy the SLA. Israel had no interest in annexing the populations of Southern Lebanon, mostly Shiites, of which 285 000 fled their homes.<sup>408</sup> Washington rapidly became scared that the Israeli response would jeopardize its ongoing attempt to make peace between Egypt and Israel.<sup>409</sup> Through resolutions 425 and 426, pushed forward by the US, the UN created the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) in response to the Israeli invasion. The UNIFIL was to only operate in the South, where Israel had invaded up to the Litani.<sup>410</sup> The French UNIFIL contingent was both the largest, with 1290 soldiers, and the first to arrive in the south.<sup>411</sup> This was also the first time France participated in any UN force. When it came to the utilization of the UN, President Giscard was an innovator compared to his predecessors. Before the UNIFIL “case law had excluded permanent members of the Security Council (with the exception of the British in Cyprus) from any participation in peacekeeping forces.”<sup>412</sup>

France played an active role on Lebanon’s behalf in the Security Council. Lebanon’s representative at the UN, Ghassan Tuani, wrote to the French representative, Jacques Leprette, to thank him for France’s support and intervention.<sup>413</sup> Historian Maurice Vaïsse points out Leprette as the architect of French participation in the UNIFIL.<sup>414</sup> President Sarkis equally expressed his gratefulness for French participation in the UNIFIL, and for being the first contingent to arrive in Lebanon.<sup>415</sup> Ghassan Tuani interestingly suggested that the presence of French soldiers among the UNIFIL forces, because of the PLO’s trusting relationship with France, was a crucial factor in pushing the PLO to respect the cease fire with Israel that was

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<sup>407</sup> «‘un pays très proche d’Israël’ selon les-quelles Israël s’apprêterait à envahir le sud du Liban en cas de nouvelle incursion des Feddayin [Sic]» in Note for the minister, «Communication de l’Ambassadeur du Liban», 28 June 1974, MAE 1835INVA 409 (Liban 1973-1982). The Fedayin here refers to the Palestinian fighters.

<sup>408</sup> Waage and Sønsteby, “The Grimness of the Alternatives”, 15; Malsagne, *Sous l’oeil de la diplomatie française*, 159.

<sup>409</sup> Mathias Nesthun Sønsteby, «Alternativenes grusomhet Amerikansk politikk ovenfor Libanon, 1977-1979», Master thesis (University of Oslo, Fall 2014), 54-55.

<sup>410</sup> Waage and Sønsteby, “The Grimness of the Alternatives”, 17; Malsagne, *Sous l’oeil de la diplomatie française*, 160.

<sup>411</sup> De Clerck & Malsagne, *Le Liban en Guerre*, 350.

<sup>412</sup> «la jurisprudence écartait les membres permanents du Conseil de sécurité (à l’exception des Britanniques à Chypre) de toute participation aux forces de maintien de la paix» in Vaïsse, *La Puissance ou l’Influence*, 505.

<sup>413</sup> Tuani to Leprette, New-York, 20 March 1978, MAE 1835INVA 409 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>414</sup> Vaïsse, *La Puissance ou l’Influence*, 505.

<sup>415</sup> Telegram from Argod, Beirut, 23 March 1978, MAE 1835INVA 416 (Liban 1973-1982).

implemented on 28 March.<sup>416</sup> Since the meeting with Arafat in 1974, and despite French support for Syria in 1976, France had maintained positive and frequent contact with the PLO. The French kept the ties to the PLO as their primary way of conducting their wider Arab policy.

The various actors of the conflict saw different uses for the UNIFIL forces. For the Lebanese Front, the UNIFIL forces should have dealt with the Palestinians just as much as the Israelis.<sup>417</sup> Communist countries such as Czechoslovakia and radical Arab countries such as Iraq were also criticizing the UNIFIL forces. They accused the UNIFIL of being against the Palestinians and of helping to maintain the SLA and Israelis in South Lebanon.<sup>418</sup> The LNM was wondering if the dispatch of French forces was a way to announce an intervention in Lebanon's internal affairs, and were naturally skeptical.<sup>419</sup>

While the UNIFIL deployed in April 1978, the Israelis were slowly retreating from southern Lebanon. The Israelis wanted as much time as possible to “pacify” the South and to give time for the SLA to adjust. Weapons and defense constructions were left in the Maronite Militia's hands. The last Israeli soldiers left on 12 June.<sup>420</sup>

The French later wanted a “reduction from six to three months of the length of the UNIFIL mandate.”<sup>421</sup> They wished for this reduction to avoid the UNIFIL being stuck in Lebanon forever, like the UN forces in Cyprus. It was also meant to make President Sarkis act more decisively.<sup>422</sup> This worried the Lebanese authorities. According to them, a premature retreat of the UNIFIL would create a vacuum in the South, something that the Lebanese Army would not be able to manage. Secretary General of the Quai d'Orsay, Jean-Marie Léon Soutou, explained the French's reasoning by saying that “the presence of an international force should not be seen as a remedy relieving those concerned from attacking the root of the evil.”<sup>423</sup> Weary of the constant inactivity of the Lebanese authorities, France wanted progress in the reforms and

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<sup>416</sup> Telegram from Leprette, New-York, 4 April 1978, MAE 1835INVA 416 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>417</sup> Internal News report «Le Front libanais et la mission de la FINUL», 12 May 1978, CADN, archives Liban (Ambassade), 91 PO/C 57.

<sup>418</sup> Telegram from d'Harcourt, Praha, 7 April 1978, MAE 1835INVA 395 (Liban 1973-1982); Telegram from Morizet, Baghdad, 14 April 1978, MAE 1835INVA 395 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>419</sup> «si l'envoi de nos forces n'annonce pas quelque dessein d'intervenir dans les affaires intérieures libanaises» in Telegram from Argod, Beirut, 25 March 1978, MAE 1835INVA 416 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>420</sup> Waage and Sønsteby, “The Grimness of the Alternatives”, 18.

<sup>421</sup> «réduction de 6 à 3 mois de la durée du mandat de la FINUL» in Confidential Note on «Entretien du Secrétaire Général avec l'Ambassadeur du Liban», 12 September 1978, MAE 1835INVA 409 (Liban 1973-1982); Sadaka, *La Diplomatie Assassinée*, 172.

<sup>422</sup> Document «Compte Rendu de l'entretien du Président de la République avec M Moshe Dayan, Ministre des affaires étrangères d'Israël», 30 January 1979, CADN, archives Liban (Ambassade), 91 PO/C 2.

<sup>423</sup> «la présence d'une force internationale ne devait pas être considérée comme un remède dispensant les intéressés de s'attaquer à la racine du mal» in Confidential Note on «Entretien du Secrétaire Général avec l'Ambassadeur du Liban», 12 September 1978, MAE 1835INVA 409 (Liban 1973-1982).

rebuild of the Lebanese Army. France did eventually achieve pushing the renewal of the UNIFIL down to four months.<sup>424</sup> France did also bring home its “operational contingent” from the UNIFIL in March 1979, leaving only its technical personnel.<sup>425</sup>

### **Maronite Militias and Syrian combats in 1978**

In the summer and fall of 1978, the Syrians bombarded East-Beirut, after the Maronite-Syrian alliance of convenience had broken down. From 1978 until 1982 the war became “essentially a Lebanese-Syrian conflict.”<sup>426</sup>

The Syrian ambassador to Paris put the cause of the initial fighting between Maronites and Syrians on the recent murder of Tony Frangieh.<sup>427</sup> Bashir Gemayel, the leader of the Lebanese Front, wanted to unify the Maronite militias. In this quest, the Phalangists assassinated former president Frangieh’s son, Tony, alongside thirty-two others including Tony’s wife and daughter. Gemayel did not take the blame, accusing lone Phalangist elements working on their own.<sup>428</sup> The senior Frangieh would not forget the massacre, cementing an even bigger rift between the Frangiehs and Gemayels. He refused to detach himself from Syria, which he had always been close to and to which he had appealed for intervention back when he was president. He accused the Phalangists of cooperating with Israel.<sup>429</sup> Before his death, Tony Frangieh had voiced his opinion against attacks perpetrated by the Lebanese Forces to chase the Syrians out of East Beirut.<sup>430</sup> The Maronite militias were now split between those close to Syria (Frangieh) and those close to Israel (Gemayel).

The French offered their help to President Sarkis and asked by what means they could help. France played the role of middleman on Sarkis’ behalf. They were asked to urge Israel to convince the Maronite militias of the Lebanese Front to show restraint against the Syrians.<sup>431</sup> As the prime weapon supplier of the militias, Israel’s influence was important. French authorities equally appealed to the Syrians for moderation.<sup>432</sup> Camille Chamoun, while in Tel

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<sup>424</sup> Confidential Note «La France et le Liban», 23 September 1978, MAE 1835INVA 414 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>425</sup> «contingent (opérationnel)» in Confidential Note from Servant «Compte-rendu de l’entretien du ministre avec M. Khaddam», 25 March 1979, CADN, archives Liban (Ambassade), 91 PO/C 2; Malsagne, *Sous l’oeil de la diplomatie française*, 161.

<sup>426</sup> «essentiellement un conflit libano-syrien» in Malsagne, 173; O’Ballance, *Civil War in Lebanon*, 80-84.

<sup>427</sup> Telegram from Lecompt, Paris, 7 July 1978, MAE 1835INVA 395 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>428</sup> Malsagne, *Sous l’oeil de la diplomatie française*, 155-156.

<sup>429</sup> Malsagne, 173.

<sup>430</sup> Malsagne, 172.

<sup>431</sup> Telegram from Argod, Beirut, 7 July 1978, MAE 1835INVA 416 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>432</sup> Secret Telegram from Leclercq, Paris, 9 July 1978, MAE 1835INVA 409 (Liban 1973-1982).

Aviv and participating in a meeting with Prime Minister Begin, asked for Israeli help if the Christians in Beirut were to be attacked. Due to French pressure exercised on Israel or not, Begin said no, while nonetheless continuing the material support to the militias. Begin had made it clear, officially, that he would not come in aid to the Christians in Beirut if they were attacked.<sup>433</sup>

Minister of Foreign Affairs de Guiringaud was clear to the Lebanese ambassador about what France would or would not do when it came to the Maronite militias. The minister stated that:

1 - Christian leaders should not count on Western support if they continued to refuse the authority of the Lebanese president. In Bremen, the nine [EC members] had been unanimous on this point. 2 - The Christian militias were making a serious mistake if they counted on Israeli intervention. If this were to take place, it would immediately be condemned by the international community. Israel would be led to put an end to it [...] 3 - France supported the sovereignty, the independence and the territorial integrity of Lebanon but it was not ready to defend the Christian militias insofar as they prepare a partition of Lebanon.<sup>434</sup>

The Maronites felt abandoned by France. In his memoirs, militia leader and former president Camille Chamoun lamented this so called “abandonment” of Lebanon by France, writing: the French “advise us to come to an understanding with the Syrians, whatever the cost, even if our independence and our sovereignty would blister.”<sup>435</sup> This demonstrates the feeling held among Maronites leaders of being the guardians of Lebanese independence in the face of Pan-Arabism and larger Syrian influence. Just as with France, the United States was seen in the eyes of the Christians as “the defenders of the west and therefore of the *westernity*” of the Lebanese, who, as such, felt betrayed and abandoned by their protectors.<sup>436</sup>

In September the Quai d’Orsay suggested that the French should utilize their “influence with Christians in Lebanon to make them more aware of the realities and to follow a policy more in line with the long-term interests of their community.”<sup>437</sup> The wording here implies a somewhat

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<sup>433</sup> Telegram from Butin, Tel-Aviv, 25 August 1978, MAE 1669INVA 302 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>434</sup> «1 – Les chefs chrétiens ne devaient pas compter sur un soutien occidental s’ils continuaient de refuser l’autorité du Président libanais. A Brême, les neuf avaient été unanimes sur ce point. 2 – Les milices chrétiennes commettaient une grave erreur si elles comptaient sur l’intervention israélienne. Si celle-ci devait avoir lieu, elle serait immédiatement condamnée par la communauté internationale. Israël serait conduit à y mettre fin [...] 3 – La France soutenait la souveraineté, l’indépendance et l’intégrité territoriale du Liban mais elle n’était pas prête à défendre les milices chrétiennes dans la mesure où celles-ci préparent une partition du Liban» in Secret Telegram from Leclercq, Paris, 9 July 1978, MAE 1835INVA 409 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>435</sup> «nous conseillent de nous entendre, quoi qu’il en coûte, avec les Syriens même si notre indépendance et notre souveraineté doivent y laisser des plumes» in Camille Chamoun, *Mémoires et souvenirs*, (Beirut: Imprimerie catholique, 1979), 316.

<sup>436</sup> «défenseurs de l’Occident et donc de leur occidentalité» in Laurens, «Le Liban et l’occident. Récit d’un parcours», 31.

<sup>437</sup> «influence auprès des Chrétiens du Liban pour les amener à prendre mieux conscience des réalités et à suivre une politique plus conforme aux intérêts à long terme de leur communauté» in Confidential Note, «La France et le Liban», 23 September 1978, MAE 1835INVA 414 (Liban 1973-1982).



conceited understanding of the situation where the Maronites, unlike the Quai d'Orsay, were unable to acknowledge where their own interests lay. When President Sarkis visited Paris in November 1978, he was still being told "to continue to cooperate with Syria until the formation of a new Lebanese Army."<sup>438</sup> France would not abandon the Syrian stability initiative so soon. Lebanese journalist Sadaka claims that France did not want to intervene even if Sarkis asked for military help, marking another source of disappointment Maronites.<sup>439</sup>

In the fall of 1978, France advanced the proposition to "interpose Lebanese Army units between Christian militias and Syrian forces with the objective of a ceasefire in Beirut."<sup>440</sup> The initiative was not void of difficulties. The Syrians were hostile to the idea. Prime Minister Selim Hoss and militia leader Chamoun were also against the plan. Moreover, the general commander of the French UNIFIL contingent described the new Lebanese Army, which now had developed for two years, as having "virtually no military value."<sup>441</sup>

Lebanon's minister of foreign affairs Boutros wanted France to use its influence at the Vatican, so that the Holy See could in turn use its influence with the Maronite religious leaders, who in turn would influence the militia leaders for the need of moderation and cooperation.<sup>442</sup> France did do a follow up on this with the Vatican, insisting on action from their part on the religious leaders. They also wanted the Vatican to clearly reject the idea of any partition of Lebanon and to pressure Christian Lebanese leaders in that way. Partition was still advocated by some, such as Camille Chamoun, as a possible resort.<sup>443</sup> The Vatican, in turn, did send a "conciliation mission" led by Cardinal Bertoli in late 1978. The Vatican also put pressure on France to talk to the Syrians to halt the fighting in Lebanon.<sup>444</sup>

The fighting between the Maronite militias and the Syrians, Palestinians and progressives ended in October 1978. The United Nations Security Council Resolution 436 called for an end to hostilities and a ceasefire.<sup>445</sup> Minister of Foreign Affairs de Guiringaud asserted that it was

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<sup>438</sup> «Continuer à coopérer avec la Syrie jusqu'à la formation de la nouvelle armée libanaise» in Chehdan-Kalifé, *Les relations entre la France et le Liban*, 81.

<sup>439</sup> Sadaka, *La Diplomatie Assassinée*, 144.

<sup>440</sup> «interposer des unités de l'armée libanaise entre les milices chrétiennes et les forces syriennes en vue d'un cessez-le-feu à Beyrouth» in Note on «Entretien du Général Cuq avec M. Lecompt», Paris, 9 October 1978, MAE 1835INVA 394.

<sup>441</sup> «pratiquement aucune valeur militaire» in Note on «Entretien du Général Cuq avec M. Lecompt», Paris, 9 October 1978, MAE 1835INVA 394.

<sup>442</sup> Confidential Note on «La France et le Liban», 23 September 1978, MAE 1835INVA 414 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>443</sup> Note on «Entretien de M. Le Président de la République avec le Saint-Père – Liban», 24 October 1978, MAE 1835INVA 394 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>444</sup> «Mission de conciliation» in Malsagne, *Sous l'oeil de la diplomatie française*, 156-157.

<sup>445</sup> Malsagne, 170; O'Ballance, *Civil War in Lebanon*, 84.

France that took the initiative at the Security Council to call for a cease fire. This he meant was only possible because of how the French diplomacy, through the personal messages of Giscard d'Estaing, had worked to influence the different countries involved.<sup>446</sup>

### **Declarations by de Guiringaud and Maronite Sentiment Towards France**

On 16 October 1978 de Guiringaud made a number of declarations that would put France in the limelight and test their relationship with the Maronites. In essence he blamed Camille Chamoun and his militia for the fighting that had previously happened in Beirut during the fall. During a lunch meeting for the English American press, he declared:

It was these Christian militias that started the last brawl in the Battle of Beirut; it was not the Syrians: it was Mr. Chamoun's militias who started the fight. [...] who were shooting at the approaching people? not Syrians: Christian militiamen! Why? To maintain the tension! We have to see where the responsibilities lie. I do not want to exonerate the Syrians, but I still want the truth to be restored because, apart from the truth, there will never be a solution! The Christian militias, in particular those of Mr. Camille Chamoun, bear the main responsibility for the tragic events in Beirut during the last two weeks.<sup>447</sup>

He further stated that the Maronite militia's attack against the Syrians was planned and not spontaneous. He also reminded that it was "the Christians who called the Syrians in Lebanon to protect themselves against the Palestinians; to also try to restore a privileged situation from which they benefited."<sup>448</sup> De Guiringaud further warned the Maronite militias that they could not rely "on the support of the international community in a fight without reason."<sup>449</sup> The Maronites would not get the internationalization they wished for. According to the minister, a Franco-Lebanese plan of replacing some ADF Syrian forces with the Lebanese Army had

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<sup>446</sup> «Déclarations faites par M. Louis de Guiringaud Ministre des Affaires Etrangères au Déjeuner de la Presse Anglo-Américaine », 16 October 1978, CADN, archives Liban (Ambassade), 91 PO/C 2.

<sup>447</sup> «Ce sont ces milices chrétiennes qui ont déclenché la dernière bagarre de la bataille de Beyrouth; ce ne sont pas les Syriens: ce sont les milices de M. CHAMOUN qui ont déclenché la bagarre. [...] qui tiraient sur les gens qui approchaient? non pas des Syriens : des miliciens chrétiens! Pourquoi? Pour maintenir la tension! Il faut voir où sont les responsabilités. Je ne veux pas exonérer les Syriens, mais je veux quand même que l'on rétablisse la vérité parce que, en dehors de la vérité, on trouvera jamais de solution! Les milices chrétiennes, en particulier celles de M. Camille CHAMOUN, portent la responsabilité principale des événements tragiques de Beyrouth au cours des deux dernières semaines » in «Déclarations faites par M. Louis de Guiringaud Ministre des Affaires Etrangères au Déjeuner de la Presse Anglo-Américaine», 16 October 1978, CADN, archives Liban (Ambassade), 91 PO/C 2.

<sup>448</sup> «les Chrétiens qui ont appelé les Syriens au Liban pour se protéger contre les Palestiniaens; pour essayer aussi de restaurer une situation privilégiée dont ils bénéficiaient» in «Déclarations faites par M. Louis de Guiringaud Ministre des Affaires Etrangères au Déjeuner de la Presse Anglo-Américaine», 16 October 1978, CADN, archives Liban (Ambassade), 91 PO/C 2.

<sup>449</sup> «sur l'appui de la communauté internationale dans un combat sans raison» in «Déclarations faites par M. Louis de Guiringaud Ministre des Affaires Etrangères au Déjeuner de la Presse Anglo-Américaine», 16 October 1978, CADN, archives Liban (Ambassade), 91 PO/C 2.

already been met with too much skepticism from the Muslims in the Lebanese government itself.<sup>450</sup>

Needless to say, the statements arose much ire among the Maronites. In the French-language *L'Orient-Le Jour* newspaper Chamoun replied by calling the minister a “liar and a coward.”<sup>451</sup> The *al-Amal*, a Phalangist newspaper, wrote that “de Guiringaud justifies the ‘spillage’ of the blood of Lebanese Christians.”<sup>452</sup> They continued by describing the declarations as “full of falsifications and false evaluations, [and] based on a vile opportunism aimed at obtaining more oil profits by the way of the ‘velvet paw’ to Syria.”<sup>453</sup> They linked these declarations to a continuation of the rapprochement of France with the PLO. The *al-Amal* further characterized the French Middle East policy as “opportunist and Machiavellian.”<sup>454</sup> The Israeli were also shocked and not happy with de Guiringaud’s declarations.<sup>455</sup> Conversely, the minister’s outbursts took another tone among the Arab countries. The Emirati daily *Itthiad* qualified the declarations as unbiased, and noted that it reminded of “the attitude of General de Gaulle condemning the Israeli aggression of 1967.”<sup>456</sup> Declarations that were seen as unbiased by Arab countries, were seen as biased by the Maronites.

The Syrians, by contrast, were thankful for de Guiringaud’s declaration. The pro-Syrian newspaper *el-Shark* wrote that the declarations were the nail in the coffin for those who wished to partition Lebanon.<sup>457</sup> At an ADF conference in the Lebanese town of Beit ed-Dine in October, resolutions were made calling for “the end of all armed appearances, the collection of weapons and the prohibition of their carrying outside the framework of the law [...] The strict and total application of the resolutions of the Riyadh and Cairo summits” was also to be implemented. The importance of building up a balanced Lebanese Army was equally made

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<sup>450</sup> «Déclarations faites par M. Louis de Guiringaud Ministre des Affaires Etrangères au Déjeuner de la Presse Anglo-Américaine», 16 October 1978, CADN, archives Liban (Ambassade), 91 PO/C 2.

<sup>451</sup> «menteur et lâche» in «Déclarations de M. Guiringaud», 17 October 1978, MAE 1835INVA 394 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>452</sup> «De Guringaud justifie le ‘versement’ du sang des chrétiens libanais» in «Déclarations de M. Guiringaud», 17 October 1978, MAE 1835INVA 394 (Liban 1973-1982). The Phalangist *al-Amal* newspaper is not to be confounded with the Shiite *Amal* movement.

<sup>453</sup> «toute pleine de falsifications et de fausses évaluations, a pour base un vil opportunisme visant à obtenir plus de profits pétroliers par le chemin de la ‘patte de velours’ à la Syrie» in «Déclarations de M. Guiringaud», 17 October 1978, MAE 1835INVA 394 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>454</sup> «opportuniste et machiavélique» in «Déclarations de M. Guiringaud», 17 October 1978, MAE 1835INVA 394 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>455</sup> Telegram from Bonnefous, Tel-Aviv, 18 October 1978, MAE 1669INVA 394 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>456</sup> «l’attitude du Général de Gaulle condamnant l’agression Israélienne de 1967» in Telegram from Guisset, Abu Dhabi, 17 October 1978, MAE 1835 394 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>457</sup> «Déclarations de M. Guiringaud», 17 October 1978, MAE 1835INVA 394 (Liban 1973-1982).

clear.<sup>458</sup> Among the Arab countries there was an intention of reforming the ADF to include even more contingents from other nations, so as to make it less Syrian dominated. This would prevent some of the Maronite antagonism towards the Syrians. Therefore, at Beit ed-Dine, it was decided that a Saudi contingent would replace the Syrians, for example in a specific Christian neighborhood, to calm things down.<sup>459</sup> According to the French ambassador to Syria Fernand Rouillon, de Guiringaud's declarations did have some desired effects as it "allowed the Arab ministers meeting in Beit ed-Dine, primarily the Syrians, to make difficult decisions for appeasement, including the replacement in East Beirut of Syrian units by other Arab units."<sup>460</sup> This was in many ways just a slight modification of the French initiative from earlier that fall, except other Arab nations, and not the Lebanese Army, would replace the Syrians. Still, it would cause an appeasement for the Christians.

Journalists Annie Laurent and Antoine Basbous claim that in November 1978, while in Paris, Foreign Minister Boutros asked his French counterpart "on the limits drawn by the West to the Syrian action in Lebanon." De Guiringaud supposedly answered that there was "no red line."<sup>461</sup> Did the French trust in the Syria intervention, which they had permitted and encouraged, really not have any limitations? Interestingly, Laurent and Basbous do not specify any source for this information. Additionally, no mention of this anecdote is recorded in the diplomatic archives.<sup>462</sup> Antoine Basbous had in the early 1980s been involved in pro-Maronite campaigning in France.<sup>463</sup> The book should therefore be treated with caution not only because of the author's involvement in pro-Maronite campaigning, but also because of the lack of primary source material.

De Guiringaud would quit the government less than a month later. The declarations he made show that the French kept believing a Syrian presence in Lebanon was the solution, even if it

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<sup>458</sup> «La fin de toutes les apparences armées, le ramassage des armes et l'interdiction de leur port hors du cadre de la loi [...] L'application stricte et totale des résolutions des sommets de Ryad et du Caire» in Confidential Note on «de la conférence de Beit Edine (15-17 Octobre 1978)», 10 November 1978, CADN, archives Liban (Ambassade), 91 PO/C 1; O'Ballance, *Civil War in Lebanon*, 84; Cobban, *The Making of Modern Lebanon*, 166.

<sup>459</sup> O'Ballance, 84; Note «de la sécurité intérieure et de la Force arabe de dissuasion», 10 October 1978, MAE 1835INVA 414 (Liban 1973-1982);

<sup>460</sup> «permis aux ministres arabes réunis à Beiteddone [Sic], au premier chef à la Syrie, de prendre des décisions difficiles en vue de l'apaisement, notamment le remplacement à Beyrouth-Est d'unités syriennes par d'autres unités arabes» in Telegram from Rouillon, Damascus, 18 October 1978, MAE 1835INVA 394 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>461</sup> «sur les limites tracés par l'Occident à l'action syrienne au Liban» & «aucune ligne rouge» in Laurent and Basbous, *Guerres secrètes au Liban*, 270-271.

<sup>462</sup> Among the selected boxes of CADN and MAE used for this thesis.

<sup>463</sup> Basbous was as a reporter for the Phalangist newspaper *Le Réveil* working with the *l'Alliance Libanaise* bureau in Paris: Found in Delamare to François-Poncet, «Action des "Forces libanaises" en France», 28 January 1981, CADN, archives Liban (Ambassade), 91 PO/C 58.

ensued disappointment by the Maronites. Due to the extreme bombardment of Christian East Beirut by the Syrians, it felt like a true betrayal from France. French standing among the Maronites was at an all-time low. If France ever thought they had acquired an image of neutrality, they had now lost it.<sup>464</sup>

### **Struggle for French Support**

With the Israelis out of Lebanon, but the Syrians very much still present, the Maronites would increase their activity and pressure towards France. Former president Camille Chamoun wanted the presence of an international Western force in Lebanon instead of the Syrians. In January 1979 he asked the French ambassador if they could help, seeing as the UN was not making any decisions. The French ambassador dismissed his proposal as illusions.<sup>465</sup> The days of French troops being sent outside of UN supervision were long overdue.

Acting against Chamoun, but also soliciting French help, was Ibrahim Kulaylat, the head of the Nasserist *al-Murabitoun* party, which was a member of the LNM coalition. He wanted France and thereby Europe to be more involved in finding a solution for the struggles of the Palestinians and the Middle East. *Al-Murabitoun* were opposed to sending the army south as they believed Sarkis was under influence from the Phalangists.<sup>466</sup> Additionally, according to the French Embassy, *al-Murabitoun* preferred the ADF and Syrians staying in Beirut, since their departure risked making the situation in the city implode. The LNM was divided, since most of it, including *al-Murabitoun*, refused the replacement of the Syrians by the new Lebanese Army, which was “still accused of having been reconstituted on a basis favorable to the Lebanese Front.”<sup>467</sup> However, Walid Jumblatt, as the head of the Progressive Socialist Party, was more accepting of the new Lebanese Army.<sup>468</sup> The vast disparity inside the LNM coalition translated into an immobilization.

President Giscard had been skeptical to the breakthrough visit of Sadat, the Camp David Accords and the ensuing Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty of 1979 as there was no solution for the Palestinian problem.<sup>469</sup> He feared the Palestinians would be neglected. According to him, and

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<sup>464</sup> Malsagne, *Sous l'oeil de la diplomatie française*, 164; Lombardi, *Les Trente Honteuses*, 207.

<sup>465</sup> Telegram from Argod, Beirut, 16 January 1979, MAE 1835INVA 394 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>466</sup> Telegram from Delamare, Beirut, 3 December 1979, MAE 1835 INVA416 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>467</sup> «toujours accusée d'avoir été reconstituée sur une base favorable au Front libanais» in Telegram from Delamare, Beirut, 6 February 1980, MAE 1835INVA 416 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>468</sup> Telegram from Delamare, Beirut, 6 February 1980, MAE 1835INVA 416 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>469</sup> Vaisse, *La Puissance ou l'Influence*, 380-381.

right he was, a certain number of conditions had not been met. France underlined the right to a homeland for the Palestinians.<sup>470</sup> On 26 March 1979 the nine EC countries made a declaration on the Camp David Accords reiterating much of Giscard's viewpoints. The declaration clearly showed that it was the French view, of coming to a global solution, that had found its way through.<sup>471</sup>

Tensions had reignited in South Lebanon in January 1979. From April 1979 until May 1981 there were numerous Israeli attacks on Palestinians as preemptive strikes or retaliation. The Palestinians, and therefore the Israelis, were more belligerent since the Washington peace accords between Egypt and Israel.<sup>472</sup> Israel operated with a total disregard for the Lebanese sovereignty when it came to fighting the PLO, be it preemptively or as retaliation. Israel was still very much assisting Saad Haddad and clashes between Haddad's militia and the UNIFIL was frequent.<sup>473</sup> The Israelis were feeding the French mixed messages on how much authority they had over Haddad and his militia.<sup>474</sup> The PLO and Syria, had come to terms with their 1976 rupture and resumed their strong relationship. As Egypt in 1977 had gotten closer to a separate agreement with Israel, it meant that the other Arab countries had to tighten their bonds.<sup>475</sup> By wanting peace with Israel the Egyptians had, in the eyes of the PLO, abandoned the Palestinian cause. Syria stepped up to be their champion. With their rapprochement, Syria then delegated most of its positions over to the PLO in 1980.<sup>476</sup> This only accentuated Israeli bombing campaigns over Lebanon. France was powerless to answer the Lebanese calls for help in the Security Council or to put pressure towards Israel. The US remained the only actor capable of pressuring Israel.<sup>477</sup> Arafat accused France "of having deviated from the 'Gaullist heritage'" and lacking in help to South Lebanon. The Palestinian leader pleaded that formulations and declarations were not enough: actions were needed.<sup>478</sup> Because of the unique relationship

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<sup>470</sup> Dalle, *La Vème République et le Monde Arabe*, 145.

<sup>471</sup> Document «Texte officiel de la Déclaration des neuf sur le Proche-Orient», 26 March 1979, CADN, archives Liban (Ambassade), 91 PO/C 2.

<sup>472</sup> Telegram from Lecompt, Paris, 12 May 1979, MAE 1669INVA 302 (Liban 1973-1982); O'Ballance, *Civil War in Lebanon*, 88-89 & 96-98.

<sup>473</sup> Yaniv, *Dilemmas of Security*, 75-78.

<sup>474</sup> For two different Israeli standpoints: Telegram from Lecompt, Paris, 12 May 1979, MAE 1669INVA 302 (Liban 1973-1982); Telegram from Bonnefous, Tel-Aviv, 18 May 1979, MAE 1669INVA 302 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>475</sup> Waage and Sønsteby, "The Grimness of the Alternatives", 13; Telegram from Argod, Beirut, 22 August 1978, MAE 1835INVA 394 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>476</sup> Malsagne, *Sous l'oeil de la diplomatie française*, 166.

<sup>477</sup> Malsagne, 166.

<sup>478</sup> «d'avoir devié de 'l'héritage gaulliste'» in Telegram from Delamare, Beirut, 2 October 1979, MAE 1835INVA 416 (Liban 1973-1982).

France had, as a Western state, with the PLO, Arafat was disappointed in what he saw as French inactions for the Palestinian cause.

Nonetheless, in Amman on 8 March 1980, Giscard declared “the right of Palestinians to self-determination.”<sup>479</sup> This was “the first time [that] the right of the Palestinians to self-determination was recognized by a Western power.”<sup>480</sup> Later in the year, at a summit in Venice, the EC reiterated what Giscard had previously said about Palestinian auto-determination.<sup>481</sup> Most Lebanese press was happy with Giscard’s declaration. The centrist *an-Nahar* newspaper described the French statements as having a “Gaullian resonance.”<sup>482</sup> Some critics from the *Safir* (Left) and *Nida* (communist), stated that declarations were not enough.<sup>483</sup> Arafat thought Giscard’s declaration on Palestinian auto-determination was “a positive but insufficient step.”<sup>484</sup> To further the French relationship with the PLO, Giscard was thinking of inviting Arafat to Paris in 1980. However, when asked about it, the answer from Lebanon’s minister of foreign affairs Boutros was that it would have been seen as too much of an insult for “his country bruised by Arafat's actions.”<sup>485</sup> In a later interview with journalists Laurent and Basbous, President Sarkis stated: “I was reduced to calling for the passage of French emissaries on tour in the Middle East, further fearing that they would stop in my capital only for Arafat.”<sup>486</sup> Who, and under what conditions to meet, was a dilemma for maintaining the French balance in Lebanon. Meanwhile, the Phalangist press continued their crusade against French passivity towards Lebanon. As a poignant example the Phalangist newspaper *Le Réveil* wrote: “Lebanon can count on the support and friendship of France. France ‘loves’ Lebanon. We know this only too well. As for ‘helping’ that is another story.”<sup>487</sup>

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<sup>479</sup> «le droit des Palestiniens à l’autodétermination» in Vaïsse, *La Puissance ou l’Influence*, 382.

<sup>480</sup> «la première fois le droit des Palestiniens à l’autodétermination était reconnu par une puissance occidentale» in Delamare to Poncet, Beirut, 14 March 1980, CADN, archives Liban (Ambassade), 91 PO/C 58.

<sup>481</sup> Lombard, *Les Trente Honteuses*, 115.

<sup>482</sup> «résonance gaullienne» in *An-Nahar* (11 March 1980) in Delamare to François-Poncet, «Réactions libanaises à la visite du Président de la République dans les pays du Golfe et en Jordanie», 14 March 1980, 91 PO/C 58.

<sup>483</sup> Delamare to François-Poncet, «Réactions libanaises à la visite du Président de la République dans les pays du Golfe et en Jordanie», 14 March 1980, 91 PO/C 58.

<sup>484</sup> «un pas positif mais insuffisant» in Delamare to François-Poncet, «Déclarations de M. Yasser Arafat au Club de la Presse», 16 May 1980, 91 PO/C 36.

<sup>485</sup> «pour son pays meurtri par les agissements d’Arafat» in Laurent and Basbous, *Guerres secrètes au Liban*, 270.

<sup>486</sup> «j’étais réduit à appeler de mes vœux le passage des émissaires français en tournée au Proche-Orient, craignant de surcroît qu’ils ne s’arrêtent dans ma capitale que pour Arafat» in Laurent and Basbous, 270.

<sup>487</sup> «Le Liban peut compter sur l’appui et l’amitié de la France. La France «aime» le Liban. Nous ne le savons que trop. Quant à «l’aider» c’est une autre histoire» in Telegram from Delamare, Beirut, 21 March 1980, MAE 1835INVA 409 (Liban 1973-1982).

## **French Delegations and the Maronite Campaign of Persuasion**

Throughout 1979 and 1980 there was a campaign by the Phalangists and the “Union of the Christian Leagues” to shape and form the opinion of French politicians and journalists by inviting them to Lebanon to see things exclusively the Maronite way. This lobbying business did bear fruit especially on targeted centrist politicians.<sup>488</sup>

Several French delegations went to Lebanon to show support for the war-torn country. Many of them had clearly been invited on the Maronites behest. Nonetheless, the Quai d’Orsay continuously tried to equilibrate who French delegations were to meet when it came to the different factions. It was important to them that France was not seen as taking any sides. For example, when a delegation from the Christian party CDS, which was led by Bernard Stasi, the vice president of the national assembly, was invited by the Union of the Christian Leagues to visit Lebanon in spring 1980, the embassy insisted on them meeting LNM and Palestinian representatives as well. It was done not to give an image of French support for a specific side in the conflict. However, in the end the delegation did not meet both sides, justifying it with the identity of their host and by a lack of time due to a heavy schedule.<sup>489</sup> A member of the Union of the Christian Leagues also pointed out that when the leader of the French Communist party Georges Marchais had visited Lebanon some weeks prior, he had not met with any representatives of the Lebanese Front.<sup>490</sup> The difference lay of course in a national assembly delegation travelling as a body representing France, while Marchais did not.

A group of Christian Democratic parliamentarians of the EC also visited Lebanon in May 1980. They were in contact with the president, prime minister and the chief of parliament but other than that, only with Christian leaders such as Camille Chamoun, Pierre Gemayel and Bashir Gemayel. The group was also in Lebanon on the invitation of the same Christian Union as the CDS delegation. The Lebanese Christian leaders were disappointed as they felt “that the Palestinian cause was often better understood in Europe than theirs” and this needed to be set

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<sup>488</sup> «Union des Ligues Chrésiennes» in Delamare to François-Poncet, «Prises de position de parlementaires français sur le Liban», 11 December 1980, CADN, archives Liban (Ambassade), 91 PO/C 58. The “Union des Ligues chrétiennes” was sometimes referred to as “Union chrétienne libanaise” in for example Dispatch slip with «Interview exclusive accordée par M. Bernard Stasi à l’hebdomadaire libanais de langue française “Magazine” (édition du 10 Mai 1980)», 10 May 1980, MAE 1835INVA 416 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>489</sup> Dispatch slip with «Interview exclusive accordée par M. Bernard Stasi à l’hebdomadaire libanais de langue française “Magazine” (édition du 10 Mai 1980)», 10 May 1980, MAE 1835INVA 416 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>490</sup> Telegram from Delamare, Beirut, 5 May 1980, MAE 1835INVA 416 (Liban 1973-1982).



right with the Europeans.<sup>491</sup> As such the whole trip was clearly organized to change the mindset of the European politicians.

In July 1980, French member of parliament and former minister, Jean de Lipkowski, was invited by the Phalangists to come to Beirut. However, the new French ambassador Louis Delamare was against such a meeting as it would be partial and occur just after a particularly bloody Phalangist operation on 7 July.<sup>492</sup> On the opposite side, Jean-Yves Le Drian, future minister of foreign affairs, visited Lebanon in early 1980, invited by the Institute of Palestinian studies. It was mostly to talk about the French socialist party and the PLO. Still, Arafat criticized the Socialist's positions on the Middle East conflict, and then went on to criticize specific members of the party as well.<sup>493</sup>

On 13 November 1980 Bernard Stasi, the vice president of the French national assembly, did bring up Lebanon in front of the national assembly. He said that the Syrians should leave and be replaced by UN forces. He had been part of the CDS mission to Lebanon. The Lebanese Front and Maronites were very thankful for his comments, illustrating the success of their invitation campaign.<sup>494</sup>

Occasionally, the diplomats expressed their frustration on the partial nature of some of these visits. The French Chargé d'affaires in Beirut, Brejon de Lavergnée, criticized the August 1980 visit of a delegation from the *Comité d'action de la Résistance*. This was an organization created to uphold the values of the resistance in post WW2 France. De Lavergnée held nothing back stating that the delegation was

subjected to an advanced indoctrination on the part of the political leaders of the Lebanese Front [...] Faced with visitors little acquainted to the Lebanese realities, living in the heroic memory of the French resistance and making of Lebanon and the Maronites an idealized image, the leaders of the Lebanese Front had no difficulty in getting their ideas admitted, and in getting their cause approved. [...] [The] emphasis was placed on the similarity between the Maronite resistance and the French resistance of the years 1940-1945.<sup>495</sup>

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<sup>491</sup> «que la cause palestinienne était souvent mieux comprise en Europe que la leur» in Delamare to François-Poncet, «Séjour au Liban d'une délégation de l'Union européenne des démocrates chrétiens», 5 June 1980, 91 PO/C 58.

<sup>492</sup> Secret Telegram from Delamare, Beirut, 12 July 1980, MAE 1835INVA 416 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>493</sup> Secret Telegram from Delamare, Beirut, 21 April 1980, MAE 1835INVA 416 (Liban 1973-1982). Jean-Yves Le Drian is the current French Minister of Europe and Foreign Affairs as of May 2021.

<sup>494</sup> Delamare to François-Poncet, «Déclarations de M. Bernard Stasi à propos du Liban – réactions à Beyrouth», 21 November 1980, CADN, archives Liban (Ambassade), 91 PO/C 58.

<sup>495</sup> «soumis à une indoctrination poussée de la part des dirigeants politiques du Front Libanais [...] Face à des visiteurs peu au fait des réalités libanaises, vivant dans le souvenir héroïque de la résistance française et se faisant du Liban et des maronites une image idéalisée, les dirigeants du Front Libanais n'ont pas eu de peine à

The irony of the resistance organization's support for a militia and party inspired at its creation by European fascist parties, seemed to be lost on the delegation.<sup>496</sup>

Ambassador Delamare described the whole Phalangist operation as “a vast information campaign, even propaganda, carried out in France at the initiative of the ‘Lebanese Forces’”.<sup>497</sup> This was done through the *Bureau de l'Alliance libanaise* in Paris. They targeted especially the Christian CDS party as they were close to Israel. They also invited journalists to Beirut, from newspapers such as *Le Figaro* and *France-Soir*, and kept them from making contacts outside of the Phalangists. Delamare pointed out the CDS mission, the resistance mission, a visit of future prime minister Michel Rocard and a visit of Jean-François Revel, the director of the *L'Express* newspaper, as visits that to a certain degree had been shaped by the Phalangists' views. The Phalangists wanted ultimately to change France's stance of tacit Syrian support.<sup>498</sup>

Subsequently, on 4 May 1981 a declaration was made by

five French political parties of the majority (*le Parti radical socialiste, le Centre national des indépendants et paysans, le Parti républicain, le Centre des démocrates sociaux [CDS] and le Rassemblement pour la République*), recalling the recent motion voted by the European Parliament and demanding the withdrawal of foreign forces from Lebanon, with the exception of UNIFIL.<sup>499</sup>

Separately, the French European politician Olivier d'Ormesson stated, falsely, that all Lebanese wished for an internationalization of the conflict.<sup>500</sup> Could these declarations be a direct result of the Maronite campaign? They certainly played to their tune.

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faire admettre leurs conceptions, et à faire approuver leur cause. [...] accent a été mis sur la similitude entre la résistance maronite et la résistance française des années 1940-1945» in Brejon de Lavergnée to François-Poncet, «Visite au Liban d'une délégation de Comité d'action de la résistance française», 29 August 1980, MAE 1835INVA 416 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>496</sup> Brejon de Lavergnée to François-Poncet, «Visite au Liban d'une délégation de Comité d'action de la résistance française», 29 August 1980, MAE 1835INVA 416 (Liban 1973-1982). The communiqué states that a reporter asked a question on fascism and the Phalangists.

<sup>497</sup> «une vaste campagne d'information, voire de propagande, menée en France à l'initiative des ‘Forces libanaises’» in Delamare to François-Poncet, «Action des «Forces libanaises» en France», 28 January 1981, CADN, archives Liban (Ambassade), 91 PO/C 58.

<sup>498</sup> Delamare to François-Poncet, «Action des «Forces libanaises» en France», 28 January 1981, CADN, archives Liban (Ambassade), 91 PO/C 58.

<sup>499</sup> «cinq partis politiques français de la majorité (le Parti radical socialiste, le Centre national des indépendants et paysans, le Parti républicain, le Centre des démocrates sociaux et le Rassemblement pour la République), rappelant la récente motion votée par le parlement Européen et réclamant le retrait des forces étrangères du Liban, à l'exception de la FINUL» in Telegram from Delamare, Beirut, 5 May 1981, MAE 1669INVA 302 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>500</sup> Telegram from Delamare, Beirut, 5 May 1981, MAE 1669INVA 302 (Liban 1973-1982).

## Undercover Help to the Maronite Militias?

While France officially maintained its neutrality in the conflict and held a general pro-Palestinian stance, help to its historic allies, the Maronites, could have been given undercover. According to historian James R. Stocker the US suspected European nations, France among them, of delivering weapons to the Maronite militias.<sup>501</sup> This would be contrary to the strict policy of neutrality operated by the Quai d'Orsay. As such, no evidence of this was found in the divulged French diplomatic archives looked at for this thesis.<sup>502</sup>

However, according to Libyan press there was in Lebanon “a group of French mercenaries recruited by the French security services.” This was supposedly all planned to be revealed so that Giscard d'Estaing would gain the Catholic vote in the upcoming presidential election.<sup>503</sup> Judging by the origin of the source, this could easily be seen as erroneous. However, according to historian Jean-René Belliard, in his book *Beyrouth; L'enfer des espions*, there were multiple French spies in Beirut during the war. Many of the French spies did not work for the state's secret service, the DGSE, but for the Gaullist militia *Service d'action civique* (SAC). Operation *Antigone*, which lasted from 1975 to 1982, was the name of the secret operation waged to gather intelligence, supposedly to “permit the French government to imagine the measures to be taken.”<sup>504</sup> In Greek mythology, Antigone, daughter of Oedipus, disobeyed the state by setting her family first.<sup>505</sup> Clearly, the operation's baptizer must have seen France's kinship to Lebanon as worthy to fight for. According to Belliard operation *Antigone* served to “identify the needs of Christian militias [when it came to] armament and ammunition needs.”<sup>506</sup> It was then up to the arm traffickers to do their part. Belliard asserts that the French authorities did not believe in the resolve of the Maronite forces, and feared a possible “humanitarian disaster” if they were to fall.<sup>507</sup> Historian Roland Lombardi, while saying that operation *Antigone* might have existed, states that he did not find any traces of the operation in the French archives or in interviews with diplomats, retired agents or Phalangists.<sup>508</sup> That is concurring with the archival work done

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<sup>501</sup> Stocker, *Spheres of Intervention*, 166 & 193.

<sup>502</sup> The only thing found in the consulted diplomatic archives is a Libyan newspaper accusing France of this. See Telegram from Malo, Tripoli, 26 April 1981, MAE 1835INVA 395 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>503</sup> «un groupe de mercenaires français recrutés par les services de sécurité français» in Telegram from Malo, Tripoli, 26 April 1981, MAE 1835INVA 395 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>504</sup> «Permettre au gouvernement français d'imaginer les mesures à prendre» in Belliard, *Beyrouth: L'enfer des espions*, 10-11.

<sup>505</sup> Françoise Meltzer, “Theories of Desire: Antigone Again”, *Critical Inquiry* Vol.37, No. 2 (Winter 2011): 174, Accessed 23 May 2021, DOI:10.1086/657289.

<sup>506</sup> «D'identifier les besoins des milices chrétiennes, besoins en armement et en munitions» in Belliard *Beyrouth: L'enfer des espions*, 11.

<sup>507</sup> «Catastrophe humanitaire» in Belliard, 11.

<sup>508</sup> Lombardi, *Les Trente Honteuses*, 218.

for this thesis. However, as Lombardi remarks, it is plausible that “adventurers gravitating around Gaullist or even Far-Right circles, nostalgic for the history of French influence in the Levant or ideologically close to the Lebanese Christian militias and above all at odds with the passivity of the French state”, did work in Lebanon more or less independently.<sup>509</sup>

### **The Events of Zahlé**

In December 1980, the eastern city of Zahlé in the Bekaa valley was under siege by the Syrians. It was sheltering parts of Bashir Gemayel’s Lebanese Forces.<sup>510</sup> France did publish a press release in which they claimed to intervene with the Syrian authorities to calm things down.<sup>511</sup> Lebanon’s ambassador to France, Boutros Dib, later asserted that it was this communiqué that made the Syrians retreat.<sup>512</sup> The French also underlined their actions towards Syrian minister of foreign affairs Khaddam to “facilitate the evacuation of wounded” out of Zahlé.<sup>513</sup>

In April and June 1981 Zahlé was once again under siege by Syrian Forces. The siege lasted ninety-three days. As the civilian situation deteriorated, the French ambassador Delamare and some of his colleagues of Western nations took the initiative “to obtain from the Syrians the sending of food to the city and to evacuate the wounded.”<sup>514</sup> Delamare advised Bashir Gemayel to start negotiating with the Syrians, something he subsequently seemed to accept.<sup>515</sup> Giscard d’Estaing also sent a delegation led by former ambassador Hubert Argo. The mission which would ultimately come to nothing, is criticized by journalist Georges Sadaka for being issued during the run up to the French presidential elections. Sadaka sees the mission only as a way for Giscard d’Estaing, who hoped to be re-elected, to gain some points by presenting himself as interested anew in the conflict.<sup>516</sup>

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<sup>509</sup> «des aventuriers gravitant autour des milieux gaullistes voire d’extrême droite, nostalgiques de l’histoire de l’influence française au Levant ou proches idéologiquement des milices chrétiennes libanaises et surtout en désaccord avec la passivité de l’État français» in Lombardi, 219.

<sup>510</sup> Magnus Seland Andersson and Hilde Henriksen Waage, “Stew in Their Own Juice: Reagan, Syria and Lebanon, 1981-1984”, *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 44, No. 4 (2020): 667-668.

<sup>511</sup> Note on «La France et le Liban», 11 March 1981, MAE 1835INVA 395 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>512</sup> Note on «Entretien de M. de Leusse avec l’Ambassadeur du Liban», 19 March 1981, MAE 1835INVA 409 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>513</sup> «faciliter l’évacuation de blessés» in Document «Communiqué», 9 March 1981, MAE 1835INVA 416 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>514</sup> «d’obtenir des Syriens l’envoi de nourriture dans la ville et d’en évacuer les blessés» in Malsagne, *Sous l’oeil de la diplomatie française*, 178.

<sup>515</sup> Malsagne, 179.

<sup>516</sup> Sadaka, *La Diplomatie Assassinée*, 153.

Ensuing the events of Zahlé was a missile crisis which made tensions rise between Israel and Syria. The Syrian had deployed missiles in the Bekaa valley.<sup>517</sup> France feared an Israeli action and even estimated a limited or massive Israeli intervention more likely than a de-escalation of the situation.<sup>518</sup> However, the US special envoy to the Middle East, Philip Habib, managed to secure “the Syrian-Israeli standoff into an Israeli-PLO ceasefire.”<sup>519</sup> The tensions rescinded, and war was avoided for the moment.

In April 1981, Lebanon’s prime minister Shafik Wazzan inquired with the French about the authenticity of the claim that US Secretary of State Alexander Haig, in a meeting with Giscard d’Estaing, “would have raised the possibility of sending a Franco-American force to Lebanon.”<sup>520</sup> Ambassador Delamare dismissed this as false. Wazzan was relieved. Still, he warned and reminded Delamare that in this sort of affairs “clear consent from the Lebanese government was essential.”<sup>521</sup> Syria was critical of this supposed French plan of internationalization of the conflict.<sup>522</sup> A couple of days later, Camille Chamoun and Pierre Gemayel met with Ambassador Delamare to present their wish for the sending of an international force.<sup>523</sup> However, France stood by their promise not to act unless Lebanese authorities explicitly asked for help. In a meeting with LNM representatives, the secretary general of the Quai d’Orsay made it clear that the constitution of an international force had been mentioned, but only as an “ultimate possibility”, and that misunderstandings had taken it out of proportions.<sup>524</sup> With the exception of the French UNIFIL participation, France would not intervene militarily in Lebanon under President Giscard d’Estaing. This would change with the new presidency of François Mitterrand.

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<sup>517</sup> Malsagne, *Sous l’oeil de la diplomatie française*, 179.

<sup>518</sup> Note from Boidevaix on «Liban», 18 May 1981, MAE 1835INVA 394 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>519</sup> Andersson and Waage, “Stew in Their Own Juice”, 669-670.

<sup>520</sup> «aurait évoqué l’éventualité de l’envoi au Liban d’une force Franco-Américaine» in Secret Telegram from Delamare, Beirut, 11 April 1981, MAE 1835INVA 394 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>521</sup> «un consentement clair du gouvernement libanais était indispensable» in Secret Telegram from Delamare, Beirut, 11 April 1981, MAE 1835INVA 394 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>522</sup> Telegram from Courtois, Damascus, 13 April 1981, MAE 1835INVA 395 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>523</sup> Secret Telegram from Delamare, Beirut, 16 April 1981, MAE 1835INVA 394 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>524</sup> «possibilité ultime» in Note on «Entretiens du Secrétaire général avec des délégations libanaises», 17 April 1981, MAE 1835INVA 394 (Liban 1973-1982).

## Chapter 5 – May 1981 to August 1982

### The Arrival of Mitterrand and the Surge in Anti-French Attacks

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In its attempt to pursue a policy of balance, the France of principles remains a France that is almost incapable of acting.<sup>525</sup>

*An-Nahar* newspaper, 1 September 1981.

With the change in France's government in May 1981 Israelis, Palestinians and Lebanese were both hopeful and worried about a change in France's Middle East policies. The expectations were high, but fundamental change would be lackluster.<sup>526</sup> Then came the assassination of Ambassador Louis Delamare in September. What followed was ten months marked by attacks against French people and interests.<sup>527</sup> With the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in June 1982 the civil war took a new turn for the worse. French diplomats found themselves in the middle, having to balance their official policy of neutrality with formulating a rescue of the reeling Palestinians.<sup>528</sup> How did the Mitterrand government represent a change or continuity compared to previous French Lebanon policies? What did the murder of an ambassador and the subsequent waves of attacks mean for France's position in Lebanon? How did France react to the Israeli invasion of 1982?

#### **François Mitterrand Elected President**

On 10 May 1981 France elected its first socialist president, François Mitterrand. The sixty-four-year-old was one of the most senior politicians in France, having been in the second round of a presidential election twice, in 1965 and 1974. He had thereafter been the leader of the Socialist

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<sup>525</sup> «Dans sa tentative de mener une politique d'équilibre, la France des principes reste une France quasi incapable d'agir» in «Editoriaux et commentaires; Presse du 1<sup>er</sup> Septembre 1981», 1 September 1981, MAE 1835INVA 415 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>526</sup> Jean Pierre-Filiu, «L'engagement de François Mitterrand au Moyen-Orient», *La contemporaine*, n101-102 (2011/1), 50; Vaïsse, *La Puissance ou l'Influence*, 388; Kodmani-Darwish, «1981-1985: le recentrage de la politique française au Liban», 400.

<sup>527</sup> Paul-Marc Henry, «Rapport de mission au Liban», MAE 1835INVA 414 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>528</sup> Malsagne, *Sous l'oeil de la diplomatie française*, 205-206.

Party and the French opposition since 1971.<sup>529</sup> As such his, political stances on the Middle East were well known.<sup>530</sup>

Mitterrand came to power with the reputation of being a solid and uncompromising friend of Israel.<sup>531</sup> As a young man he had been deeply affected by the liberation of the concentration camps of Dachau and Landsberg in 1945, which he had witnessed firsthand.<sup>532</sup> Four years later it was Mitterrand himself who, as spokesperson of the government, announced the “establishment of diplomatic relations between France and Israel.”<sup>533</sup> Mitterrand had visited Israel several times and was known as being close to the Jewish State. He was a friend of Labor leader Shimon Peres.<sup>534</sup> In opposition he “had announced a reorientation of the policy of France in the Middle East considered too pro-Arab.”<sup>535</sup> Mitterrand had denounced all pro-Arab declaration from Giscard and his government as driven by a lust for oil.<sup>536</sup> Yet, while Mitterrand entered the presidency on a platform of changing France’s Middle East policies, the long lines of the Fifth Republic of pursuing pro-Arab policies were not easily shaken.

Subsequently, the election of Mitterrand to the highest office was unsurprisingly met with warmth in Israel. Meanwhile, the Arab countries were worried about what the arrival of a socialist and supposed friend of Israel would mean for their relationship with France.<sup>537</sup> However, having visited Gaza in 1972 and met with Arafat in Cairo in 1974, Mitterrand had also recognized the right of the Palestinians to a sovereign state since 1976.<sup>538</sup> Consequently, Arafat was not worried about a change in France’s Arab policies, as he told Ambassador Delamare in May 1981.<sup>539</sup> Delamare stated that among the Lebanese “it was generally admitted that the French Left had, with regard to the Lebanese conflict, espoused the theses” of the Muslim-progressive bloc.<sup>540</sup> It was therefore somewhat paradoxical that some of the Lebanese newspapers of the left showed restraint in their coverage of the election of Mitterrand. The left-

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<sup>529</sup> Jean Charlot, *Les Partis Politiques en France* ([Paris]: Ministère des Relations Extérieures Service d’information et de presse, 1986), 10-11.

<sup>530</sup> See Filiu, *Mitterrand et la Palestine*, 29-61.

<sup>531</sup> Dalle, *La Vème République et le Monde Arabe*, 439.

<sup>532</sup> Filiu, *Mitterrand et la Palestine*, 15.

<sup>533</sup> «l’établissement de relations diplomatiques entre la France et Israël» in Filiu, 355.

<sup>534</sup> Filiu, 54; Filiu, «L’engagement de François Mitterrand au Moyen-Orient», 50.

<sup>535</sup> «avait annoncé une réorientation de la politique de la France au Proche-Orient jugée trop proarabe» in Vaïsse, *La Puissance ou l’Influence*, 388.

<sup>536</sup> Filiu, *Mitterrand et la Palestine*, 42.

<sup>537</sup> Filiu, «L’engagement de François Mitterrand au Moyen-Orient», 50; Sadaka, *La Diplomatie Assassinée*, 86.

<sup>538</sup> Filiu, 50; See Filiu, *Mitterrand et la Palestine*, 38 & 44 for the visit to Gaza and Cairo respectively.

<sup>539</sup> Secret Telegram from Delamare, Beirut, 20 May 1981, CADN, archives Liban (Ambassade), 91 PO/C 29.

<sup>540</sup> «Il était généralement admis que la gauche française avait, en ce qui concerne le conflit libanais, épousé les thèses» in Delamare to François-Poncet, «Interview de M. Jean Daniel et du Général Georges Buis», 27 February 1981, CADN, archives Liban (Ambassade), 91 PO/C 58.

wing *as-Safir* newspaper wrote that Giscard d'Estaing “had been more open to Arab causes than his opponent.”<sup>541</sup> The Phalangist press such as the *al-Amal* underlined the “contacts made in recent months between the Lebanese Front and certain French socialist officials [such as with future prime minister Michel Rocard] had already enabled [...] Mitterrand to get an exact idea of the Lebanese cause.”<sup>542</sup> According to Delamare, Michel Rocard and his close circle changed their point of view on the conflict after his visit to Lebanon, which had been on the Phalangists' behest.<sup>543</sup> This once again proves that the Phalangists' campaign in France was successful to steer some politicians to their side.

Historian Bassma Kodmani-Darwish claims that Mitterrand was also “less reluctant than his predecessor towards US policy in the Middle East.” Unlike Giscard, he approved of the Camp David Accords and the Americans' step by step approach.<sup>544</sup> For Mitterrand, a friend of Israel, peace between Israel and Egypt was considerable. His government, led by Prime Minister Pierre Mauroy, had four ministers from the Communist party.<sup>545</sup> Yet, when it came to the Middle East, Mitterrand personally pushed the Socialist Party in a more Israel-friendly direction. This distinguished the Socialist Party from the more pro-Palestinian and pro-Soviet Communist Party, which was a major force in France at the time.<sup>546</sup> As the Fifth Republic's first president of the Left, a break from old policies was the platform on which he had been elected. However, conscious of his role as president of France and all French people, he also had to represent some form of continuity.<sup>547</sup> While in opposition Mitterrand had always critiqued the personal powers of the president when it came to foreign policy. Yet in this manner little would change during his presidency. Foreign policy would remain a president's prerogative.<sup>548</sup>

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<sup>541</sup> «avait été plus ouvert vis-à-vis des causes arabes que son adversaire» in Delamare to François-Poncet, «Elections présidentielles en France – réactions au Liban -», 22 May 1981, CADN, archives Liban (Ambassade), 91 PO/C 58.

<sup>542</sup> «contacts menés au cours des derniers mois entre le Front libanais et certains responsables socialistes français avaient d'ores et déjà permis à [...] Mitterrand de se faire une idée exacte de la cause libanaise» in Delamare to François-Poncet, «Elections présidentielles en France – réactions au Liban -», 22 May 1981, CADN, archives Liban (Ambassade), 91 PO/C 58.

<sup>543</sup> Delamare to François-Poncet, «Interview de M. Jean Daniel et du Général Georges Buis», 27 February 1981, CADN, archives Liban (Ambassade), 91 PO/C 58.

<sup>544</sup> «moins réticent que son prédécesseur à l'égard de la politique américaine au Moyen-Orient» in Kodmani-Darwish, «1981-1985: le recentrage de la politique française au Liban», 402; Filiu, *Mitterrand et la Palestine*, 54.

<sup>545</sup> Grosser, *Affaires Extérieures*, 270. This was the second Mauroy government (June 1981-March 1983), as the first one only lasted a couple of weeks.

<sup>546</sup> Filiu, *Mitterrand et la Palestine*, 36.

<sup>547</sup> Grosser, *Affaires Extérieures*, 294.

<sup>548</sup> Grosser, 292.



In his book on France and the civil war, the Lebanese journalist Georges Sadaka distinguishes between Giscard's "disengagement diplomacy" and Mitterrand's "re-engagement diplomacy."<sup>549</sup> Sadaka claims that France went from a path of only discourse under Giscard to one of increased action under Mitterrand.<sup>550</sup> However, as pointed out by Sadaka himself, while the discourse and style changed with Mitterrand, the resulting policies and its effects towards Lebanon did not change much.<sup>551</sup> The so-called re-engagement was mostly due to actual developments in the war, rather than a reformulation of policies. Mitterrand and his minister of foreign affairs Claude Cheysson almost had a plan of dichotomy when it came to declarations on the Arab-Israeli conflict. Whenever Mitterrand made a gesture towards the Israelis it was soon complemented by Cheysson doing the same towards the Arabs or Palestinians.<sup>552</sup> This was how they managed the balance.

In March 1982 Mitterrand became the first French president to officially visit Israel; an electoral promise he had intended to keep.<sup>553</sup> In his speech given before Knesset, the Israeli parliament, Mitterrand described the Palestinian fighters as "combatants" and not as terrorists, as Prime Minister Menachem Begin would have done. He also said that in the future, the Palestinians would have a right to form a state.<sup>554</sup> The visit showcased how Mitterrand, now president, had to balance his strong feelings for Israel with the established ties French policies had formed with the PLO. Mitterrand thought the trip was a success, and he felt that border tensions with Lebanon would decrease because of his visit. Back in Paris, he even declared to his ministers: "my trip avoided a painful adventure in Lebanon."<sup>555</sup> For the Lebanese the visit would hardly bring any change.

Mitterrand would eventually break with his image of an uncompromising friend of Israel.<sup>556</sup> While the expectations for a change were high, the French policies did not really change. As historian Maurice Vaïsse asserts: "unlike the announced break, it was continuity that prevailed."<sup>557</sup>

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<sup>549</sup> «diplomatie de désengagement» & «diplomatie de réengagement» in Sadaka, *La Diplomatie Assassinée*, 24.

<sup>550</sup> Sadaka, 185.

<sup>551</sup> Sadaka, 23 & 78.

<sup>552</sup> Sadaka, 88.

<sup>553</sup> Vaïsse, *La Puissance ou l'Influence*, 389; For the visit see Filiu, *Mitterrand et la Palestine*, 78-87.

<sup>554</sup> «combattants» in Filiu, «L'engagement de François Mitterrand au Moyen-Orient», 51.

<sup>555</sup> «Mon voyage a évité au Liban une aventure douloureuse» in Filiu, *Mitterrand et la Palestine*, 86.

<sup>556</sup> Dalle, *La Vème République et le Monde Arabe*, 439.

<sup>557</sup> «contrairement à la rupture annoncée, c'est la continuité qui prévaut» in Vaïsse, *La Puissance ou l'Influence*, 388.

## New Challenges and Unchanging Commitments

In June 1981 Israel bombed Osirak, a nuclear reactor in Iraq which was helped built by the French.<sup>558</sup> A young French technician died in the bombing.<sup>559</sup> This dented the French Israeli relationship. Minister of Foreign Affairs Cheysson, described the Israeli bombings of the reactor as unacceptable and “hurtful.” France was committed to Iraq if they wanted a new reactor.<sup>560</sup> France was also one of Iraq’s major weapon suppliers in its ongoing war against Iran.<sup>561</sup> The Iran-Iraq War had divided the Arab countries. Jordan supported Iraq while Syria supported Iran.<sup>562</sup> The 1978/79 fundamentalist Shia revolution in Iran profoundly influenced regional affairs creating “an atmosphere of mistrust between Sunni and Shiite elements of the population of the region.”<sup>563</sup> This divide would spill over to Lebanon. The Shiite *Amal* movement had started to tire of the Palestinians, blaming them for the problems they found themselves in. Due to their presence in South Lebanon, the repercussions of Israeli attacks were often felt most strongly by the Shiites.<sup>564</sup> Mohammed Mehdi Chamseddine, who headed the Shiite community in Lebanon since Moussa al-Sadr had disappeared in 1978, blamed the Palestinians for the dire situation of the community.<sup>565</sup> The revolution in Iran reinvigorated the Shiite movement. Iranian volunteer fighters arrived in Lebanon and the *Amal* movement was furnished with arms and funding.<sup>566</sup> An Iranian-Iraqi proxy war was in many ways waged in Beirut and South Lebanon between the *Amal* Movement, close to Iran, and parts of the PLO, close to Iraq.<sup>567</sup>

In July 1981 fire was exchanged for two weeks over the border between the PLO and the Israeli Army. Mitterrand posed himself as neutral, not wanting to point out a guilty party. Due to his personal conviction, criticizing Israel was hard for Mitterrand.<sup>568</sup> US envoy Philip Habib

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<sup>558</sup> Filiu, «L’engagement de François Mitterrand au Moyen-Orient», 51; Lombardi, *Les Trente Honteuses*, 122.

<sup>559</sup> Filiu, *Mitterrand et la Palestine*, 67.

<sup>560</sup> «blessant» in «Interview de M. Claude Cheysson, Ministre des relations extérieures», 5 July 1981, MAE 1835INVA 415 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>561</sup> Filiu, «L’engagement de François Mitterrand au Moyen-Orient», 51; Sadaka, *La Diplomatie Assassinée*, 87-88.

<sup>562</sup> Waage, *Konflikt og stormaktspolitikk i Midtøsten*, 273 & 317; Patrick Seale, *Asad of Syria: The Struggle for the Middle East* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 1988), 351.

<sup>563</sup> «Une atmosphère de méfiance entre éléments sunnites et chi’ites de la population de la région» in Georges Corm, *Géopolitique du conflit Libanais: Etude historique et sociologique* (Paris: La Découverte, 1987), 143.

<sup>564</sup> O’Ballance, *Civil War in Lebanon*, 98-99 & 102; Telegram from Delamare, Beirut, 21 March 1980, CADN, archives Liban (Ambassade), 91 PO/C 29.

<sup>565</sup> Malsagne, *Sous l’oeil de la diplomatie française*, 174-175.

<sup>566</sup> Malsagne, 175.

<sup>567</sup> O’Ballance, *Civil War in Lebanon*, 98-99; Delamare to Cheysson, «Le mouvement chiite ‘Amal’ », 11 June 1981, CADN, archives Liban (Ambassade), 91 PO/C 58;

<sup>568</sup> Filiu, *Mitterrand et la Palestine*, 71.

managed to negotiate a cease fire that started on July 25 and would last for ten months with few infringements.<sup>569</sup> However, tensions were still brewing in the rest of Lebanon.

Minister of Foreign Affairs Cheysson's visit in August 1981 to Jordan, Lebanon and Syria was the first test for the socialist government in its Lebanon policies.<sup>570</sup> In an interview to the *an-Nahar* newspaper, made to present these policies, Cheysson presented the slogan "the politics of the possible."<sup>571</sup> Vague and devoid of any repercussions, this supposed emphasis on *realpolitik* did not represent any break with the previous administration. He also reiterated the French position that there was "no hope for Lebanon without a comprehensive solution."<sup>572</sup> What he meant was that solving the regional Palestinian problem was the only way to solve the crisis in Lebanon. While this played to the tune of the Phalangist narrative by putting the PLO as the disruptive element, it also disappointed many Lebanese who hoped for an end to the fighting independent of what fate awaited the Palestinians.

As such, the socialist government followed a path of continuity when it came to the official French policy in Lebanon. The idea to keep "the integrity, the sovereignty and the independence of Lebanon" was still fundamental.<sup>573</sup> Cheysson said there was no French plan when it came to Lebanon. He underlined the importance of the Lebanese finding a solution for themselves.<sup>574</sup> This was also the position of the Lebanese government who wanted to find an Arab solution to an Arab problem. The Lebanese authorities did not want any non-Arab initiative.<sup>575</sup>

Just as Minister of Foreign Affairs Sauvagnargues had done in 1974, Cheysson met with Yasser Arafat. Assad did not appreciate the French meeting with the PLO. By meeting Arafat in Beirut and not Damascus, France showed support for the PLO's "freedom of decision" away from the Syrians.<sup>576</sup> The Israeli authorities did not appreciate the meeting either, and Mitterrand even ended up seeing the ambassador of Israel to calm down ensuing tensions.<sup>577</sup> Cheysson described

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<sup>569</sup> Rashid Khalidi, *The Hundred Year's War on Palestine: A History of Settler Colonial Conquest and Resistance* (London: Profile Books, 2020), 143.

<sup>570</sup> Sadaka, *La Diplomatie Assassinée*, 187; Note from Servant «Voyage du Ministre au Proche Orient», Paris, 10 August 1981, MAE 1835INVA 415 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>571</sup> «La politique du possible» in «Interview de M. Claude Cheysson, Ministre des relations extérieures», 5 July 1981, MAE 1835INVA 415 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>572</sup> «Pas d'espoir pour le Liban sans un règlement global» in «Interview de M. Claude Cheysson, Ministre des relations extérieures», 5 July 1981, MAE 1835INVA 415 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>573</sup> «de l'intégrité, de la souveraineté et de l'indépendance du Liban», Kodmani-Darwish, «1981-1985: le recentrage de la politique française au Liban», 400.

<sup>574</sup> «Interview de M. Claude Cheysson, Ministre des relations extérieures», 5 July 1981, MAE 1835INVA 415 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>575</sup> *L'Orient-Le Jour*, 31 August 1981, MAE 1835INVA 415 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>576</sup> «liberté de décision» in Sadaka, *La Diplomatie Assassinée*, 189; Malsagne, *Sous l'oeil de la diplomatie française*, 181;

<sup>577</sup> Filiu, *Mitterrand et la Palestine*, 72-73.

Arafat as a “grand figure” and “a man of dialogue.”<sup>578</sup> Be that as it may, Arafat wanted France to go further in its Palestinian policies. He wanted France to change its stance and recognize the PLO as the only legitimate representation of the Palestinians.<sup>579</sup> While the meeting had strong symbolical value, it did not change the French stance on representation. The *al-Amal* Phalangist newspaper was disappointed that Cheysson did not meet with any of the leaders of the Lebanese Front.<sup>580</sup> A disappointment that was felt since Cheysson met with both Arafat and LNM leader Walid Jumblatt. However, as the left-wing *as-Safir* newspaper pointed out, Cheysson refused to meet with the Front as he was there only to meet legal authority. His meeting with Jumblatt was due to the Druze leader’s membership in the Socialist International.<sup>581</sup> Being a socialist seemed to bypass the Quai d’Orsay’s careful balance of meeting all sides of the conflict.

Nonetheless it seems like most of the press realized that France could do little on its own, be it under socialist or Giscardian administration. The independent newspaper *al-Anouar* wrote: “France says beautiful sentences, then it camouflages its powerlessness behind a single expression: ‘Lebanon did not ask for anything’”.<sup>582</sup> But since the Lebanese government only wanted an Arab solution, France could not do too much without breaching the wish of the authorities. The Egyptian socialist newspaper *al-Shaab* concluded that Cheysson’s visit was a rebuttal to those who thought Mitterrand would be more removed from the Arabs and Lebanon than Giscard had been.<sup>583</sup> The visit had showed that the new French government still intended to be present in Lebanon.

### **The Assassination of Louis Delamare**

On 4 September 1981 Ambassador Delamare was assassinated. He was in his car only 200 meters from his residence when two men, coming down from a blocking vehicle, tried to open the passenger seat door. When it did not open, one of them opened fire fatally wounding the

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<sup>578</sup> «grand personnage» & «un homme de dialogue» in Press documents (it does not say what newspaper it is) of 31 August 1981, MAE 1835INVA 415 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>579</sup> Press documents (it does not say what newspaper it is) of 31 August 1981, MAE 1835INVA 415 (Liban 1973-1982); For the French stance on the PLO see Filiu, *Mitterrand et la Palestine*, 66.

<sup>580</sup> Telegram from Delamare, Beirut, 31 August 1981, MAE 1835INVA 415 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>581</sup> «La presse du 9 Septembre 1981», 9 September 1981, MAE 1835INVA 415 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>582</sup> «la France dit de belles phrases, puis elle camoufle son impuissance derrière une seule expression: ‘Le Liban n’a rien demandé’» in «Editoriaux et commentaires; Presse du 1<sup>er</sup> Septembre 1981», 1 September 1981, MAE 1835INVA 415 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>583</sup> «Editoriaux et commentaires; Presse du 1<sup>er</sup> Septembre 1981», 1 September 1981, MAE 1835INVA 415 (Liban 1973-1982).

ambassador. The ambassador's driver, unharmed, quickly drove to the hospital, but Delamare's life was beyond saving. Eleven bullets were found during the autopsy.<sup>584</sup> Beirut had become a highly dangerous place for diplomats. Five other diplomats were killed in West-Beirut in the year 1981 alone.<sup>585</sup> Louis Delamare was the first-ever French ambassador killed during tenure.<sup>586</sup>

The reaction to the murder displayed the importance of the French diplomatic mission to Lebanon. A somewhat ridiculous situation arose when the whole political elite (Prime Minister Wazzan, Walid Jumblatt, Samy Khatib the commander of the ADF, multiple ministers and ambassadors) made their way to the hospital, to get news of Delamar's condition.<sup>587</sup> Who among all these people would arrive first and show themselves as the truest friend of France? Who would reap the fruits of France's goodwill? After Delamare's death, representatives of almost all countries and different factions went to the embassy to sign the condolence rapport. The Chargé d'affaires Marcel Guillemant was sure to note that the Iranian representatives were shining with their absence.<sup>588</sup> The Iranians were hostile towards France due to the French support of Iraq.

The proximity of the murder to the visit of Cheysson, just days before, raised some questions. Was it a personal attack against the job done by Delamare? Was it an attack on French politics in Lebanon, or more generally in the Middle East? Or was it a failed kidnapping attempt? France's envoy in the wake of the murder, Guy de Commines, spoke with President Sarkis who thought it was a deliberate murder to attack France, not the ambassador. Due to his position as president of all Lebanese, he was, however, careful not to point any fingers. Prime Minister Wazzan on the contrary thought Israel could be behind it because of the recent meeting between Cheysson and Arafat which Delamare had helped to organize. Had France's closeness to Israel's terrorist leader number one been too much? De Commines did not think so and disappointed in his interlocutor he dismissed this thinking as "a very simplistic Arab conformism."<sup>589</sup> An Omani newspaper, *al-Akidah*, stated, rather vaguely, that an Arab country

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<sup>584</sup> Telegrams from Janier & autopsy report, Beirut, 4 September 1981, MAE 1835INVA 410 (Liban 1973-1982). For more on the assassination see Malsagne, *Sous l'oeil de la diplomatie française*, 182-183.

<sup>585</sup> Malsagne, 187.

<sup>586</sup> Vaïsse, *La Puissance ou l'Influence*, 64. He was the first if one does not take into account "délégué général" Pierre Susini in Hanoi in 1972.

<sup>587</sup> Guillemant to Cheysson, «Assassinat de M. Delamare Réactions libanaises», 10 September 1981, MAE 1835INVA 410 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>588</sup> Guillemant to Cheysson, «Assassinat de M. Delamare Réactions libanaises», 10 September 1981, MAE 1835INVA 410 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>589</sup> «un conformisme arabe très simpliste» in Note for the minister from Guy de Commines, «Mission au Liban», 14 September 1981, MAE 1835INVA 410 (Liban 1973-1982).

had concluded in it being Mossad, the Israeli intelligence agency, who was behind the assassination.<sup>590</sup> All sides seemed to ask themselves how they could use the assassination to best serve their own cause. Accordingly, Bashir Gemayel and the Phalangist press accused the Syrians of the assassination, as it served their cause to accuse their enemies.<sup>591</sup> The Syrians, through their embassy in Paris, forcefully condemned and denied the allegations.<sup>592</sup>

Still, the Delamare assassination did happen only sixty meters from a Syrian roadblock, making Syrian complicity highly plausible.<sup>593</sup> Did the Syrians retaliate to show their objection to the Cheysson-Arafat meeting happening in Beirut and not in Damascus? Or was it the Syrians, because Cheysson, while in Beirut, had denounced foreign intervention in Lebanon?<sup>594</sup> According to the Phalangist newspaper *Le Réveil* and their sources it was Iranians working under Syrian cover who were behind the murder. The same sources stated that it was a botched kidnapping attempt. The goal of the kidnapping would have been to put pressure on French authorities to deliver former Iranian president Abolhassan Bani-Sadr and Massoud Rajavi, the leader of the People's Mujahedin of Iran, a militant opposition group. They were both in political asylum in France.<sup>595</sup> Yet, Iranian killers could hardly work in Beirut without Syria's blessing.<sup>596</sup> Paul-Marc Henry, who would replace Delamare as ambassador, concluded with the same assessment. He also stated that "the Syrian [secret] services were probably aware of the operation and did nothing to oppose it."<sup>597</sup> Historian Roland Lombardi claims that as retaliation to the assassination, the DGSE, the French secret service, detonated a bomb in Damascus killing sixty-four and injuring 135 people. The bomb missed its target, "the building housing the Syrian military police."<sup>598</sup> Lombardi also claims that the French secret service knew the identity of the perpetrators, two Shiites members of the Saiqa, and liquidated them.<sup>599</sup>

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<sup>590</sup> «article de presse relatif à l'assassinat de M. Delamare», 28 September 1981, MAE 1835INVA 410 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>591</sup> Malsagne, *Sous l'oeil de la diplomatie française*, 187; Telegram from Guillemant, Beirut, 9 November 1981, MAE 1835 INVA 410.

<sup>592</sup> Malsagne, 187.

<sup>593</sup> Note for the minister from Guy de Commines, «Mission au Liban», 14 September 1981, MAE 1835INVA 410 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>594</sup> Secret Telegram from Guillemant, Beirut, 16 September 1981, MAE 1835INVA 410 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>595</sup> Telegram from Guillemant, Beirut, 19 October 1981, MAE 1835INVA 410 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>596</sup> Note for the minister from Guy de Commines, «Mission au Liban», 14 September 1981, MAE 1835INVA 410 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>597</sup> «Les Services syriens étaient probablement informés de l'opération et n'ont rien fait pour s'y opposer» in Paul-Marc Henry, «Rapport de mission au Liban», MAE 1835INVA 414 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>598</sup> «l'immeuble abritant les services de la police militaire syrienne» in Lombardi, *Les Trente Honteuses*, 241-242.

<sup>599</sup> Lombardi, 239 & 243.

Ambassador Henry would later write a book about his years in Beirut. In it he stated that the assassination did not really change much in relation to France's policies. As a generalization on violence against diplomats he claimed that: "on the contrary, the country concerned tends to react in the direction of reaffirming its intangible objectives."<sup>600</sup> And this was exactly what happened: France was not frightened into leaving, but rather doubled down on its commitment to stay in Lebanon.

### **Wave of Attacks**

With the determination to stay, the murder of Delamare became only the first of a wave of attacks against the embassy and French interests in Lebanon. From late 1981 until the Israeli invasion in June 1982 France was the target of multiple terrorist attacks.<sup>601</sup> The first menaces against the embassy had come already back in February 1981.<sup>602</sup> By early 1982, the French mission to Lebanon had arguably become the most dangerous diplomatic mission in the world.

On 15 November 1981 the buildings of Air France and the French Lebanese bank in the Christian city of Jounieh were bombed.<sup>603</sup> Threats that had been made against Air France the same day came from the ASALA (Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia) which was operating in Lebanon. The embassy described them as a small terrorist organization. They wanted the release of one of their own from custody in France, which they said was due to Turkish pressure.<sup>604</sup>

The attacks resurfaced in the spring of 1982. On 15 April an employee of the embassy and his wife were assassinated in their home. Next, on 22 April, a bomb exploded in Paris killing one and injuring sixty-three people. The target was the offices of an Iraqi newspaper that had recently pointed to Syria as being culpable of the murder of Delamare.<sup>605</sup> Agence France Press (AFP) locals were attacked on 25 April.<sup>606</sup> Then a major terrorist attack rocked the embassy on

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<sup>600</sup> «Bien au contraire, le pays concerné a tendance à réagir dans le sens de la réaffirmation de ses objectifs intangibles» in Henry, *Les Jardiniers de l'Enfer*, 104.

<sup>601</sup> Malsagne, *Sous l'oeil de la diplomatie française*, 187 & 195; Paul-Marc Henry, «Rapport de mission au Liban», MAE 1835INVA 414 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>602</sup> Telegram from Desmarest, Paris, 4 February 1981, MAE 1835INVA 410 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>603</sup> Malsagne. *Sous l'oeil de la diplomatie française*, 187; Telegram from Guillemant, Beirut, 15 November 1981, MAE 1835INVA 416 (Liban 1973-1982). By French Lebanese bank it is meant the *Banque Libano-Française*.

<sup>604</sup> For the threats see two Secret Telegrams from Guillemant and Cambray, Beirut, 15 November 1981, MAE 1835INVA 416 (Liban 1973-1982); Telegram from Guillemant, Beirut, 18 November 1981, MAE 1835INVA 416 (Liban 1973-1982). Armenians are one of Lebanon's many minority communities.

<sup>605</sup> Filiu, *Mitterrand et la Palestine*, 94.

<sup>606</sup> Malsagne, *Sous l'oeil de la diplomatie française*, 195; Card on «Attentats contre les personnes et les intérêts français au Liban depuis septembre 1981», 25 May 1982, MAE 1835INVA 416 (Liban 1973-1982).

24 May. A bomb hidden in one of the employees' cars exploded the moment it crossed the front gate, leaving eleven dead.<sup>607</sup> There were five dead among the personnel of the embassy and one French soldier.<sup>608</sup> In total eight attacks had been perpetuated against French people or organizations since the September murder of the ambassador.<sup>609</sup> On 26 May France's prime minister Pierre Mauroy went to Beirut for the obsequies of the victims of the embassy bombing. He was in Beirut for a mere five hours to "console" the French population in Lebanon and the personnel of the embassy. He also briefly met with Sarkis and Wazzan.<sup>610</sup> Judging the situation too dangerous, French nationals were evacuated after the bombing. In the first half of 1982, the Soviet and French diplomatic corps were the only ones that did not move their embassies to East Beirut, to Christian territory, or simply ceased their activity all together.<sup>611</sup>

Why was there an increase in attacks against France? Many of the attacks, as so many in Lebanon, were difficult to trace due to the sheer number of small organizations and breakaway groups. The increase of pro-Iranian groups among the Shia population of Lebanon as well as an influx of actual Iranian fighters, could have been behind some of the attacks.<sup>612</sup> The anti-French sentiment of the ayatollah's regime had its cause in France's weapons sale to Iraq and its harbor of dissidents. Another suspect was Syria. When Israel decided to annex the Golan heights in December 1981, France, along with the US, were the only members in the Security Council to abstain instead of voting for a condemnation. This came as a shock to the infuriated Syrians. Historian Ignace Dalle claims that "for certain observers" this was the reason for the rise in violence and attacks against French citizens in Lebanon over the two next years.<sup>613</sup> The Syrian authorities would not tolerate what they viewed as France's too pro-Israeli stance. The threats and bombings from groups such as ASALA also showed the variety of groups operating out of Lebanon, who sometimes had demands not necessarily related to the Lebanese conflict.

In one of the last grand receptions to be held at the *Résidence des Pins* embassy building, on 26 May 1982, both Pierre Gemayel, his son Amine, and Walid Jumblatt were present.<sup>614</sup> In the wake of the bombings, many personalities of all confessions went to the residence to offer their

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<sup>607</sup> Filiu, *Mitterrand et la Palestine*, 96.

<sup>608</sup> Telegrams from Rapin, Paris, 24 May 1982, MAE 1835INVA 416 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>609</sup> Card on «Attentats contre les personnes et les intérêts français au Liban depuis septembre 1981», 25 May 1982, MAE 1835INVA 416 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>610</sup> Malsagne, *Sous l'oeil de la diplomatie française*, 196; Telegram from Henry, Beirut, 28 May 1982, MAE 1835 INVA 415BIS (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>611</sup> Paul-Marc Henry, «Rapport de mission au Liban», MAE 1835INVA 414 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>612</sup> Malsagne, *Sous l'oeil de la diplomatie française*, 175.

<sup>613</sup> «Pour certains observateurs» in Dalle, *La Vème République et le Monde Arabe*, 409-410 ; see also Filiu, *Mitterrand et la Palestine*, 76.

<sup>614</sup> Henry, *Les Jardiniers de l'Enfer*, 122.



condolences. President Mitterrand saw in this, not a pursuit for France's goodwill, but a grief for France shared across religious divides. For him this was proof that the wave of terrorist attacks had to be of foreign nature.<sup>615</sup> From the start of the war the residence had served as a location where the different factions could meet and talk. The *Résidence des Pins* would stop being used in the upcoming months.<sup>616</sup> However, as French historian Stéphane Malsagne writes, despite the threats, "danger and daily difficulties, at no time was there any question of closing the French Embassy in Lebanon."<sup>617</sup>

### **The 1982 Israeli Invasion of Lebanon**

The prospect of an Israeli intervention in South Lebanon was on everybody's mind in the spring of 1982. In April Lebanon's minister of foreign affairs Fouad Boutros had told Ambassador Henry he was afraid of an upcoming Israeli invasion, which the Lebanese authorities thought was imminent.<sup>618</sup>

President Sarkis inquired if Mitterrand could be invited to Lebanon before the start of the upcoming Lebanese presidential election that summer. Sarkis argued that a visit by Mitterrand "would play an essential dissuasive role with regard to the alleged intentions of Israel to intervene militarily on Lebanese territory."<sup>619</sup> Could Israel really invade after the visit of a world leader and known friend of Israel? There were rising tensions in Lebanon due to the upcoming election.<sup>620</sup> A visit of Mitterrand would hopefully have a soothing effect.

France did initially support a lengthening of Elias Sarkis' presidency. Yet, Sarkis, tired of the strenuous job without much real power, did not stand for reelection.<sup>621</sup> His control of Lebanese affairs remained elusive. Serving at the pleasure of Damascus over a country partially controlled by Palestinians, Syrians and rebel groups, Sarkis was in desperate need of help from France or the US. The French and Americans, however, only saw Sarkis as weak and without power.

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<sup>615</sup> Filiu, *Mitterrand et la Palestine*, 98.

<sup>616</sup> Stéphane Malsagne, «Penser les violences de la guerre du Liban: l'exemple des diplomates français (1975-1990)», *Confluences Méditerranée*, No. 112 (2020/1): 118, Accessed 17 March 2021, URL: <https://www.cairn.info/revue-confluences-mediterranee-2020-1-page-109.htm>.

<sup>617</sup> «danger et les difficultés du quotidien, à aucun moment il ne fut question de fermer l'ambassade de France au Liban» in Malsagne, *Sous l'oeil de la diplomatie française*, 220.

<sup>618</sup> Telegram from Henry, Beirut, 13 April 1982, MAE 1835INVA 416 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>619</sup> «jouerait un rôle dissuasif essentiel quant aux intentions prêtées à Israël d'intervenir militairement sur le territoire libanais» in Secret Telegram from Henry, Beirut, 25 February 1982, MAE 1835INVA 415BIS.

<sup>620</sup> Note for M. Boidevaix by Lucet on «Entretien avec M. Emile Najam», 30 March 1982, CADN, archives Liban (Ambassade), 91 PO/C 2.

<sup>621</sup> Malsagne, *Sous l'oeil de la diplomatie française*, 199.

They did not see his real predicament. Ambassador Henry recognized the difficulty of Sarkis' position and describes him as a "manager of the impossible."<sup>622</sup> And as politics are the art of the possible, there was not much he could do. Sarkis therefore, understandably, did not want to extend his mandate in any way. Additionally, he had already found his favorite successor in the young and vigorous Bashir Gemayel.<sup>623</sup> According to Henry "France did not have a preferred candidate for these elections."<sup>624</sup> He claimed that the US, at least behind the scenes, followed the same goal as Israel: to elect Bashir Gemayel. Initially the US had expressed support for Sarkis staying at his post, but this was just a play "for the gallery."<sup>625</sup> The Phalangists objective was to get the Syrians out before the presidential election in the summer. Dory Chamoun, son of former president Camille, said the Lebanese would this time oppose any presidential candidate chosen by Syria or pro-Syria, like Sarkis and Frangieh had been.<sup>626</sup>

Before Paris could reflect further on whether Mitterrand would visit Lebanon, the Israelis took action in South Lebanon. On 4 June Israel began an intense bombing campaign.<sup>627</sup> On 6 June Operation Peace for Galilee was launched with the Israeli invasion of its northern neighbor. A staggering 120 000 troops were mobilized by the IDF.<sup>628</sup> The troops rolled past the UNIFIL forces, who struggled to do much, which led to a few altercations and somewhat of a crisis between the French and Israeli governments.<sup>629</sup> The superior Israeli Army quickly made their way upwards, and by 11 June they stood outside of Beirut.<sup>630</sup> In the air Israel was totally dominant. The Syrians lost sixty aircrafts, against one Israeli.<sup>631</sup> Syria quickly accepted a cease fire and was thus placed on the sidelines.<sup>632</sup> This left the PLO and its progressive allies alone in fighting the Israeli forces. Ariel Sharon, Israel's minister of defense, was the grand architect behind the invasion. His goals were to "expel the PLO and the Syrian forces from Lebanon and create a pliable allied government in Beirut."<sup>633</sup>

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<sup>622</sup> «gestionnaire de l'impossible» in Henry, *Les Jardiniers de l'Enfer*, 130.

<sup>623</sup> Henry, 134.

<sup>624</sup> «la France n'avait pas de candidat préféré pour ces élections» in Paul-Marc Henry, «Rapport de mission au Liban», MAE 1835INVA 414 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>625</sup> «pour la galerie» in Paul-Marc Henry, «Rapport de mission au Liban», MAE 1835INVA 414 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>626</sup> Note for the general secretary on «Entretien avec un porte-parole des forces libanaises (Phalanges)», 14 December 1981, MAE 1835INVA 394 (Liban 1973-1982); Note, «Liban: entretien avec M. Dory Chamoun», 18 December 1981, MAE 1835INVA 414BIS (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>627</sup> Khalidi, *The Hundred Year's War on Palestine*, 139.

<sup>628</sup> Khalidi, 143.

<sup>629</sup> Lombardi, *Les Trente Honteuses*, 319.

<sup>630</sup> O'Ballance, *Civil War in Lebanon*, 114.

<sup>631</sup> Numbers are disputed: 60 aircrafts in O'Ballance, 114; 85 aircrafts in Lombardi, *Les Trente Honteuses*, 319.

<sup>632</sup> Khalidi, *The Hundred Year's War on Palestine*, 143.

<sup>633</sup> Khalidi, 142.

Historian Alain Ménargues claims that Prime Minister Begin wanted to include France in the plans of invasion and future for Lebanon. Begin told Bashir Gemayel that he would propose to Mitterrand that France should join a coalition of forces in Lebanon to kick out the Syrians. Yet, this did not happen.<sup>634</sup> Sharon and Begin thought that France would look favorably on the Israeli intervention, as the French were the traditional protector and allies of the Maronites. They were wrong.<sup>635</sup> France wanted to avoid any such forceful regime change in Lebanon under Israeli influence.<sup>636</sup> They stood by their man Sarkis, whom they had supported throughout the war.

The invasion could not have been done without the implicit green light of the US. A few weeks before, on 25 April, Sharon had met with Secretary of State Alexander Haig and presented in detail his plan of invasion.<sup>637</sup> The provocation chosen by Israel as *casus belli* was “the attempted assassination of Israel’s ambassador in London.” The real perpetrators of the attack were not even the PLO, but their rivals the Abu Nidal group.<sup>638</sup> However, this hardly changed anything for Israel’s determination.

During Mitterrand’s visit to Israel, Begin had told the French president that he would not allow more Christians to be killed in Lebanon. Begin hinted to Mitterrand of a possible upcoming invasion and Israel’s justification.<sup>639</sup> French historian Jean-Pierre Filiu claims that France had also been informed of the invasion through, among others, American channels. Yet France did nothing to dissuade Israel or warn the PLO and the Lebanese authorities. Mitterrand had accepted the supposed limited intervention.<sup>640</sup> However, Begin had described the invasion to Mitterrand as an operation only limited to forty kilometers, not going further north. Feeling deceived over the obvious breach of trust, Mitterrand quickly appealed for a cease-fire.<sup>641</sup> France condemned the Israeli invasion, and in a communiqué from the presidency demanded that Israel immediately should end the fighting and bombing.<sup>642</sup> Much of the French population that had remained in Lebanon was evacuated.<sup>643</sup>

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<sup>634</sup> Alain Ménargues, *Les Secrets de la Guerre du Liban Du coup d’État de Bachir Gemayel aux massacres des camps palestiniens* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2004), 232; Lombardi, *Les Trente Honteuses*, 320-321.

<sup>635</sup> Lombardi, 300 & 322.

<sup>636</sup> Secret Telegram from Vernier-Palliez, Washington, 21 June 1982, MAE 1835INVA 395 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>637</sup> Khalidi, *The Hundred Year's War on Palestine*, 151.

<sup>638</sup> Khalidi, 151.

<sup>639</sup> Filiu, *Mitterrand et la Palestine*, 84.

<sup>640</sup> Filiu, 102.

<sup>641</sup> Filiu, «L’engagement de François Mitterrand au Moyen-Orient», 51-52; See also Filiu, 101 & 107.

<sup>642</sup> Lombardi, *Les Trente Honteuses*, 323; Telegram from Dejammet, Paris, 14 June 1982, MAE 1835INA 395 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>643</sup> Malsagne, *Sous l’oeil de la diplomatie française*, 198.

## France in the Negotiations with the PLO

The French were wary of the consequences of an Israeli offensive into West Beirut, where the bulk of the PLO forces were entrenched. It would inevitably result in a bloodbath. France was also afraid of the repercussions for themselves and the Western world who “risked taking the blame in the eyes of the Arabs.”<sup>644</sup> US Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, Lawrence Eagleburger, told the French ambassador in Washington that the US did not have the means to stop Israel from entering Beirut.<sup>645</sup> Especially Saudi-Arabia pressured France and the Europeans to take stronger action against Israel. The Saudis warned that a continuation of the battle of Beirut and an expulsion of the Palestinians out of the city would lead to reactions from the Arab countries, which could engulf the whole region into conflict.<sup>646</sup> France and the US were especially worried of a possible involvement of Iran in the conflict, alongside their ally the Syrians.<sup>647</sup> A new major Middle Eastern war needed to be avoided.

The standing of the PLO among the Lebanese had been gradually declining as wartime privation led to increasing suffering.<sup>648</sup> Would Lebanese support for the PLO survive yet another Israeli intervention? Palestinian historian Rashid Khalidi claims that the real objective of the Israeli “bombardment was to terrorize the population of Beirut and turn it against the PLO.”<sup>649</sup> France knew they could play a role in helping the PLO, whose leadership was now trapped in West-Beirut. To avoid a battle for Beirut, Arafat asked France to intervene.<sup>650</sup> Presumably Arafat meant that France should put pressure on the Americans and Israeli who were the only ones with real leverage on the issue. To the contrary of President Jimmy Carter, which had neglected Lebanon and would only engage under the framework of the UN, Ronald Reagan would involve the US much further in the conflict.<sup>651</sup> But Reagan and Mitterrand had two different approaches to the PLO. While Reagan wanted “an unconditional surrender, his French counterpart wished

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<sup>644</sup> «risquaient d'en porter la responsabilité aux yeux des arabes» in Secret Telegram from Vernier-Palliez, Washington, 24 June 1982, MAE 1835INVA 395 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>645</sup> Secret Telegram from Vernier-Palliez, Washington, 23 June 1982, MAE 1835INVA 395 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>646</sup> Secret Telegram from Rocalve, Jeddah, 21 June 1982, MAE 1835INVA 395 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>647</sup> Secret Telegram from Vernier-Palliez, Washington, 10 June 1982, MAE 1835INVA 395 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>648</sup> Khalidi, *The Hundred Year's War on Palestine*, 152.

<sup>649</sup> Khalidi, 147.

<sup>650</sup> Confidential defense Telegram from Francis Gutmann, 16 June 1982, MAE 1835INVA 416 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>651</sup> Corrin Varady, *US Foreign Policy and the Multinational Force in Lebanon: Vigorous Self-Defense* (Cham: palgrave macmillan, 2017), 67.

to encourage the PLO in a dynamic of peace, by offering it a political ‘more’ in return for its military ‘less’.<sup>652</sup> The Israeli subsequently accused the French of thereby aiding terrorists.<sup>653</sup>

France learned that the PLO were ready to leave their militarism behind if Israel retreated, if the Palestinians were to receive expanded rights in Lebanon, and if the PLO’s status was not called into question.<sup>654</sup> On 20 June the US inquired with France if the French had any knowledge of such information concerning the PLO. France did send this information over to the Americans.<sup>655</sup> Because of the Americans’ policy of not talking to the PLO, US envoy Philip Habib had to rely on intermediates.<sup>656</sup> Habib thought France, alongside possibly Egypt or Saudi-Arabia, could act as such a link.<sup>657</sup> The Americans knew of the good relationship between the PLO and France.<sup>658</sup> So, there is no doubt that the French were present in the talks in these hectic weeks in Lebanon. They spoke with both the PLO and the Americans, thus France acted as a middleman between the PLO and the Americans.<sup>659</sup> Minister of Foreign Affairs Claude Cheysson did communicate directly with his American counterpart Alexander Haig on this. Thereafter, France, possibly not as the only actor, passed on from the Americans to the PLO the idea of a monitored evacuation out of Lebanon of the Palestinian fighters.<sup>660</sup>

In July, France, alongside Egypt, proposed a project at the UN to “organize the withdrawal of the Palestinian militiamen into the Beirut ‘camps’, ‘with their light weapons’.” However, the proposition would get nowhere as it was quickly vetoed by the Americans.<sup>661</sup> On 6 July, in a letter from President Reagan, the Americans pressured Mitterrand to join a multinational coalition of forces. The idea was that these troops would escort the Palestinian fighters out of Beirut. The Americans knew they needed the French in such a coalition to please and reassure the Arabs and the PLO.<sup>662</sup> The French, however, had conditions to such a participation; it

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<sup>652</sup> «une capitulation sans condition, son homologue français désire encourager l’OLP dans une dynamique de paix, en lui offrant un ‘plus’ politique en contrepartie de son ‘moins’ militaire» in Filiu, «L’engagement de François Mitterrand au Moyen-Orient», 52.

<sup>653</sup> Filiu, 52.

<sup>654</sup> Confidential defense Telegram from Francis Gutmann, 16 June 1982, MAE 1835INVA 416 (Liban 1973-1982); see also Filiu, *Mitterrand et la Palestine*, 109 & 114.

<sup>655</sup> Secret Telegram from Vernier-Palliez, Washington, 21 June 1982, MAE 1835INVA 395 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>656</sup> For the PLO-US relationship see Jensehaugen, “A Palestinian window of opportunity?”, 1.

<sup>657</sup> Secret Telegram from Vernier-Palliez, Washington, 21 June 1982, MAE 1835INVA 395 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>658</sup> Malsagne, *Sous l’oeil de la diplomatie française*, 206-207.

<sup>659</sup> See Telegrams from Vernier Palliez on meetings with Eagleburger every day from 9 to 12 June 1982, Washington, all MAE 1835INVA 395 (Liban 1973-1982); Card on «Liban: entretien avec M. Souss», 23 June 1982, MAE 1835INVA 394 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>660</sup> Secret Telegram from Vernier-Palliez, Washington, 24 June 1982, MAE 1835INVA 395 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>661</sup> «organizer le repli dans les «camps» de Beyrouth des miliciens palestiniens, «avec leur armement léger»» in Lombardi, *Les Trente Honteuses*, 329.

<sup>662</sup> Filiu, *Mitterrand et la Palestine*, 120.

needed to be wanted by the PLO, the Lebanese authorities and the UN, only then would they participate.<sup>663</sup> Still, the US was adamant about not getting the Security Council involved.<sup>664</sup> While the operation would circumnavigate the UN, France finally accepted to join. On 21 August the first French Multinational Force (MNF) troops arrived in Beirut.<sup>665</sup> For the Phalangists, this was another massive blow to their relationship with France. Learning of the MNF Bashir Gemayel complained to Sharon, asking: “Can we avoid the presence of the French? They are too favorable to the Palestinians. Can't there just be Americans?”<sup>666</sup> He even threatened that his forces might attack the disembarking French forces.<sup>667</sup> He had hoped to see the final days of the PLO and did not want foreign forces intervene now that things were going his way. Historian Lombardi states that “by intervening with its army to save the PLO, [France did] what it had always refused to do for the Christians when they were in difficult circumstances.”<sup>668</sup>

On August 12 a cease fire marked the end of seven weeks of siege for Beirut.<sup>669</sup> In the words of Rashid Khalidi, in the end “the PLO was forced to agree to evacuate Beirut, under intense pressure from Israel, the United States, and their Lebanese allies, and in the absence of meaningful support from any Arab government.”<sup>670</sup> The US was supposed to provide security for the Palestinian civilians that stayed behind.<sup>671</sup> In a conversation with Khalidi, Philip Habib stated that he, alongside the Palestinians, had been deceived by Israel, but also by Secretary of State Haig.<sup>672</sup> Khalidi also writes that

senior French diplomats [...] who were involved in the negotiations over the PLO's evacuation from Lebanon expressed regrets about their failure to get a better deal; they were bitter about their inability to obtain international security guarantees for the Palestinian civilian population and for the long-term stationing of multinational forces to protect the Palestinian civilian population. They regretted the United States' unilateral handling of the negotiations and its efforts to restrict the involvement of international representatives. At the time, they had warned repeatedly and presciently that the course being followed by the United States would lead to a tragic outcome, but in the end the French did nothing to prevent it.<sup>673</sup>

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<sup>663</sup> Filiu, 135 & 143.

<sup>664</sup> Secret Telegram from Vernier-Palliez, Washington, 24 June 1982, MAE 1835INVA 395 (Liban 1973-1982).

<sup>665</sup> Filiu, *Mitterrand et la Palestine*, 145.

<sup>666</sup> «Peut-on éviter la présence des Français? Ils sont trop favorables aux Palestiniens. Ne peut-il y avoir que des Américains?» in Ménargues, *Les Secrets de la Guerre du Liban*, 357; Lombardi, *Les Trente Honteuses*, 329.

<sup>667</sup> Filiu, *Mitterrand et la Palestine*, 136.

<sup>668</sup> «En intervenant avec son armée pour sauver l'OLP, [...] ce qu'elle s'était toujours refusée à faire pour les chrétiens lorsqu'ils étaient en situation difficile» in Lombardi, *Les Trente Honteuses*, 333-334.

<sup>669</sup> Khalidi, *The Hundred Year's War on Palestine*, 142.

<sup>670</sup> Khalidi, 149.

<sup>671</sup> Khalidi, 155.

<sup>672</sup> Khalidi, 165.

<sup>673</sup> Khalidi, 165.

Working with a superpower such as the United States ultimately meant a compliance with their goals and tactics, even for France. While France was able to navigate in Lebanon, when push came to shove, power spoke above all else.

It was under the watchful eye of Ambassador Henry and French soldiers that Arafat departed from Lebanon on 30 August 1982.<sup>674</sup> It was a requirement from the PLO that the evacuation was supervised by the French.<sup>675</sup> Because of their longtime relations, the PLO leadership trusted the French more than the Americans. France in turn saw the PLO as a more moderate representative and interlocutor of the Palestinian people compared to potentially more hardline organizations.<sup>676</sup> It was therefore as much for the sake of Israel and future peace that it was important to save the PLO as a political entity. Historian Kodmani-Darwish gives a positive image of France in the days of the negotiations. She states that “only France seemed concerned at the time by the events” destroying Lebanon.<sup>677</sup> She argues that, after all, France had “no ambition to dominate the country [like Syria or Israel] or to resolve the crisis to its advantage”, like the US.<sup>678</sup> While this may be the case, the French resolve came from their belief in a resolution of the Israeli-Palestine conflict, not necessarily of Lebanon.

The events of the summer 1982 concluded the eventful first half of the Lebanese Civil War. Ambassador Henry described the Israeli invasion in 1982 as “the major and [...] irreversible element in the history of contemporary Lebanon.”<sup>679</sup> The rise of new actors such as the Shia Islamist militant group Hezbollah was among the most significant long-term results of the invasion.<sup>680</sup> Just over two weeks after the departure of the PLO Bashir Gemayel was assassinated. Two days later Phalangists and SLA troops, sanctioned by the watching Israeli Army, commenced the infamous massacres of Sabra and Shatila. In less than three days over 1 300 people were killed.<sup>681</sup> Thus, the war entered yet another bloody phase, of which there were still many to come.

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<sup>674</sup> Filiu, «L’engagement de François Mitterrand au Moyen-Orient», 52; Lombardi, *Les Trente Honteuses*, 333.

<sup>675</sup> Kodmani-Darwish, «1981-1985: le recentrage de la politique française au Liban», 401.

<sup>676</sup> Kodmani-Darwish, 401.

<sup>677</sup> «Seule la France semblait alors préoccupée par les événements» in Kodmani-Darwish, 400.

<sup>678</sup> «aucune ambition de dominer le pays ou de régler la crise à son avantage» Kodmani-Darwish, 401.

<sup>679</sup> «l’élément majeur et [...] irréversible dans l’histoire du Liban contemporain» in Henry, *Les Jardiniers de l’Enfer*, 123.

<sup>680</sup> Khalidi, *The Hundred Year's War on Palestine*, 164.

<sup>681</sup> O’Ballance, *Civil War in Lebanon*, 118-119; Malsagne, *Sous l’oeil de la diplomatie française*, 207-211; the number of dead is obtained from Khalidi, 159.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

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If you have understood anything about Lebanon, it is because it was poorly explained to you.<sup>682</sup>

French Historian Henry Laurens

The French approach to the 1975-1982 years of the Lebanese Civil War was dominated by uncertainty as to how to proceed. France understood that due to their historic position as longtime ally many Lebanese, and especially Maronites, expected France to intervene or put forwards a solution to end the conflict. Yet, France, through their reinvigorated Arab policy, had a newfound attachment to the PLO, a foreign entity in Lebanon. Therefore, a balance between the different actors needed to be maintained. Consequently, neutrality was officially adopted and a careful diplomatic equity between the factions was sought. This would, however, be hard to maintain for a country whose goodwill was desired by the multiple factions that made up the Lebanese political order.

### **French Initiatives**

In this thesis I have shown the continuity of French initiatives and interventions in Lebanon throughout the seven years studied (1975-1982). However, I have argued that many of these initiatives took the form of a show of presence and few, if any, had profound impact.

The Couve de Murville mission in November 1975, the first French envoy initiative, had a promising start. However, the mission's vague intentions and a reignition of combats ultimately led to its failure. The same can be said of the Gorse mission in the spring of 1976, which might have been implicated in the election of President Sarkis. France's acquiescence to Syrian intervention in 1976 and its multiple efforts to convince the US of letting the Syrians into Lebanon, by contrast, would have real repercussion on the war. After the Syrian intervention,

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<sup>682</sup> «Si vous avez compris quelque chose au Liban, c'est qu'on vous l'a mal expliqué» in Henry Laurens, «La question de Palestine à partir de 1982 2/2», Collège de France - min 39', 3 November 2010 <https://www.college-de-france.fr/site/henry-laurens/course-2010-11-03-16h00.htm>.



France also took part in the reconstruction of Lebanon and its army. While its military aid might have been negligible, France made a point of showcasing its commitment to Sarkis' rebuilding focus.

After the first Israeli intervention in March 1978, the UNIFIL was established, and France was the first participant to send troops. A show of presence to be sure, the UNIFIL forces would have a hard time dealing with securing the border against trespassing Palestinian fighters, IDF soldiers and especially Saad Haddad's SLA militia. In the fall of 1978, France worked to put pressure on Syria and Israel for moderation. The Vatican was also used to put pressure on the Lebanese religious leaders. In October 1978, France suggested having the Lebanese Army replace certain Syrian units in Beirut's to calm down the situation. A version of this plan was implemented at the Beit ed-Dine conference, but with Saudi forces rather than Lebanese replacing Syrian units. France, and especially Ambassador Delamare intervened towards the Syrians during the events of Zahlé in late 1980 and early 1981.

Rather than engaging on a path of discontinuity, President Mitterrand continued his predecessor's policies in Lebanon. His handling of the Israel-Palestine conflict would eventually spill over to Lebanon. It was in that context that France worked to get the PLO out of Lebanon, rather than for the safeguarding of Lebanese interests. However, in the bigger scheme of things France still had to work in compliance with the United States, who, due to their position as superpower and close bonds to Israel, always had the final say.

### **Neutrality and the Pro-Arab Versus Pro-Maronite Balance**

Officially, France remained neutral in the conflict. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Quai d'Orsay, was trying to strictly balance its image of meeting and dialoguing with all sides of the conflict. Every French delegation to Lebanon was supposed to meet both progressive and right-wing representatives, Muslim and Christian. However, while officially preaching neutrality, *realpolitik* decisions had to be made to save face and interests. Throughout the thesis I have asserted that despite their discourse of neutrality, France *did* take sides and depending on developments in Lebanon – oscillated between the Maronites and the PLO.

Early in the war, many Maronites were hoping for a French military intervention in Lebanon comparable to the one in 1860. Although in May 1976, Giscard seemed willing to send troops, the Maronites would ultimately be disappointed as France chose refrain from intervening. In

the spring of 1976 Syria entered Lebanon, surprisingly on the side of the Maronites. France then supported the Syrian intervention which rescued their historic allies the Maronites from the PLO and LNM. A PLO victory would have led to an Israeli intervention. Faced with the choice of invader, France, the United States, and Israel chose Syria and the expense of the PLO. However, as the war progressed, the French relationship with the Maronites would progressively be jeopardized. Unhappy with the Syrian takeover of their country, the Maronites started opposing the invader – and subsequently, expected France to do the same. But France would defend their Syrian decision as long as they could. The Maronites felt France's inaction as an abandonment in their time of need. As historian Stéphane Malsagne writes: “on several occasions it came close to incomprehension, even rupture” with the Maronites.<sup>683</sup> The comments made in 1978 by Minister of Foreign Affairs de Guiringaud in which he accused the Maronites, and especially Camille Chamoun, of being responsible for combats in Beirut were badly received by the community. Later, France's help in the evacuation of the PLO in 1982 would be interpreted in a similar light. Where was France when the Maronites were bombarded by the Syrians in East Beirut in 1978? After all, be it the French UNIFIL forces in 1978 or the French participation in the MNF in 1982, both interventions were to save the Palestinians, not the Maronites. Still, the information campaigns waged by the Phalangists in France did have an impact in turning parts of the French political establishment to their side. But the French dilemma was perhaps best incarnated in the person of François Mitterrand, who after he came to power in 1981 had to balance his longtime friendship with the Israeli with the pro-Palestinian policies of the recent years. Notwithstanding, there might have been French underground support for the Maronite militias. In an incapacity to let go of their historic allies, the *Antigone* secret operation supposedly worked to help arm the militias.

The handshake between Yasser Arafat and Minister of Foreign Affairs Jean Sauvagnargues in Beirut in 1974 marked the start of France's more pro-Palestinian orientation as a hallmark of French-Arab policy. Giscard d'Estaing had understood the importance of keeping a friendly relationship with Arab countries, especially after the oil shock of 1973. These longtime Gaullist pro-Arab policies which continued into Giscard d'Estaing's presidency would eventually make the Lebanese Civil War difficult to navigate. While France supported the Syrian intervention against the PLO, the embassy in Beirut would keep its contact with the PLO leadership throughout the war. In August of 1981 Minister of Foreign Affairs Claude Cheysson also met

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<sup>683</sup> «on frôla à plusieurs reprises l'incompréhension, voire la rupture» in Malsagne, *Sous l'oeil de la diplomatie française*, 304.

with Arafat personally – a symbol of French willingness to not abandon their Palestinian efforts. Finally, during the 1982 Israeli invasion, France successfully participated in the negotiations to save and move the PLO away from Lebanon.

### **Integrity, Sovereignty, Unity**

Central to France's involvement in the Lebanese Civil War was the much-repeated focus on keeping the integrity, sovereignty and unity of Lebanon intact. The exaggerated use of the slogan made one newspaper ironically write that the French were "friends of the sovereignty and integrity of Lebanon."<sup>684</sup> The vagueness and overlapping of these terms ultimately gave the impression of a slogan devoid of any real importance. In this thesis I have shown that this was a slogan whose components France failed to deliver.

France wanted to avoid a dismemberment of Lebanon, which might have led to grave regional consequence. However, from the beginning of the conflict, French authorities were unable to keep the integrity of Lebanon. Neither did they really try. France's tacit support for the PLO and the Syrian intervention in 1976 dismantles the first part of the slogan. So does the Israeli invasions of 1978 and 1982. While complaints were raised, neither Giscard nor Mitterrand intervened on behalf of Lebanon. When it comes to supporting Lebanese sovereignty, France emphasized its endorsement of the President Elias Sarkis, but he was a president without much power. By supporting the Syrian intervention in the spring of 1976, France counteracted Lebanese sovereignty, even if it was to avoid dismemberment, a PLO victory and subsequent Israeli retaliation. A choice of lesser evil was made at the expense of the Lebanese. Finally, despite France's intentions, none of their initiatives managed to keep Lebanon unified. The slogan of keeping Lebanon's integrity, sovereignty and unity was nothing more than just rhetoric. While much reiterated, it never became a French priority to follow up on it.

In any case, France still wished for the bloody conflict to end. Many French historians have argued that France was the only country genuinely concerned with Lebanon's fate.<sup>685</sup> This was certainly true when compared to the US, Syria or Israel. At the start of the conflict, the Americans saw a possible end to the war in Lebanon, and therefore any shift in paradigms, as a threat to their ongoing peace process between Egypt and Israel. However, France was not the

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<sup>684</sup> «amis de la souveraineté et de l'intégrité du Liban» in Sadaka, *La Diplomatie Assassinée*, 113.

<sup>685</sup> See Kodmani-Darwish, «1981-1985: le recentrage de la politique française au Liban», 401 & 409; Malsagne, *Sous l'oeil de la diplomatie française*, 190-191; Laurens, «Le Liban et l'occident. Récit d'un parcours», 31.

only one to wish for an end in the fighting. The Vatican also tried to put an end to the conflict, by using its influence among its Christian communities in Lebanon to advocate peace and coexistence between different religious groups. The Arabization of the conflict, through increasing participation at conferences such as Riyadh in 1976 and Beit ed-Dine in 1978, clearly shows that the Arab “brother” countries, other than Syria, also wanted an end to the bloodshed. Other historians have made the case for France not doing enough and not being able to influence events.<sup>686</sup> French historian Elizabeth Picard states that France “made a show of vain promises and puffing; [...] Paris [was] unable to act independently of its Western allies [...] and the instances of French interventions [...] were more symbolic than substantive.”<sup>687</sup> This thesis takes a mediating stance, arguing that while France was always present and active, their policies were often heavy on the rhetoric and of little consequence.

The civil war would last for another eight years. It took a devastating toll on human life: in fifteen years of conflict 800 000 people were displaced from their homes, 145 000 people died and 185 000 were injured.<sup>688</sup> France found itself sidelined as a footnote, albeit a major footnote, in the story of the first half of the Lebanese Civil War. By walking the impossible line of balance, France, while active, was not able to change the course of war in any significant way.

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<sup>686</sup> See Laurent and Basbous, *Guerres secrètes au Liban*, 265-266; Walid Arbid, *La Représentation Diplomatique de la France au Liban et du Liban en France et à l’UNESCO* (Paris: Al-Maha/L’Esprit des Péninsules, 1997), 39; Henry, Paul-Marc, *Les Jardiniers de l’Enfer*, 11; Sadaka, *La Diplomatie Assassinée*, 137.

<sup>687</sup> Picard, *Lebanon A Shattered Country*, 170.

<sup>688</sup> Malsagne, *Sous l’oeil de la diplomatie française*, 304.

## **Primary Sources**

### **Archives**

#### **Non-published French diplomatic documents from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs**

##### ***Centre des Archives diplomatiques de La Courneuve (MAE) :***

MAE 1835INVA (1973-1982)

-- Box 394

-- Box 395

-- Box 409

-- Box 410

-- Box 414

-- Box 414BIS

-- Box 415

-- Box 415BIS

-- Box 416

-- Box 428

-- Box 436

MAE 1669INVA (1973-1982)

-- Box 302

##### ***Centre des Archives diplomatiques de Nantes (CADN) :***

Archives Liban (Ambassade), 91 PO/C

-- Box 1

-- Box 2

-- Box 29

-- Box 36

-- Box 37

-- Box 57

-- Box 58

### **Audio source**

Lecture given by Henry Laurens on «La question de Palestine à partir de 1982 2/2» for Collège de France on 3 November 2010. Accessed 19 May 2021. URL: <https://www.college-de-france.fr/site/henry-laurens/course-2010-11-03-16h00.htm>.

### **Miscellaneous Digitized Material**

Information available on public archive. Accessed 24 May 2021. URL: <https://francearchives.fr/fr/article/26287562>.

### **Photo**

Description in French on the ECPAD archives site:

Les légionnaires du 2e REP (Régiment étranger de parachutistes) et des soldats de l'armée libanaise assurent la sécurité et la protection des combattants palestiniens qui arrivent par convoi de camions au port de Beyrouth. Sur le point d'être évacués de la capitale libanaise après trois mois d'encerclement, ils manifestent leur joie par des tirs.

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