"Our 1789":

The Transitional Program of the Lebanese National Movement and the Abolition of Sectarianism, 1975–77

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Were the events of 1975–77 in Lebanon, commonly thought of today as an internecine sectarian war between Christians and Muslims, more comparable to the furies of revolution and counterrevolution? This article reframes the Lebanese National Movement's (LNM) "Transitional Program" as a revolutionary, anti-colonial, and radical republican challenge that sought to implement a new constitutional order based on popular sovereignty. Internally, it severed the link between sectarian affiliation and political representation that was the hallmark of the Lebanese regime. Externally, the program announced a commitment to popular struggle against imperially sustained settler colonialism in Palestine while calling into question the authoritarian practices of most regional regimes. Drawing from periodicals, memoirs, diplomatic sources, and interviews the article considers the efforts of the LNM-PLO alliance to push the Transitional Program in the political sphere and on the battlefield. In turn, it demonstrates how the United States, Syria, Israel, and Lebanese counterrevolutionaries worked in concert to ensure that the sectarian regime would be preserved at the moment of its greatest challenge. Against a historiography that either dismisses the venture as predestined to fail or considers the period only within the shackles of post-defeat melancholia, it reevaluates the history of one of the most explicit emancipatory challenges to the Arab order.

Keywords Lebanon, sectarianism, revolution, republicanism, sovereignty

It is difficult to imagine a more radical political demand in Lebanon than the abolition of sectarian political representation. In August 1975, the Lebanese National Movement (*al-Haraka al-Wataniyya al-Lubnaniyya*, LNM), a coalition of political parties, movements, and independent figures representing an ideologically diverse, multisectarian constituency, released its "Transitional Program for the Democratic Reform of the Political System in Lebanon." Promulgated during the opening rounds of what became a fifteen-year international civil war, the program was the culmination of at least a decade of polarizing popular struggle. Calling for "a progressive, democratic, Arab national Lebanon," it detailed a suite of comprehensive changes to the political system, premised upon the abolition of sectarian political representation, the institution of a parliament based on proportional representation of all Lebanese in a single

district, and the declaration of a voluntary civil personal status code.[1] In an interview with *Le Figaro* on May 13, 1976, at time when the Joint Forces of the LNM and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) controlled some 80 percent of Lebanese territory containing 70 percent of the population, LNM leader Kamal Junblat declared: "We are trying to make our 1789. But we are a small revolution in a small country and we are surrounded by enemies."[2]

Are the events of 1975–76, commonly thought of today as an internecine sectarian war between Christians and Muslims, better understood as the furies of revolution and counterrevolution? As historian Arno Mayer writes in his study of the French and Russian revolutions, "There is no revolution without violence and terror; without civil and foreign war; without iconoclasm and religious conflict; and without collision between city and country."[3] All these ingredients were present in Lebanon's "two-year war" (*harb sannatayn*), and there is little doubt that many contemporary observers knew they were experiencing a moment of refoundation that would decide the fate of the country, and to a great extent, the region. This article understands the struggle for the Lebanese state as far more than an internal sectarian conflict. Rather, it was an important setting in an international civil war over the direction of decolonization and the shape of political representation in the Eastern Mediterranean. It reframes the LNM's Transitional Program as a revolutionary, anti-colonial, and radical republican

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[1] For the program's full text, see al-Haraka al-Wataniyya al-Lubnaniyya, *Watha'iq*, 5–24.

[2] *Le Figaro*, May 13, 1976.

[3] Mayer, *The Furies*, 4.

challenge that sought to implement a new constitutional order based on popular sovereignty.[4] The LNM-PLO mobilization was a fundamental challenge to the colonial state system instituted in the former Ottoman domains by Britain, France, the Zionist settler movement, and, to a lesser extent, their Arab auxiliaries. Domestically, it severed the link between sectarian affiliation and political representation that was the hallmark of the Lebanese regime. Internationally, the Transitional Program's affirmation of popular sovereignty embodied a commitment to popular struggle against imperially sustained settler colonialism in Palestine while calling into question the authoritarian practices of the nationalist military regimes, particularly Ba'thist Syria. The United States, Syria, Israel, and the Lebanese Right—to name only the most involved—each decided that the sectarian regime must be preserved at the moment of its greatest challenge.

Given the recent avalanche of studies on sectarianism in the Middle East, it is striking that the greatest threat to political sectarianism in Lebanon has been historically silenced.[5] Across the interpretive and political spectrum of this recent literature, there is little to no reference to the experience of the LNM or even its most prominent figure, Kamal Junblat.[6] The defeat of the LNM in 1976 did much to recast its demise as a foregone conclusion in what became a tradition of debilitating auto-critiques and lachrymose narratives by participants and

[4] The "revolutionary" nature of the LNM and its program has been contested by a number of figures, ranging from the counterrevolutionary Right to the ultra-Left. Rightist views are sketched here, but for a contemporary "revolutionary" critique of the program as unoriginal see Sharara, "Al-Islah Min Al-Wasat." Syrian Marxist Yasin al-Hafiz argued the war is simply sectarian in "Harb Ta'ifiyya." For a recent entry focusing on intentions, see Abu Khalil, "Li-Madha Fashal."

[5] See Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*.

[6] A notable recent exception with regard to Junblat is Hazran, *Druze Community*, though its major concern is the study of a single sect. One must return to an earlier generation of scholars for works concerning the LNM. However, these efforts also quickly pass over the Transitional Program, its demands, and its significance at the intersection of material, ideological, communal, and international factors. See Dhubyān, *Al-Ḥaraka*; Odeh, *Lebanon*; Petran, *Struggle Over Lebanon*; Kassir, *La guerre*; Traboulsi, *History of Modern Lebanon*. Standard works on the Lebanese civil war include Hanf, *Coexistence*; El Khazen, *Breakdown*; Fisk, *Pity*; Salibi, *Crossroads*.

fellow travelers.[7] Others hostile to the principles of the LNM's antisectarian, tricontinentalist project have simply consigned it to oblivion.[8] Despite raising many of the same demands, not even the participants of Lebanon's 2019 uprising articulated a historical connection with the LNM.[9] Moreover, postsecularist scholars who stress the alleged Western and imperial nature of secularism have ignored this episode of explicitly Arab, secular, anti-colonial, and multisectarian mass mobilization.[10] Instead, there appears a structural inability for the buried history of this movement—concealed and repressed by a string of bitter defeats—to be unearthed. At stake is an evocative history of an attempt, led by socialists across social difference—sect, class, region, and nation—to fashion, amidst crisis, a just political community. However, any attempt to exhume it cannot be limited by a methodological nationalism that binds historical questions and answers to the borders of the Lebanese Republic, but must consider the mutually interactive factors on the local, regional, and international levels.

Figure 1. "Against Imperialism and Zionism." Lebanese National Movement, 1977. Clockwise from top left: Kamal Junblat, Gamal Abdel Nasser, Che Guevara, 19th century Mount Lebanese peasant rebel Tanyus Shahin, Ho Chi Minh, Patrice Lumumba. Source: SignsOfConflict.com and the PSP Archives.

[7] See, e.g., Bardawil, *Revolution and Disenchantment*.

[8] The "tricontinental" label is not merely rhetorical: notable LNM figures from the PSP, LCP, the Movement of Arab Nationalists (later the OCAL), and the Ba'th attended the 1966 Tricontinental Conference in Havana.

[9] Points of the Transitional Program raised during the 2019 uprising include: the abolition of political sectarianism, an electoral law based on proportional representation in a single district for all of Lebanon, an independent constitutional court, laws for prosecuting politicians and government officials for illegal enrichment.

[10] See, i.e., Asad, *Formations*; Mahmood, "Secularism"; Mahmood, *Religious*. For an important counterpoint to this school, see Al-Azmeh, *Secularism*.

Sovereignty and the Sectarian Regime

The inhabitants of Lebanon did not create the system of political sectarianism on their own. The sectarian regime was formed and re-formed in unequal interaction with numerous imperial powers at several points. Like race in other colonial contexts, the configuration of Lebanon's sectarian regime "registers the state of colonial hostilities," or the balance of power between colonial and indigenous forces.[11] The design of the *mutasarrifiyya* (governorate) of Mount Lebanon (1861–1914) reflected the balance of power between the Ottoman Empire and European powers, chiefly France and Britain, and the elites and commoners of Mount Lebanon.[12] By recognizing communal equality while rejecting the notion of citizenship, Ottoman and European imperial administrators strove to contain further violent local episodes—which threatened international intervention and the destabilization of the "Eastern Question"—by ensuring communal interests were respected and represented by designated elite subjects.[13] This principle of constraining popular sovereignty by means of dividing the population into a hierarchy of religious sects—assumed to be hostile to each other—which were then represented and constrained by elites, was reinvigorated at several historical conjunctures.[14] The French-appointed authors of the 1926 Lebanese constitution enshrined sectarian consociationalism and the system of religious personal status laws into the mandate state.[15] By design, Paris and local sectarian institutions encumbered the colonial state's sovereignty and ability to unify and transform society.

[11] Wolfe, *Traces of History*, 18.
[12] Makdisi, *Culture of Sectarianism*.
[13] Makdisi, *Age of Coexistence*, 59.
[14] On the assumption of hostility, see Hudson, "Lebanese Crisis."
[15] Makdisi, *Age of Coexistence*, 134–35.

The sectarian regime was renegotiated again on the eve of independence in 1943. Lebanese independence was not born out of a popular national liberation struggle

but an inter-imperial decision at the international level. Domestically, a deal was struck by local elites who believed that a Lebanese entity playing an intermediary role between the European and Arab worlds would be good for business.[16] According to this unwritten "National Pact" (*al-Mithaq al-Watani*), the Christian elite agreed to accept Lebanon's "Arab face" and stop seeking political protection from Western empires, while the Muslim elite forsook unification into a larger Arab state. In order to secure Christian political support, the 1943 system built off the customary practices of the mandate era by reserving the commanding heights of the Lebanese state for Maronites, the most numerous and politically dominant group of Christians. Only Maronites could hold the offices of the presidency (which held extraordinary power), the commander of the Armed Forces, the chief of Military Intelligence, and later, the governor of the Central Bank. In addition, a 6:5 Christian majority in parliament was enforced. Christian ascendancy was justified based on the Lebanese Republic's only official census, carried out by the French in 1932, which tenuously manufactured a razor-thin Christian majority.[17] The office of the prime minister—who was effectively selected and dismissed by the president—was reserved for a Sunni. By 1947, the speaker of parliament became earmarked for a Shi'i, reckoned to be the third largest community.

[16] This agreement was facilitated by the economic boom produced by servicing the Allied armies during the Second World War, which benefitted the commercial-financial bourgeoisie, both Christian and Muslim. See Johnson, *Class and Client*, 25–29. See also Rabbath, *Formation Historique*, 539–61.

[17] The 1932 census recorded the population as 50.1 percent Christian and 48.6 percent Muslim. A Muslim majority was reckoned to be reached in the 1940s. Maktabi, "Lebanese Census"; Thompson, *Colonial Citizens*, 82. Prior to the mandate, the French carried out an earlier population survey similarly designed to produce a pro-French Christian majority. See Fahrenthold, *Between*, 137–59.

The 1943 agreement faced serious challenges from within and without. The 1958 insurrection aimed for greater Christian-Muslim equity, but that civil war ended in US military intervention and its brokering of a negotiated solution preserving the sectarian formula, with Egyptian assent.[18] The postwar reformist president, General Fu'ad Shihab, scored moderate success securing the allegiance of Muslims and peripheral communities. Yet by the early 1970s a series of economic, political, and social crises polarized Lebanese society yet again into contrasting visions of sovereignty.

The Struggle for Palestine, the Struggle for Lebanon

As the United States attempted to construct an Arab-Israeli settlement that would pacify a volatile Middle East after the 1967 war, Lebanon became a key site of international and popular political contention. Arab politics divided between those who advocated for a diplomatic settlement under present circumstances and those who argued that more favorable conditions could be achieved through protracted popular liberation struggle.[19] At the center of this regional civil war was the struggle to define the role of the PLO. Israel and the US were adamant that the PLO be excluded from settlement negotiations, while the Arab states differed as to what shape any eventual PLO participation should take.[20] By May 1974, US-mediated Egyptian and Syrian disengagement agreements with Israel signaled their acceptance of United Nations Security Council Resolution 242 of 1967, which called for the exchange of land for a final settlement. This intensified the pressure on the PLO, which did not accept 242 because it did not recognize Palestinian political rights as part of the solution, and on Lebanon, since 1971 the PLO's sole

[18] See particularly Gendzier, *Notes from the Minefield*.

[19] Sharabi, "Liberation or Settlement."

[20] On the US-PLO relationship during this period, see Khalil, "Oslo's Roots."

base of operations. In this context, the question of Palestine became deeply intertwined with the struggle for control of the Lebanese state.

A climate of wide social ferment made Lebanon a vital setting of revolutionary mobilization in the global 1960s.[21] Students, peasants, workers, and intellectuals were becoming increasingly mobilized for substantial concessions from state and private entities. Calls to abolish political sectarianism began to pick up momentum but remained scattered and inconsistent.[22] The ranks of Arab nationalist, Marxist, and socialist parties swelled, as did their wider influence. This Lebanese social struggle became intertwined with the Palestinian revolution and the development of PLO institutions.[23] Beirut became the cosmopolitan hub for exiled opposition groups and cultural figures from all over the Arab world—and even international revolutionary factions from further afield. An existential military struggle stoked this political ferment. The south became the base of Palestinian resistance operations, while Israel carried out increasingly numerous and disproportionate attacks across the country. The Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) responded with studied nonintervention. Instead, the LAF was most often seen breaking up strikes and demonstrations—repeatedly with deadly force—which called into question its purpose. As a result, the sectarian regime appeared indifferent to popular needs, impervious to reform, and came increasingly under attack as the government of privileges. "Is this a state of capitalists and monopolists," demonstrators cried out after the lethal suppression of the 1972 Gandour factory strike, "or a state of the people, workers, and peasants?"[24]

[21] See, i.e., Maasri, *Cosmopolitan Radicalism*; Tufaro, "Also"; Traboulsi, *History of Modern Lebanon*, 156–83; Guirguis, "La Référence"; Nasr, "Backdrop"; Petran, *Struggle over Lebanon*.

[22] See, e.g., the demands of striking AUB students in 1969. Maasri, *Cosmopolitan Radicalism*, 167.

[23] Nabulsi and Takriti, "Palestinian Revolution."

[24] *An-Nahār*, November 13, 1972.

The role of Kamal Junblat (1917–77), the figurehead and spokesman of the LNM, was central within this milieu of activity. Few figures are more controversial in Lebanese history than this Druze aristocrat, founder of the Progressive Socialist Party (PSP), frequent government minister, Lenin Peace Prize winner, vegetarian, and devoted yogi. His stable sectarian constituency and national stature made him the most important and consistent ally of the Palestinian revolution in Lebanon, while also affording him political independence from the Palestinian movement's charismatic authority. To his many supporters, he represented the politician most capable of ushering in a progressive future for a Lebanon committed to democracy, equitable development, and Arab internationalism. His sect, however, barred him from high office. His many detractors view him as a "fake socialist," a feudal sectarian leader par excellence, whose "Arabism" was little more than the traditional "*taqiyyah*" (dissimulation) of a Druze politician striving to pander to the "ideas and concerns of the ruling majority."[25] In this view, he was only passionate about accumulating power, led a simply sectarian Druze party, and was driven by communal resentment against Maronites and Christians. More insightful than these one-dimensional analyses is the conclusion of a twenty-five-page biographical study of Junblat written by a political officer in the US embassy in Beirut: "For all the vicissitudes of his political life and the eccentricities of his character, Kamal Jumblatt is probably smarter, more dedicated, and more energetic than all his political rivals, and he has a clearer idea of what is wrong with Lebanon. Even if his feudal ties preclude his emergence as a genuine revolutionary, he bears watching as a possible link between a traditionalist past and a revolutionary future."[26]

[25] El Khazen, "Kamal Jumblatt," 183. Theodor Hanf and his interlocutors single out Junblat for having the greatest responsibility for the civil war. *Coexistence*, 373, 391–93. See also de Clerck, "Kamal et Walid."

[26] This conclusion was drawn despite the report's frequent trafficking in tabloid Orientalism. Its speculations included that Junblat was the illegitimate child of the Maronite Archbishop of Sidon, Augustine Bustani; his "anti-Americanism" was caused by an alleged affair between his wife May Arslan and American journalist Larry Collins,

The Politics of War

Following years of polarization, an international offensive against the growing ranks of the LNM-PLO mobilization in the spring of 1975—the Israeli destruction of the southern village of Kfarshuba; the assassination of Ma‘ruf Sa‘d, a popular former MP and veteran LNM figure; and infamously, the Phalangist massacre of a busload of passengers in ‘Ayn al-Rummana—plunged Lebanon into outright war. After several rounds of fighting, talks, and failed ceasefires, there appeared no end in sight. But by August 1975 three main political camps emerged, clarifying the politics of war.

Abolition: The Lebanese National Movement’s Transitional Program

Faced with the formation of a staunchly conservative government, an array of mobilized counterrevolutionary militias, and renewed outbreaks of violence, the disparate parties of the LNM began to coordinate their activities more closely than ever (See Table 1 for a complete list of adherents). They decided to press forward with a campaign for the fundamental revision of a political system that appeared incapable of evolution. The LNM formed a Central Committee with Junblat in the presidency and Muhsin Ibrahim of the Organization of Communist Action (OCAL) as the secretary-general. The heads of five other leading parties—the Lebanese Communist Party (LCP), the Syrian and Iraqi Ba‘th parties, the Syrian Social National Party (SSNP), and the Independent Nasserists (*al-Murabitun*)—entered as deputy-presidents.[27] In a press conference on August 18, 1975, the Central Committee announced “The Transitional Program for Democratic Reform of the Political System in Lebanon” (*al-Birnamij al-Marhali lil-Harakat al-Wataniyya min ajl Islah Dimuqrati lil-Nizam al-Siyasi fi Lubnan.* See Figure 2 for the

and he was rumored to be homosexual, claiming he was once in love with his chauffeur. February 23, 1971, Beirut A-42, US National Archives II (hereafter A2), Subject-Numeric Files, 1970–73, Box 2447.

[27] Taqi al-Din, *Al-Yasar Al-Lubnani*, 90.

original pamphlet art). Claiming to "represent the overwhelming majority of Lebanese," it began with a manifesto interpreting the origins of the civil violence, and continued by detailing demands for comprehensive changes to the political system.

Table 1. Signatories of the "Transitional Program for Democratic Reform of the Political System in Lebanon." Sources: *as-Safir* and *L'Orient-Le Jour*, August 19, 1975.

1) Progressive Socialist Party	10) Workers Unions (represented by Fawzi Abu Mujahid)
2) Lebanese Communist Party	11) Arab Socialist Union (Nasserist Organization)
3) Organization of Communist Action in Lebanon	12) Provisional Committee for the National Conference
4) Arab Socialist Ba'th Party Organization (pro-Syria)	13) Association of Maqasid Graduates
5) Arab Socialist Ba'th Party (pro-Iraq)	14) Movement of the Disinherited
6) Syrian Social Nationalist Party (In'am Ra'd faction)	15) Union of Popular Working Forces (Corrective Movement)
7) Independent Nasserists (*al-Murabitun*)	16) National Congress to Support South Lebanon
8) Union of Communists	17) Cultural Club of South Lebanon
9) Movement of Shia Democrats	

At its core, the Transitional Program envisioned a political system emancipated from the strictures of sectarian representation, which it considered "the defining characteristic" of the Lebanese system and the root cause of the state's "petrification" when confronted with urgent internal and external challenges.[28] At the highest level of power, it eliminated the unwritten tradition of allocating the presidency to a Maronite, the prime ministry to a Sunni, and the speaker of parliament to a Shi'i. In parliament, it called for proportional representation of all of Lebanon as a single electoral district, with strictly equal representation (one deputy for every ten thousand electors). It sought to implement publicly funded election campaigns, lower the voting age from twenty-one to eighteen, fix the retirement age for members of parliament at sixty-four,

[28] al-Haraka al-Wataniyya al-Lubnaniyya, *Watha'iq*,

abolish all discriminatory laws against women, modernize the nationality law, end restrictions on the formation of political parties and unions, increase the separation of powers, abolish military censorship, and comprehensively reorganize the military and the state administration. It demanded "the absolute independence of the judiciary" and the creation of a Supreme Judicial Council with sole authority in making appointments, stripping this privilege from the *zu'ama'* (notable power brokers). In the international sphere, the program called for Lebanon's unambiguous participation in support of the Palestinian and Arab national liberation movements. To implement these proposed changes, the program called for the convocation of an elected, non-sectarian constituent assembly to lead the national deliberations. In short, the Transitional Program was calculated to break the power of the sectarian oligarchy via established republican means.

Figure 2. Front cover of the pamphlet edition of the "Transitional Program for Democratic Reform of the Political System in Lebanon." Central Political Committee of the Lebanese National Movement, November 1977 (1987 reprint). Source: Middle East Ephemera Collection, AUB Archives and Special Collections.

The program was primarily written by the LNM's leading triumvirate, Junblat, Ibrahim, and George Hawi (who soon became the LCP secretary-general), alongside input from Junblat's advisers 'Isam Na'man, an independent "radical social democrat," and Hasan 'Awada, who was close to the LCP.[29] Notably, these figures all came from Druze, Shi'i, or Greek Orthodox backgrounds, communities the sectarian regime deliberately excluded from paramount positions.

[29] Fawwaz Traboulsi, interview by the author, Beirut, Lebanon, August 17, 2017. On Na'man, see *Monday Morning*, June 2, 1975.

According to Fawwaz Traboulsi, then the second-in-command of the OCAL, the deliberations started with the goal of abolishing denominationalism (*madhdhabiyya*) instead of political sectarianism (*ta'ifiyya*) as a whole. This would have allowed any type of Christian to become president—not only Maronites—and any type of Muslim—not simply Sunnis—to become prime minister.[30] Junblat then advocated moving beyond this to the total abolition of political sectarianism. It was also Junblat who advocated for the voluntary civil personal status law, a calculating compromise between secular and religious visions in a sensitive field. In this and other aspects, he was influenced by the leading constitutional lawyer in Lebanon, Edmond Rabbath, who also provided advice during the drafting.[31] The diverse makeup of the program's authors and supporting constituency, its strict separation of communal identity and political office, and its commitment to promulgating a civil personal status law highlight the LNM's theory and practice of integrative secular politics.

One of its most novel proposals was for the establishment of a second representative institution, the Basic Lebanese Activities Council (*Majlis al-Nashatat al-Lubnaniyya al-Asasiyya*, BLAC). Essentially a citizens' assembly, the BLAC would allow for much wider political representation by involving delegates "of the full complex of Lebanese life, including professional, economic, social, cultural, and corporate bodies."[32] This recalled the classical

[30] Tarabulsi, *Surat Al-Fata Bi-Al-Ahmar*, 153.

[31] A Greek Catholic from Aleppo, Rabbath considered the religious court system governing personal status (marriage, divorce, inheritance, etc.) an infringement upon the sovereignty of the state, because these courts were unaccountable to the constitution. See Rabbath, *Formation Historique*, 126–27, 131–32. The French mandate authorities attempted to introduce an optional civil code in Syria and Lebanon in 1938–39, but this attempt was received by anticolonial nationalists and religious authorities as an intolerable external imposition. Mass protests in both countries effectively squashed the proposal. Thompson, *Colonial Citizens*, 152–53. Postindependence agitation for a civil personal status law went back to the late 1940s and early 1950s, when the lawyers syndicate advocated for this, going on strike in 1952.

[32] "A citizens' assembly (CA) is a body of people (a) chosen by a random or near random process, (b) so as to be descriptively representative of the population (along chosen dimensions), and (c) set up to deliberate and make a recommendation or recommendations on a public policy issue or issues." White, "Citizens' Assemblies," 81.

Greek practice of *sortition*, or choosing representatives by lot of social function.[33] It was also within the BLAC that Lebanon's significant religious institutions would have their say: a cultural sector would include representation for "moral and spiritual" institutions.[34] In the words of 'Isam Na'man, the BLAC was designed "to hit two birds with one stone": to ease the anxiety produced by the of abolition of political sectarianism and to address social and economic issues.[35] The BLAC would have the authority to deliberate and propose laws but not to enact them, which remained the parliament's prerogative. With sectarian representation abolished in the parliament and religious interests represented in the BLAC, both chambers would elect the president. Seeking to allay the fears of conservative Christians, Junblat expected this arrangement was virtually guaranteed to produce a Christian majority between both chambers, which would allow for the abolition of political sectarianism while providing a long-term but informal guarantee for a Christian president.[36] Finally, the Transitional Program called for instituting a mechanism for calling binding referendums on "certain important matters" by direct popular vote. By expanding and enhancing the deliberative process, the BLAC was designed to ensure that active popular sovereignty was the source of legislation and legitimacy, as well as to prevent the capture of government institutions by a section of the population.

In addition to its constituent groups, the Transitional Program quickly gained the support of numerous intellectuals across the Left and center. On behalf of the Lebanese Women's Rights League, Marcelle Hunayni thanked the LNM for its stances concerning women while calling for

[33] While sortition is based on randomly chosen lot representatives, Junblat envisioned that each organization would elect its own representatives. Nasr, *Min 1975*, 321. For a Marxist view of sortition as vital political form, see James, "Every Cook Can Govern."

[34] Nasr, *Min 1975*, 317.

[35] Nasr, *Min 1975*, 320.

[36] The Lebanese president is elected by parliament, not a direct election by citizens. Nasr, *Min 1975*, 326.

further struggle on this front.[37] *Al-Hurriyya* published statements of support from leading cultural figures including Riyad Taha, president of the Press Union; Dr. Zahiyya Qaddura of the Lebanese University, the first female dean in the Arab world; playwright 'Isam Mahfuz; poet Unsi al-Hajj; feminist writer Layla Ba'lbaki; and journalist Lucien George.[38] And to illustrate the possibilities that the war had opened, influential Lebanese historian Kamal Salibi—up until the early seventies the faculty advisor for the Phalangist-affiliated student group at the American University of Beirut—penned an article titled "'Arab Lebanon' as the Only Option." Though he did not comment on the Transitional Program specifically, Salibi argued that Lebanon must take "a decision to be ready not only to commit itself sincerely and unreservedly to Arabism, but to go even further and establish itself as the vanguard and arbiter of true Arabism in the Arab world."[39] By late 1975, the LNM constructed a historic bloc across ideological, regional, sectarian, and class differences that threatened to carry through a transition from a sectarian regime to a new national-popular hegemony.[40]

Restoration: Counterrevolution and Maronite Supremacy

A coalition of conservative and predominantly Maronite Christian parties and figures adamantly rejected the Transitional Program's conception of secular democratic equality—or indeed, any substantive political reform. These eventually formally affiliated as the Front for Freedom and Man in Lebanon (*Jabhat al-Hurriyya wa al-Insan fi Lubnan*, FFML), the war's counterrevolutionary alliance. A leading Phalange intellectual described the LNM's Transitional Program as "a living study of how to deceive the citizens, via the suggestion that the 'brotherly'

[37] *As-Safir*, August 19, 1975.

[38] *Al-Hurriyya*, October 20, 1975.

[39] *Monday Morning*, May 24, 1975.

[40] The Gramscian concept of the historic bloc was self-consciously employed by LNM leaders. See, e.g., Joumblatt, *I Speak*, 20–21.

struggle the Lebanese arena witnessed is fundamentally due to the lack of realization of a few internal political reforms!"[41] For the FFML, the battle was not a civil war but a war against Lebanon by the Palestinians and their internal and external allies. In this schema the LNM was nothing more than a "trojan horse" (*hisan tarwada*) either for Palestinian designs or, alternatively, "genocide" or "Islamization."[42]

A striking feature of this view was the denial that the sectarian regime privileged the political position of the Maronite community. Curiously, this was often accompanied by a simultaneous justification of Maronite hegemony. In a remarkable statement by the ideological vanguard of the FFML, the Lebanese Research Committee (*Lajnat al-Bahuth al-Lubnaniyya*, LRC) based at the Holy Spirit University of Kaslik, a private university financed by the Maronite monastic order, conceived Maronite hegemony in the nation and the state in terms directly inspired by nineteenth-century Anglo-American ideology of a master race:

> If the *umma* or "nation" consists of a group of human beings who wish to live together, in accordance with civilizational convictions and specific everyday praxis on a particular land, the Lebanese *umma* is, in its essence, a Maronite nation [*umma maruniyya*], just as the American nation is, in its essence, an Anglo-Saxon nation. Over the course of history, the Maronites in Lebanon played the role of constituent nucleus in the formation of the Lebanese nation in this region of the Mountain, bordering the Eastern Mediterranean, exactly as the Anglo-Saxon group played the role of constituent nucleus of the American nation in the New World. . . . The will to coexistence, in Lebanon, as in the United States

[41] Nasr, *Mihnat Lubnan*, 67. "J. A. Nasr" was a pseudonym, likely for Joseph Abu Khalil, the editor of the Phalange daily *al-ʿAmal*. Fawwaz Traboulsi, interview with the author, Beirut, March 8, 2017.

[42] Nasr, *Mihnat Lubnan*, 28. For the LNM as a façade for "Islamization," see the July 1976 pamphlet by the Lebanese Research Committee, "Génocide au Liban," 58–60, Holy Spirit University of Kaslik Special Collections.

> of America, principally stems from the natural propensity of the Maronites and the Anglo-Saxon "Puritans" to the absolute freedom of man and his dignity. . . . The war on the Maronites is a war on Lebanon.[43]

This racialized and essentialized vision of sectarian exceptionalism—which, as we will see, was embodied in FFML military practices—brooked scant opportunity for reform. As Phalange Party president Pierre Gemayel clarified, the constitution and the National Pact together "gave the Lebanese Christians guarantees which freed them from fear."[44] Instructively, he underlined that the unwritten "National Pact is stronger than all written agreements," because it ordered many of the customary allocations of state office, not the constitution. His party urged the restoration of state security before any reform.[45] The FFML's domestic aims were intertwined with its deeply anticommunist and philo-colonial international policy that set it firmly within a global tradition of counterrevolution. Years prior to the opening of hostilities, FFML elements cultivated support from a constellation of imperial, colonial, monarchical, and conservative states, including the US, Israel, Jordan, Iran, Saudi Arabia, France, and Britain.[46]

Participation: The Muslim and Christian Establishments

In contrast to the LNM's detailed reform program, the slogan of participation (*musharaka*), predominantly raised by the Sunni Muslim political establishment along with some liberal Christian figures, was an expedient idea that was never clearly defined by those who called for it. The basic idea was to preserve political sectarianism while increasing the prerogatives of the

[43] Khuwayrī, *Ḥawādith Lubnān 1976*, 3:487–89. See also Rabbath, *Formation Historique*, 608–9. For a critical history of "Anglo-Saxon" ideology, see, e.g., Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny*. On the LRC, see Kattar, "Lebanese Study Committee."

[44] *Monday Morning*, June 2, 1975.

[45] September 5, 1975, Beirut 11197, Access to Archival Databases (hereafter AAD).

[46] Schulze, *Israel's Covert Diplomacy*, 86–91; Gendzier, *Notes from the Minefield*.

Sunni prime minister vis-à-vis the Maronite president. A second possibility included a shift to a 1:1 Christian to Muslim ratio in parliament instead of 6:5. For their part, the Muslim ulema also vigorously fought against the LNM's call for a civil personal status law and state secularization.[47] However, the veteran Sunni notables now lacked a mobilized constituency, which largely had gone over to the fighting organizations of the LNM.[48] This forced prime minister Rashid Karami and his predecessor and rival Sa'ib Salam into an exposed position. Both continued to cling to the remaining power of the Lebanese state and its security services while simultaneously calling for their reorganization with greater Muslim participation. Yet since the opening of the hostilities, Karami had refused to deploy the army because of its aid to the counterrevolutionary Right. This muddled position did not endear them to the Maronite Right, Christian conservatives, the armed forces, or to left-wing opinion. Proponents of participation eventually came to see Syria's Hafiz al-Asad, and more specifically his military, as the guarantor of such a solution.

Sinai II Fallout

By late August 1975, the political aims of the country's main factions had been clearly staked out. Yet the internal Lebanese political debate cannot be viewed in isolation. The violent struggle in Lebanon was closely related to the ebb and flow of the US-mediated Arab-Israeli settlement negotiations. The Lebanese Right viewed the conclusion of a US-moderated Arab-Israeli settlement as the optimum way to remove Palestinians from Lebanon *in toto*.[49] The announcement of the second disengagement agreement between Egypt and Israel on September

[47] See, ii.e., the fiercely anti-LNM and antisecular statement by the Council of 'Ulama', *al-Anwar*, March 25, 1976.
[48] Johnson, *Class and Client*.
[49] [ca. February 1976], "Why Are the Lebanese People Fighting?," Library of Congress, Charles Malik Collection, Box 145, Folder 7.

1, 1975, sent shockwaves through the Arab east. Sinai II, as it became known, clarified to all that Anwar Sadat was willing to abandon Palestinians and Syrians to their own fates in his pursuit of an agreement with Israel through the US. In this context, the "explosion" of conflict in Lebanon, as then US Secretary of State and National Security advisor Henry Kissinger recalled in his memoirs, suited US interests because it "abated the pressures for a resumption of the peace process."[50] The civil violence was taken to new heights. "Unlike previous rounds, which were localized in one urban sector," wrote US ambassador George McMurtrie Godley, "this outbreak has skipped from Zahle to north Lebanon to Beirut like a fever coursing through different parts of an organism. The fever has drastically weakened the Lebanese body politic."[51]

The National Dialogue Committee

In this fateful and dynamic conjuncture, the Transitional Program structured the terms of the domestic and international political debate and military struggle. Not for the first time, Syrian foreign minister 'Abd al-Halim Khaddam's mediation brokered the ceasefire of September 23, 1975. This ceasefire, like many others before and after, eventually did not hold. Yet Khaddam's September mission was distinguished for its convening of a twenty-man "National Dialogue Committee" (*Hay'at al-Hiwar al-Watani*). The initiative brought together the country's leading political figures to work out an agreement on fundamental political problems.

The committee's composition was subtly informative of the implicit balance of power in the country and of Syria's preferences for incremental change within the sectarian system. Carefully composed of ten Christians and ten Muslims, the grouping presaged a possible shift toward equality of representation. There were four representatives each from the Maronite,

[50] Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, 1019.

[51] September 22, 1975, Beirut 11803, AAD.

Sunni, and Shi'i communities, indicating the growing political weight of the latter. Politically, the committee was probably more representative of actual influence than of parliament. Indeed, several participants concurred that there would be no need for a dialogue committee if the parliament accurately represented society.[52] Gemayel and Camille Chamoun spoke for the Christian nationalists and were backed by their conservative Druze ally Majid Arslan. The political center was made up of Karami, Salam, Raymond Eddé, and René Mu'awwad. Finally, the Left was well represented with five members of varying commitment to the LNM platform. No representative was close to President Sulayman Franjiyya, all but confirming his political eclipse.[53]

From the opening of the first session, Junblat launched a direct attack on political sectarianism and the sectarian composition of the committee. In a classic republican line of argument, Junblat instead desired a small national conference including groups unrepresented in either parliament or the dialogue committee, which would lead to a constituent assembly to write a new constitution, subject to approval by national referendum.[54] He urged agreement on the basis of policy commitments, not abstract principles, which must be to national unity over partition, a will for genuine coexistence, and amending the constitution and political system. "The struggle of ideas," Junblat insisted, "must win over the struggle of rifles."[55]

Gemayel immediately countered by announcing that the Phalange opposed discussing amending the constitution. He saw foreign inspiration behind all demands for change. "My basic

[52] Nasr, *Min 1975*, 221; *Monday Morning*, October 13, 1975; *Monday Morning*, October 20, 1975.

[53] September 26, 1975, Beirut 11967, AAD. By early October, Eddé, Salam, several other MPs, and ever more elements of society exasperated with the president's obvious failure called for Franjiyya's resignation. October 2, 1975, Beirut 12323, AAD.

[54] Nasr, *Min 1975*, 9–10.

[55] Nasr, *Min 1975*, 12.

contention," Gemayel speculated, "is that the Lebanese Muslim is committed to the current Lebanese formula, whereas the other ideas are imported, whether from some of the Arab regimes or whether they are inspired by Israeli plots." For Karami and the centrists, the question was how to interpret the constitution, not whether or not it should be amended. Former prime minister 'Abdallah al-Yafi chided Gemayel for speaking on behalf of Muslims and for dissimulating on political equality between Christians and Muslims. The question of reinterpreting or amending the constitution was secondary, he argued: "If you want the Muslims as a whole to stick to Lebanon, then the way is equality on the basis of knowledge and ability and not on sectarian considerations."[56] But Gemayel was unmoved. "The path you are traveling on," he retorted, "will lead to making Lebanon the twentieth Arab-Islamic state."[57]

There was less discrepancy on the matter of economic policy: while nearly every politician gestured toward the need for economic reform, most were deeply invested in the maintenance of Lebanon's laissez-faire capitalist structure, which they often called a "free economy" (*iqtisad al-hurr*). Junblat voiced his dissent, feeling that "there is no alternative to a planned economy . . . directed toward the interest of the masses." Yet the LNM had no illusions that it was able in this forum and at this point to establish the outlines of a significant welfare state, much less a socialist economy, and they did not press such issues.[58] Instead, the LNM saw the establishment of secular democratic institutions as the necessary precondition for economic reform to the benefit of the many. Among the Marxists, the Transitional Program was thought of in terms of Lebanon's bourgeois-democratic revolution.[59] While an LNM committee drew up an

[56] Nasr, *Min 1975*, 18.
[57] Nasr, *Min 1975*, 20.
[58] See, i.e., *Monday Morning*, October 13, 1975; *Monday Morning*, January 5, 1976.
[59] Traboulsi, *History of Modern Lebanon*, 203.

economic reform program that aimed to strengthen the historically marginalized productive sector, at the time Junblat insisted the plan not be released. The LNM leader did not want to repel the bourgeoisie—particularly its Muslim sector—from supporting what he considered the more pressing goal of abolishing political sectarianism. However, as Traboulsi wrote, Junblat would soon realize "the Muslim bourgeoisie was scared of him more than they were scared of the Phalange."[60]

Gemayel instead reoriented the discussions toward a more divisive issue, the Palestinian armed presence. Of course, the 1969 Cairo Agreement legalizing this presence lay at the heart of this debate on the theory and practice of Lebanese sovereignty. In Gemayel's view, the agreement should have been concluded secretly by the president, so as not to contradict the 1949 armistice agreement with Israel.[61] The Phalange leader contended the Palestinian resistance was not in control of the "thugs" within its ranks, particularly the "Rejection Fronts" [*sic*] who did not abide by the agreements between the government and the PLO. Gemayel was met with stiff resistance from multiple challengers. "Every time we say that the resistance is undisciplined," Salam argued, "we are actually hiding the fundamental truth, which is that we, as Lebanese, are not disciplined. . . . I ask that we discipline ourselves before you discipline the resistance."[62] Junblat argued the Cairo Agreement was not unique in allowing for an allied military presence. Instead, he criticized the Phalange's arguments about absolute sovereignty. Not only were they outmoded by the "sixteenth century, or even the nineteenth" by the existence of international agreements limiting individual state action. They also studiously ignored Israeli infringements,

[60] Tarabulsi, *Surat Al-Fata Bi-Al-Ahmar*, 153. It is far from clear that, in this context, if the economic program would have been released, it would have worked in the LNM's favor.

[61] Nasr, *Min 1975*, 204.

[62] Nasr, *Min 1975*, 38–39.

which included occupied Lebanese territory and attacks throughout the country. Furthermore, Junblat argued that the series of campaigns against the resistance, whether by the state or militias, were all counterproductive. Every confrontation resulted in increasing rather than reducing Palestinian influence.[63] Eddé—the sole politician who opposed the Cairo Agreement upon its signing—agreed with Junblat's assessment.[64] Eddé, the former ally of Gemayel and Chamoun, charged that Phalangists were "a danger to the Maronite sect." They not only "create[d] Muslim victims" but also killed their Maronite opponents in the heart of Kisrawan, at checkpoints far removed from the frontlines.[65] Instead, Junblat proposed, "what we must discuss is the subject of popular sovereignty (*al-siyada al-sha'biyya*)."[66]

> The National Movement has ten times more authority in this country than the parliament, because it leads masses. Whether the parliament meets or not, it has no value. For the parliament doesn't represent the people, and for this reason we demanded popular representation, because sovereignty is built on correct popular representation. . . . It's time for us to return to democratic government. Popular sovereignty is the basis of national sovereignty.[67]

As the dialogue sessions progressed, it was clear the only serious proposals came from the Junblat-led Left, whose Transitional Program literally set the agenda for the subsequent discussions.[68] Meanwhile, the obstruction from the Right did not abate. No Phalange or National

[63] Nasr, *Min 1975*, 35.

[64] Nasr, *Min 1975*, 37.

[65] Nasr, *Min 1975*, 187. Eddé's positions later earned him the support of the Joint Forces in the 1976 presidential election.

[66] Nasr, *Min 1975*, 190.

[67] Nasr, *Min 1975*, 190–91.

[68] The US embassy noted this with interest. October 24, 1975, Beirut 13224, AAD.

Liberal (NLP) representatives attended the final session of the Committee for Political Reforms, held on November 14, 1975. These stalwarts excepted, the committee issued its final recommendations:

(1) Abolish Article ninety-five from the constitution, Article ninety-six from the law of employment, abolish sectarianism from all general posts and in the formation the ministries.

(2) Establish a socioeconomic council representing all economic sectors. [The BLAC.]

(3) Abolish sectarianism from parliamentary representation, with the exception of Raymond Eddé, who agreed on the condition of the "complete secularization of the state" ("*al-'almana al-dawla al-kamila*").

(4) Lower the voting age from twenty-one to eighteen, with the exception of 'Abdallah Yafi, who suggested twenty.[69]

In other words, most of the main points of the LNM's Transitional Program were accepted by the majority of the members of the Committee on Political Reform. The Phalange and the NLP announced their opposition to committee's recommendations the next day.

Imperial Strategies of Containment

As the political victory of the Transitional Program became clear, vested internal and international interests were reluctant to accept the need for systematic change. Karami reiterated his position that the constitution should be "interpreted" and not amended.[70] Karami's intended concession to the FFML lacked any specifics, while the LNM criticized his attempt to bypass the National Dialogue Committee and its reform program. His initiative went nowhere. Externally, France attempted to insert itself, sending special envoy Maurice Couve de Murville on a mission intended to stimulate dialogue between Lebanese political and religious leaders—at the same

[69] Nasr, *Min 1975*, 340–41. Article 95 of the constitution stipulated that there must be a temporary yet unspecified balance of sectarian representation in the ministries and public employment (reinforced by Article 96 of the 1959 law of employment).

[70] November 22, 1975, Beirut 14426, AAD.

time as Lebanon's own dialogue committee had already reached its conclusions on the necessary and possible political reforms. A Vatican mission likewise failed to persuade the FFML leaders to make concessions.

US officials took notice of the crucial political deliberations. While US state and capital interests had long been wary of Junblat's politics and alliances—in the early 1950s Americans viewed him as a potential Lebanese Muhammad Mossadeq—Ambassador Godley wrote he was impressed with the Transitional Program's "inherent reasonableness," described as "paradoxically moderate in content."[71] If "Christian rightists have legitimate arguments against some of [its ideas]—in general they can hardly be called extreme except in the peculiar context of Lebanese politics." In fact, Godley saw in the program an opportunity for the situation to be contained. If "moderates" responded to the proposals "constructively," Junblat and his allies might be mollified, leaving only "the real radicals more or less isolated on the extreme fringe." "One hopes this possibility will d[a]wn on moderate Christians someday," he concluded. Godley's positive assessment led a State Department official to describe Junblat as a "sheep in wolf's clothing."[72]

Yet here as elsewhere, US acknowledgment of the necessity for substantial political reform did not translate into positive action to that end. The United States continued to most closely identify itself with prime minister Karami's initiatives.[73] Godley provided direct advice to Karami, urging him that it was imperative he stay in office, that he maintain the National Dialogue Committee, and that he compromise with the Christian conservatives.[74] US support for

[71] November 22, 1975, Beirut 14495, AAD. For Mossadeq comparison, see Gendzier, *Notes from the Minefield*, 161–66.

[72] November 24, 1975, State 277410, AAD.

[73] November 1, 1975, Beirut 13625, AAD.

[74] See October 11, 1975, Beirut 12667, AAD.

Karami was furthermore clearly communicated to the Soviet embassy in Beirut, whereas the Soviets conveyed their endorsement of Junblat to their US counterparts.[75] For his part, the record of conversations between US officials and Karami indicates that he was far more concerned with Junblat than with the FFML.[76] Karami's attitude was typical of the political class who tended to feel their position threatened far more by LNM-PLO mobilization than by the Christian Right's call for restoration of security. The same held for the US. While Godley and the US embassy often expressed exasperation with what they called "the Christian Rejection Front's" intransigent obstruction of meaningful reform the Americans did not pressure them to modify their position.[77]

In the highest echelons of US policy, the Washington Special Actions Group met in mid-October 1975 to define the nature of the Lebanese conflict and US interests therein. CIA Director William Colby argued for a policy intending to reshape the internal Lebanese political order. "We have to recognize that there must be a greater position for the Moslems," Colby summarized.[78] Kissinger chafed. "I want to define our own interests. I have no particular interest in Lebanon's internal affairs if they do not involve outside countries."[79] The group realized the Phalange were the Americans' only solid "counter-weight." The defeat of the Phalange and the sectarian regime could have startling regional effects that threatened to undermine years of US efforts at pacifying the Arab-Israeli war. Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Joseph Sisco reasoned that Lebanon "could turn to a leftist-radical orientation," which "would invite

[75] October 23, 1975, Beirut 13170, Gerald Ford Presidential Library, Presidential Country Files for the Middle East and South Asia (hereafter PCFME), Box 25, Lebanon: State Department Telegrams, To SECSTATE: NODIS (3).

[76] Karami considered Junblat "totally irresponsible and . . . contributing nearly as much as the president to the demise of Lebanon." October 11, 1975, Beirut 12667, AAD.

[77] October 22, 1975, Beirut 13134, AAD.

[78] *Foreign Relations of the United States* (*FRUS*) *1969–1976*, 26: 933. The minutes are not yet fully declassified; the Israeli role appears to be the focus of the redactions.

[79] *FRUS 1969–1976*, 26: 935.

outside intervention and all the work we have done with Egypt, Syria and Jordan could be upset."[80] Kissinger reiterated his distaste for becoming too directly involved in Lebanon's internal arrangements. Instead, he urged further study of the military contingencies and continued consultations with Israeli and Lebanese officials.

White Terror/Red Terror

After the weapons of criticism were silenced, the criticism of weapons escalated to new heights. In response to the National Dialogue Committee's recommendations for political reform, the counterrevolutionary militias again took the military offensive. This led the contending mass movements to launch a series of interlocked offensives to impose their will. These offensives should be understood as exchanges of white and red terror—frightening waves of violence intended to conserve or transform the political order in a situation of political foundation—rather than manifestations of allegedly primordial sectarian hostility.[81]

Over the next month, the FFML executed a succession of massacres and expulsions of Muslims and Palestinians (Christians and Muslims) from east Beirut. The logic of this white terror was clear: sectarian partition was preferable to compromise, therefore every Muslim was suspect and exterminable in its areas of influence, whether Lebanese or Palestinian, partisan or not.[82] Black Saturday, Harat al-Ghawarina, Sibnayh, Dbayya, Maslakh, Karantina: these operations expelled over 30,000 from their homes, while hundreds were summarily executed. After so many losses, the Joint Forces responded to white terror with red terror. Damur, Jiyya,

[80] *FRUS 1969–1976*, 26: 936.

[81] On violence, terror, and religion in the context of revolutionary situations, see Mayer, *The Furies*.

[82] While the proximate cause may have indeed been spontaneous vengeance, the presence of corporate bodies of non-Christians and non-Lebanese within predominately Christian districts had long been a source of anxiety for conservative Christians—particularly but not exclusively Maronite. See Joseph, "Working-Class Women's Networks."

and Sa'diyat: by January 23, 1976, some 20,000 residents of the region, mostly Christian and under Chamounist control, fled, while the remaining 150 civilians and militiamen were killed in the sacking of Damur.[83] Notably, Junblat's PSP did not join the offensive, which instead opened Druze villages to the Christian refugees and attempted to facilitate their return shortly thereafter.[84]

The terrors further polarized social divisions and partitioned the country *de facto*, if not *de jure*. On both sides, animosity for the enemy deepened while the necessity of the friendly party-militias was reinforced. Yet the rivers of blood spilled temporarily appeased the protagonists. On January 22, the seventh Syrian mediation mission, backed by the Syrian-controlled troops of the Palestine Liberation Army, succeeded in securing a durable ceasefire.

Consecrating Political Sectarianism: The Constitutional Document

Presidents Franjiyya and Asad closely cooperated in search of a political solution, often with the input of Karami. The resulting seventeen-point "Constitutional Document" (*al-Wathiqa al-Dusturiyya*) was announced on February 14. Its first point ended the possibility of significant political change. It consecrated political sectarianism by putting into words what the constitution carefully avoided: the presidency was reserved for a Maronite; the premiership for a Sunni; and the speaker of parliament for a Shi'i.[85] The plan changed the ratio of Christians to Muslims in parliament from 6:5 to 1:1 and called for the prime minister to be elected by parliament as opposed to a presidential appointment. It insisted on press censorship and effective Syrian tutelage over both Lebanese and Palestinian security. Finally, on the issue of Lebanon's identity

[83] Sayigh, *Armed Struggle*, 376.

[84] Taqi al-Din, *Al-Yasar Al-Lubnani*, 92; *Monday Morning*, February 2, 1976.

[85] For the Constitutional Document's full text, see 15 February 1976, *an-Nahar*. Not even the US expected the presidency to remain reserved for Maronites, much less the sectarian allotment of the three top posts. February 14, 1976, Beirut 1427, AAD.

and international affiliation, the text flatly declared Lebanon an "Arab country." The document was crafted to satisfy the lowest common denominator among establishment political leaders while isolating the LNM-PLO alliance.

The public received the plan with great skepticism. Could Lebanon's furies be tamed by such a minor adjustment to the sectarian regime? While welcoming the Syrian mediation effort, Edmond Rabbath slammed its attempt to limit the state's top three offices to specific sects. Besides posing a potentially "insurmountable obstacle to the gradual secularization of the State," he added, "talking of Lebanese democracy under such conditions is utterly grotesque." Instead, Rabbath affirmed "the Islamo-Progressive demands for the abolition of political confessionalism are well-founded."[86] Greek Catholic Bishop Grégoire Haddad argued that "the first step towards the *new Lebanon* must be the deconfessionalization and secularization of the state."[87] Former prime ministers Salam and Yafi voiced their opposition.[88] The marginal Lebanese branch of the Muslim Brotherhood opposed the document and called for "the abolition of political sectarianism at all levels."[89] Riyad Taha, the president of the Press Syndicate, vowed to "resist . . . by all possible means" the proposed restrictions on press freedom, Lebanon's "one and only quality or virtue."[90] Junblat and the LNM immediately came out against the agreement, as did Eddé, who objected to Lebanon's internal structure being decided in and by Damascus.[91] Despite the

[86] *Monday Morning*, February 9, 1976.

[87] *Monday Morning*, February 16, 1976.

[88] February 21, 1976, Beirut 1602, AAD.

[89] February 21, 1976, al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya fi Lubnan, "al-Wathiqa . . . wa-l-Matalib al-Islamiyya," AUB, Linda Sadaqa Collection, File 35, al-Tawa'if: al-Ta'ifa al-Sunniyya.

[90] *Monday Morning*, February 23, 1976.

[91] February 21, 1976, Beirut 1602, AAD; *Monday Morning*, March 1, 1976.

widespread opposition, the US embassy did not expect the opposition to amount to its obstruction given its Syrian backing.[92]

The Constitutional Document found its support in the centers of power. Karami and Mufti Hasan Khalid rallied around the document.[93] Imam Musa al-Sadr, the head of the Shi'ite Higher Committee and the Movement of the Deprived, switched to endorse this solution after initially backing the Transitional Program. In a reversal of their past anti-Syrian politics, the FFML saw in it the last chance to save Christian political privilege and the opportunity to divide Syria, the LNM, and the PLO.[94] Given the extent of the reservations, the Constitutional Document was thus a dubious advance for the participation paradigm. Yet it challenged the abolitionists to either advance or retreat.

The Disintegration of the State

The legitimacy and sovereignty of the Lebanese state rapidly decomposed in the resulting stalemate. Between March 8 and 11, 1976, the army definitively split into predominantly Muslim Lebanese Arab Army (*Jaysh Lubnan al-'Arabi*, LAA), aligned with the Joint Forces, and the predominantly Christian remaining loyalists, many of whom aided the FFML.[95] In a bid to arrest the disintegration of the state, retired Brigadier 'Aziz al-Ahdab commandeered television on March 11 and called for the president and cabinet to resign within twenty-four hours. Ahdab's television coup, supported by Fatah, the largest Palestinian faction, carried some tangible social support as a result of Franjiyya's unpopularity and Ahdab's reputation as a credible figure calling

[92] February 17, 1976, Beirut 1457, AAD.
[93] February 21, 1976, Beirut 1602, AAD.
[94] February 20, 1976, Beirut 1568, AAD.
[95] *Monday* Morning, March 15, 1976.

for order.[96] After neither demand came to pass, sixty-nine out of ninety-nine deputies signed a petition for Franjiyya's resignation. Franjiyya obstinately clung to the presidency despite the opposition of most civilian, parliamentary, and military groups.

The climate of public opinion shifted into the LNM's favor. Its uncompromising stand on the abolition of political sectarianism—the defining characteristic of Lebanon's political order—its rejection of Franjiyya, and its independence from Syria all boosted its popular position, particularly among Christian liberals who sensed the impasse the FFML had led them into.[97]

The Arab Jacobins: The Mountain Offensive

At this moment Junblat and the LNM placed their fateful bet. The violence had thus far taken place along existing socio-communal fault lines, and the only offensives were essentially carried out by the FFML against minority pockets within otherwise homogenous social territory. The FFML continued to besiege over 100,000 people in Tal al-Za'tar, Jisr al-Basha, and Nab'a in east Beirut.[98] To break the siege and pass to the offensive, the Joint Forces needed to penetrate the northern area of Mount Lebanon, which was a predominantly Christian stronghold of the FFML. Furthermore, this would increase the pressure on the FFML forces to accept the Transitional Program as a political settlement.

Junblat calculated that the international conjuncture was in his favor and prevented a counterrevolutionary intervention from abroad. On the Arab political level, Egypt, Iraq, and Libya were eager to contest Syria's growing influence in Lebanon. Both Fatah and the Rejection Front were chafing at Syrian attempts to impose its control over the Palestinian resistance. This

[96] Sayigh, *Armed Struggle*, 380. Ahdab, a Muslim married to a Christian, privately supported Raymond Eddé for president.

[97] Samir Franjieh, "Post-Ahdab Lebanon," *Monday Morning*, March 22, 1976.

[98] Sayigh, *Armed Struggle*, 372; Traboulsi, *History of Modern Lebanon*, 201.

Arab pressure opened the question of Asad's position within Syria. Would the alliance with the FFML against the PLO-LNM expose Asad to internal opposition within the Ba'th? Furthermore, the threat of an Israeli counterattack was another significant check on Syrian military power. The Lebanese and Palestinian Left also calculated that the Soviet Union would welcome their military victory and could prevent the Syrians from intervening against them.[99] And in the immediate wake of the US defeat in Vietnam, Western powers could hardly be expected to directly intervene. Internally, the political winds were in the LNM's sails, and the international balance of power suggested the time was propitious for a push for military victory.

For many, the precedent of Mount Lebanon's sectarian violence of the nineteenth century weighed heavily over the contemporary political contest.[100] This historical experience was certainly one among many factors guiding Junblat's policy.[101] Yet unlike the FFML's racialized ethnonationalism, Junblat's military adventure drew upon a sectarian reading of the past to impose political equality in the present. Far from a campaign of communal vengeance and unification, it was opposed by most of the Druze notables.[102] Shaykh Farid Hamadah and Emir Faysal Arslan, Junblat's closest rival for Druze leadership, threw in their lot militarily with the FFML. Shaykh al-'Aql Muhammad Abu Shaqra assembled a high-level team of Druze spiritual leaders who made their pilgrimage to Damascus to declare their support for Asad's Constitutional Document. Two members of Junblat's own parliamentary bloc dropped their support. With the mountain offensive, Junblat thus broke decisively with the sectarian leadership of his community.

[99] Taqi al-Din, *Al-Yasar Al-Lubnani*, 93; Sayigh, *Armed Struggle*, 383–84.
[100] See Makdisi, *Culture of Sectarianism*.
[101] See Joumblatt, *I Speak*.
[102] Taqi al-Din, *Al-Yasar Al-Lubnani*, 93–94.

Instead, he mobilized military forces based on the multisectarian LCP, OCAL, LAA, Murabitun, and a loyal officer from the LAF.[103] On the Palestinian side, the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine and the Arab Liberation Front joined the battle, as well as Fatah, which relocated its top military leadership to ʻAlayh for the venture.[104] In terms of fighters, the LNM factions were far outnumbered and bested by their battle-hardened Fatah counterparts.[105] But the LNM took the lead in administering the areas they controlled and captured, under the auspices of their "Popular Administration in the Mountain" (*al-Idarat al-Shaʻbiyya fi al-Jabal*), featuring experienced administrators, politicians, civil leaders, and tested party cadres. The council was headed by Kamil Hassan of the SSNP, featuring the former ministers ʻAbbas Khalaf and Khalid Junblat (PSP), Bishop Gregoire Haddad, Maurice Nuhra (LCP), Sulayman Taqi al-Din (OCAL), Dawud Hamid (PSP), and Shaykh Wadiʻ Talhuq, the mayor of Bhamdun. The Popular Administration supported the villages with supplies and food, often with a massive effort by women's groups. According to Taqi al-Din, Junblat took broad precautions not to upset the multireligious coexistence in the mountain as much as possible. He forbade attacks on Christian populations, denied the Palestinian armed forces from wielding authority in local administration, and maintained a network with a broad range of Christian figures. Not all the LNM's efforts were successful, such as the attempt to create local courts, whose instances of corruption failed to set a "progressive" example.[106] However, by late March 1976, the Joint Forces of the LNM-PLO controlled some 82 percent of the territory of Lebanon, containing 73 percent of the

[103] A major proponent of the mountain offensive was George Hawi, LCP politbureau secretary and a Greek Orthodox Christian from Mount Lebanon. Hawi personally commanded his fighters in battle. Al-Baṭal, *Jūrj al-Baṭal*, 260.

[104] Sayigh, *Armed Struggle*, 382.

[105] Taqi al-Din, who took part in the venture, recalls the size of the forces at about 500 LCP, 200 OCAL, and small contingents of the Murabitun and the LAA, who contributed heavy weapons.

[106] Taqi al-Din, *Al-Yasar Al-Lubnani*, 97.

population.[107] Even Yasser Arafat viewed the prospect of a Syrian invasion against the PLO as "inconceivable."[108]

Plotting Restoration

The situation of the increasingly imperiled Maronite Right worried Damascus, Washington, 'Amman, Tel Aviv, and Paris. Syrian General Hikmat Shihabi revealed to US Ambassador to Syria Richard Murphy on March 14, 1976, that he saw "no way to bring Lebanese situation under control other than to introduce regular Syrian forces."[109] Kissinger read this as a key signal of Asad's intent and desire to consult.[110] Thus began the famous "Red Line" negotiations between the US, Syria, and Israel over the acceptable scope of a Syrian military intervention in Lebanon.[111] The objective for these parties was to prevent a revolutionary victory in Lebanon without sparking a wider regional conflagration.

While Kissinger often professed to be agnostic on the internal political arrangements in Lebanon, he realized at this moment that maintaining the sectarian regime was indispensable for his regional strategy. "Deconfessionalization," Kissinger speculated, "would mean that the Christians would be made a permanent minority and Lebanon would become a pure Arab and a radical state, which neither Syria nor Israel would want on their borders."[112] US officials feared that an Israeli intervention would prove counterproductive by uniting the Arabs. Instead, Kissinger incentivized a Syrian intervention. He wanted Asad to know that if the Syrian initiative

[107] Petran, *Struggle Over Lebanon*, 193.

[108] *Filastin al-Thawra*, April 11, 1976; cited in Sayigh, *Armed Struggle*, 384.

[109] March 13, 1976, Damascus 1445, "Lebanese Developments—Syrian View," A2, RJS, Box 42, Folder 5, Lebanon (February–March 1976).

[110] Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, 1039.

[111] Only the outlines of this complex negotiation can be examined here. For more, see Wight, "Kissinger's"; Stocker, *Spheres of Intervention*; Shaaban, *Edge*; Weinberger, *Syrian Intervention*.

[112] *FRUS 1969–1976*, 26: 1012.

in Lebanon worked, "within two years he would have a substantial part of the Golan and the settlements."[113] By March 29, the State Department concluded that "the Christians" could no longer endure a protracted battle. Instead, it calculated that the object of US strategy should be to split Arafat away from Junblat via "a credible threat of Syrian intervention."[114] Finally, US policymakers acted to convince their Israeli counterparts to accept a Syrian intervention in Lebanon as primarily directed against the LNM-PLO forces.[115]

The Joint Forces Break with Damascus

Syrian opposition to the mountain offensive, which threatened to undo their proposed solution to the crisis, was well known from the beginning. But the formal break came when Junblat met Asad in Damascus on March 27, 1976. By all accounts, their seven-hour meeting sealed the rupture between the two men and their coalitions. Yet what specifically was said remains a point of contention. "Alas, as I kept telling President Assad and anybody who would listen," Junblat recorded, "the racist fascism of the Falangists, of Shamun and company, first had to be broken militarily if one was later to deal with it politically and, eventually, heal it psychologically."[116] He told Asad he needed about two weeks to defeat the FFML and abolish political sectarianism. Asad wanted Junblat to end the mountain offensive and support the Constitutional Document, which he expected to reorient Maronites toward Syria and away from Western sponsorship. Asad—and sympathetic accounts—cites the meeting as the moment that allegedly proves Junblat was primarily motivated by sectarian chauvinism rather than secular Arabism. Asad would later claim in his famous anti-leftist speech of July 1976, that Junblat told him, "They ruled us for 140

[113] *FRUS 1969–1976*, 26: 999.

[114] March 29, 1976, Harold Saunders, "The Christian Position in Lebanon and 'Arafat's Calculation of His Interests," A2, Records of Joseph Sisco (hereafter RJS), Box 43, Lebanon (February–March 1976) (folder 3).

[115] *FRUS 1969–1976*, 26: 995.

[116] Joumblatt, *I Speak*, 74.

years and we want to get rid of them [*badna nitlakhas minhum*] here!"[117] The day after their ill-fated encounter, on March 28, 1976, the Joint Forces reignited the fighting, vowing to press on until Franjiyya resigned, while Asad summoned Arafat to Damascus in the hopes of convincing him to withdraw Palestinian support for Junblat.

The open break between Syria and the LNM posed a serious dilemma for the Joint Forces. First, the rupture with Syria deprived them of the required strategic depth. Even if the LNM found material support from Iraq, Egypt, or elsewhere, Syria was in a position to block its delivery, which it did.[118] Fatah's military training camps, armament, and infrastructure were for the most part on Syrian territory. Second, the break threatened to undermine the alliance from within. The Syrian Ba'th sponsored Lebanese and Palestinian factions, which it now attempted to mobilize against the Joint Forces in a rival "National Front." On April 1, 1976, the pro-Syrian Lebanese Ba'th party led by 'Asim Qansuh condemned Junblat as an "imperialist stooge" seeking to invite foreign intervention, partition Lebanon, and embarrass Syria, "the fountainhead of Arab nationalism."[119] Following pressure from Syria, pro-Syrian organizations, and Arafat, Junblat agreed to a ten-day ceasefire beginning April 2.

Yet the rift continued to deepen as Junblat doubled down on the abolition of sectarianism as his final condition. "Lebanon today is the Rhodesia of the Arabs," Junblat declared. "All Arabs must realize this and help us in order to liberate Lebanon, whether by peaceful means or in a popular liberation war."[120] While the statement was demagogic in the sense that Lebanon was

[117] Asad strongly implied Junblat's alleged words meant "all Christians"—yet not even he attempted to directly put these words in Junblat's mouth. Al-Asad, "Khuttab." See also Seale, *Asad*, 281; Shaaban, *Edge*, 222–23; de Clerck, "Kamal et Walid," 163; Hazran, *Druze Community*, 179.

[118] Jordanian PM Rifa'i underlined this point in promoting a Syrian intervention to the US. March 26, 1976, Amman 1602, A2, RJS, Box 43, Lebanon (February-March 1976) (folder 2).

[119] *Monday Morning*, April 5, 1976.

[120] *An-Nahar*, April 1, 1976.

in no way a settler colony, it rammed home the inequality of political sectarianism and its imperial origins, which perpetuated minority rule—defined in sectarian terms—in most major areas of decision.

The Syrian Intervention and the Crisis of Arabism

By the end of May 1976, the Syrian intervention to impose a settlement, which had the explicit support of the US and a number its allies, had not succeeded. Even the coerced election of a new president supported by Syria and the US, Ilyas Sarkis, the former Central Bank director with no popular constituency, solved little. The Joint Forces remained popular and militarily strong throughout much of the country. Under this intense military pressure, even Bashir Gemayel grew wary of the FFML's pro-Syrian line. The young Phalange military leader stated that he was ready to consider the abolition of political sectarianism and adopt many of the points of the LNM program, and he met with Junblat on June 2. "We were within one inch of reaching an agreement with our adversaries," Bashir stated, "when Syrian troops intervened and reshuffled all the cards."[121]

Over the course of May 31–June 1, an estimated eight thousand Syrian troops and two hundred tanks poured across the border. The path of the Syrian military was met with stiff resistance by the Joint Forces. The LNM refused to budge while Fatah, the major military power of the PLO, was now convinced that Asad wanted to gain control of Palestinian decision making and was determined to resist. Neither, however, could defeat the Syrian army. Over the next five months, Asad eventually increased his forces to some twenty-five-thousand troops, which advanced cautiously inch by inch, taking time to assess the consequences of each move. The question of a possible Israeli counter intervention was rapidly dispelled. Israeli defense minister

[121] *Monday Morning*, June 14, 1976; *al-Hurriyya*, June 21, 1976.

Shimon Peres announced that they would not intervene in Lebanon because they understood that Syrian goals were "to strike against Yasser Arafat" and instigate "a Black September in Lebanon."[122] As for the US, the absence of a red light was as telling as the presence of a green light.

The Syrian invasion severely tested the idea of Arab solidarity, much less a united Arab nation. Lebanon became the setting of an Arab civil war. Aware of the widespread charges of collusion with the US, Asad refused to meet with its ambassador to Syria, Richard Murphy, for months after the Red Line consultations carried out in March and April. But Asad's Arab isolation and estrangement from the Soviet Union compelled them back together.[123] On August 7, Murphy delivered a private message from Kissinger to Asad: "There is no reward for losing in moderation and no substitute in some situation[s] for a military victory."[124] Asad reportedly "smiled broadly" after hearing the message. He evidently took the advice to heart, as the Syrian-backed FFML offensive against Tal al-Za'tar succeeded in conquering the camp just days later. With the elimination of some 200,000 Muslims and Palestinians from east Beirut, the FFML succeeded in their quest to establish a territorially contiguous, Christian, "Free Lebanon" purified of the alien menace. It took until mid-November, with Syrian units fighting side-by-side with Israeli-backed FFML militias and benefitting from sporadic Israeli attacks on LNM-PLO targets in the south, to dislodge the Joint Forces from their forward positions and compel them to surrender.

[122] *Monday Morning*, June 7, 1976.

[123] For instance, Ambassador Murphy shared with Syria US intelligence on Soviet support for the Joint Forces. August 4, 1976, Damascus 5147, PCFME, Box 32, Syria: State Department Telegrams, To SECSTATE: NODIS (15).

[124] August 7, 1976, Damascus 5202, PCFME, Box 32, Syria: State Department Telegrams, To SECSTATE: NODIS (15).

"The Great Arab Prison"

On March 16, 1977, Kamal Junblat, his bodyguard, and his driver were ambushed and executed. The assassination occurred shortly after their Mercedes passed a Syrian military checkpoint, while moving between Ba'qlin, a Druze village, into the area of Dardurit, a Christian village. Junblat's assassination—and most accuse Syrian intelligence for the deed—ignited intermingled political and sectarian passions. In the ensuing days, some 129 Christian villagers in the Shuf region were indiscriminately massacred in revenge by their Druze neighbors.[125] This upheaval was of course but one incident in a chain of carnage. For some of the attackers, they were exacting vengeance for the Phalange's massacres and expulsions of Druze during their prior Syrian-backed campaign to retake the mountain.[126] That the post-assassination paroxysm in the Shuf was the first of its kind suggests that the LNM leader was a significant brake on exchanges of sectarian vengeance during his lifetime. In counter-retaliation, FFML militias began expelling Druze inhabitants in the mixed Matn region, and then began shelling the southern Druze town of

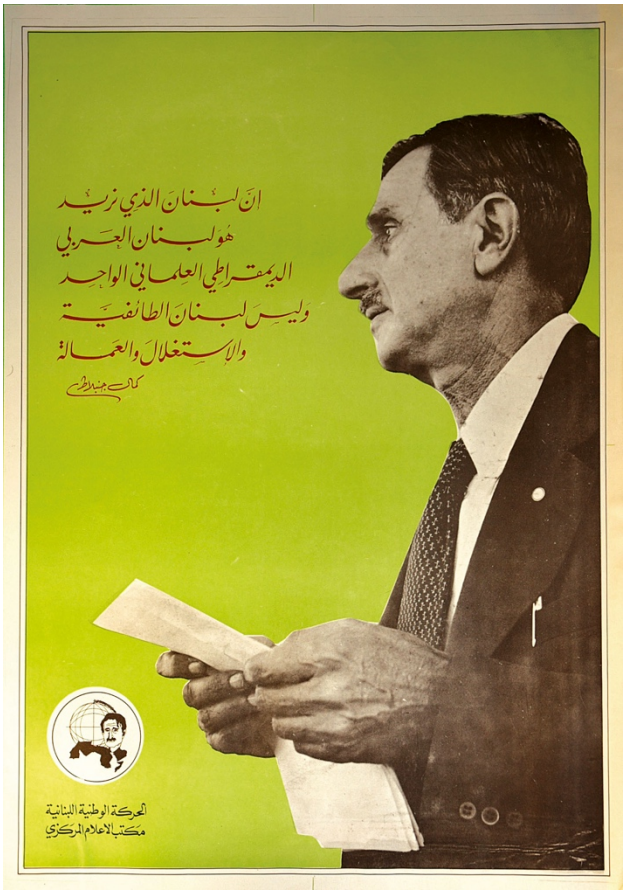

Figure 3. Kamal Junblat quoted: "The Lebanon we want is an Arab, democratic, secular, united Lebanon, and not a Lebanon of sectarianism, exploitation, and collaboration." Lebanese National Movement, ca. 1978–79. Source: SignsOfConflict.com and the PSP Archives.

[125] March 22, 1977, Beirut 1260, AAD. On the LNM's shocked silence over this massacre, see Al-Bizrī, *Dafātir*, 135.

[126] Particularly in Salima, Arsun, Kfar Silwan. Taqi al-Din, *Al-Yasar Al-Lubnani*, 97.

Hasbayya.[127] With the Syrian occupation ratified by President Sarkis, the FFML, the PLO, the US, and the Arab League—and with Israeli assent—the assassination of Junblat removed the most galvanizing figure of Lebanese opposition to the restoration of the sectarian regime and to the US-enforced regional order. "Kamal Jumblatt's passing," Georges Corm wrote, "also symbolized the end of the Jacobin dream of the Arab Left."[128]

Far from an abstract theoretical treatise, the Lebanese National Movement's Transitional Program was a public declaration designed to "arm the rising and growing popular movement" with immediate and clear objectives amid the shifting terrain of an international civil war.[129] It built on at least a decade of popular struggles for improved working and living conditions, the organization of nonsectarian political parties and unions, and the right to resist Zionist settler colonialism and imperial dependency. Despite its modest title calling for "reform," the character and quantity of demands foretold a qualitative change in regime from sectarian to popular sovereignty. This point was not lost on its local, regional, and international adversaries, who could brook no compromise on the maintenance of political sectarianism. Over the course of the program's announcement in summer 1975, to the adoption of its major planks by the National Dialogue Committee in the fall, through the Joint Forces' mountain offensive of spring 1976, the LNM had mobilized a hegemonic bloc politically and militarily for the abolition of sectarianism, and together with the PLO had come to control most of Lebanon's territory and inhabitants. The preservation of sectarian regime in 1976, with only minor modifications to the existing arrangement, did not reflect the balance of forces in Lebanon, and neither was it inevitable due to an allegedly sectarian social fabric. Rather, the US-orchestrated defeat and decapitation of the

[127] March 23, 1977, Beirut 1296; March 24, 1977, Beirut 1324, AAD.
[128] Corm, *Fragmentation*, 157.
[129] al-Haraka al-Wataniyya al-Lubnaniyya, *Watha'iq*, 9.

National Movement was a contingent outcome principally achieved through the massive intervention of the Syrian military, with Israeli assent. If Asad intended his police action as bringing order to chaos, thus justifying a role for him in the international negotiations over Palestine, his bold move actually manifested the state of colonial power in the *mashriq*.

Following this decisive rout, the diverse coalition that was the LNM began to founder as the revolutionary upsurge of the late 1960s and early 1970s transitioned into stalemate, disillusionment, and uncertainty. But the war was an impasse for far more than the LNM: the FFML, Syria, the US, and Israel would each be stung with critical defeats to come. In the process, the previous decades of popular, organized, and secular revolutionary struggle in the Arab world, which had challenged imperial, Zionist, and authoritarian rule, gave way to an assortment of one-party states, absolutist monarchies, and military regimes. In one of Kamal Junblat's final interviews, he likened the regional order to "the Great Arab prison."[130] The structures of political sectarianism in Lebanon, Zionist colonization in Palestine, Arab authoritarianism, and US imperial power were interrelated. Their abolition is as well.

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[130] Quoted in Batatu, "Some Reflections," 3.

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