

# Murder of Gemayel Targets Iran, Escalates Crisis in Lebanon

by Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

“Isn’t it strange that whenever the situation would become slightly, slightly toward engagement with Syria, every time this happens, immediately an assassination takes place? Some anti-Syrian politician would be assassinated and immediately the whole context changes again against involvement with Syria?” This is how the Syrian Ambassador to the United States, Imad Moustapha, put it in remarks to *CNN* on Nov. 22, following the murder of Pierre Gemayel, a Lebanese Christian political leader and Minister of Industry—which was promptly blamed on Syria.

Ambassador Moustapha’s remarks identify an important feature of the ongoing destabilization of Lebanon, which is,

however, only one piece of a larger mosaic. In his Nov. 23 characterization of the larger picture, Lyndon LaRouche stressed that the Gemayel murder is a signal that the Dick Cheney/Israeli Mafiya networks plan to attack *Iran* in the near future (see accompanying article). That attack is, in turn, part of a long-standing program for destroying Southwest Asia as a whole.

A useful point of reference is the “Clean Break” strategy paper drafted in 1996 by the Cheney circles for then-Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel: It projected regime change through war and other means, in Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, and Iran, for the greater glory of “Greater Israel.” The 2003

Iraq War started the process, followed by the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri in 2005, which was then blamed on Syria, and used to force a withdrawal of Syria’s troops from Lebanon. Regime change took place in Beirut, with Hariri’s son, Saad, assuming responsibility as head of the parliamentary majority, alongside a pro-American government under Prime Minister Fuad Siniora.

The next step took place in July 2006, when Cheney’s friends in Israel launched a war against Lebanon, in an attempt to eliminate the Hezbollah resistance, as preparation for a strike against its ally Iran. Now, with the murder of Gemayel, the screws are being tightened again against Syria and Iran, in preparation for the final assault.

## Civil War in Lebanon?

As soon as the news broke of Gemayel’s death, wild accusations were launched, left and right, against Syria—and Iran—as the culprits. The head of the March 14 movement, the anti-Syrian majority in parliament, Saad Hariri, interrupted a press conference to accuse the Syrian regime of “trying to kill every

**Lebanese Industry Minister Pierre Gemayel**, a 34-year-old Christian Maronite politician, was killed “by gunshots on his convoy near the Mar Antonios church in the region of Jdaideh,” north of Beirut, according to the state news agency. Witnesses said Gemayel was apparently driving the car when it was hit by a car from behind, after which gunmen jumped out and shot him in the head.

Gemayel was the son of former President Amin Gemayel, a leading figure of the anti-Syrian camp. He was the nephew of President-elect Bashir Gemayel, who was murdered in 1982 at the height of Lebanon’s 15-year Civil War. His grandfather was Pierre Gemayel, the founder of the Kataeb (Phalangist) party.



Kataeb.org

*An election poster for Pierre Gemayel, Lebanon’s Industry Minister and scion of the Gemayel clan, one of the country’s most powerful Christian families, the bastion of the Phalangist party.*



U.S. State Dept.

*Lebanese Prime Minister Fuad Siniora with U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. The Bush Administration is pushing for a confrontation between the Siniora government, and Hezbollah and Syria.*

free person” in Lebanon. “The cycle [of killings] has resumed,” he said. “We believe that the hands of Syria are all over the place,” he said. “This is not a time to give up. Blood has been shed to free our country from the hands of the regime, from the regime that was involved in killing Rafik Hariri, in killing a lot of people,” he said.

President Bush did his part by calling for an investigation into “those people and those forces” behind the killing. “We support the Siniora government and its democracy and we support the Lebanese people’s desire to live in peace and we support their efforts to defend their democracy against attempts by Syria, Iran, and allies to foment instability and violence in that important country,” said Bush. He called on the UN Security Council to move quickly to establish an international tribunal to investigate the murder of Rafik Hariri.

Walid Jumblatt, leader of the Druze in Lebanon, in an interview with Deutschlandfunk, German national radio, on Nov. 22, accused Syria in unambiguous terms: “I believe that the Syrian government is behind it,” he said, linking the murder to the progress being made toward an international tribunal to investigate the Hariri murder. “The murderers, who opposed such an international tribunal, belong first and foremost to the Syrian regime. They have killed a minister and parliamentarians, to drive fear into the Lebanese people. I accuse the Syrian regime above all.”

Jumblatt raved against Damascus. Asked about the implications of the murder for Lebanon, he answered: “We will never find peace and quiet, until those responsible for this murderous regime are condemned somewhere. . . . With this murderous regime in Damascus, there will never be an independent, free, and democratic Lebanon.”

Asked whether French and U.S. pressures could not push Syria to cooperation, Jumblatt had this to say: “This was, from

the very beginning, a regime of murderers and no one can get these people to change their methods. The leader in Damascus is an evil and sick man. Diplomacy will not change this either. The only way is to convict him in a court, thrust him into a corner, and make him afraid.” As for Hezbollah, he said: “Hezbollah is there, it is a state within the state. It is in the service of Syria and paid by Iran. . . .”

When thousands gathered in Beirut for the funeral of the slain Christian leader, the mood was vehemently anti-Syrian, and posters of Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah as well as Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad were demonstratively trampled on and burned. The scene appeared set for confrontation between the anti-Syrian and pro-Syrian forces.

This all unfolds against the backdrop of a political crisis that has been building since the end of the Israel-Lebanon War last Summer. Hezbollah emerged from that conflict victorious, not only militarily, but politically, and made a bid for a greater share of political power in the government, together with its Christian ally Michel Aoun. Talks between the official majority, led by Saad Hariri, and the parliamentary minority of Hezbollah, Amal, etc., were launched on the initiative of Amal leader Nabih Berri, Speaker of the Parliament, and a liaison to Hezbollah.

When the talks broke down, five Shi’ite members of the government resigned, followed by a sixth, a Christian, who did so to protest the absence of a major religious group in government. Saad Hariri, leader of the March 14 Forces, responded to the resignation of the first five ministers, by accusing Syria and Iran of being behind the move. “This resignation . . . was not a coincidence,” he said in a statement. “The March 14 Forces lament this step and see in it an attempt to foil the formation of the international tribunal. We agreed twice to Speaker Nabih Berri’s call for dialogue and consultations to maintain stability . . . but it turned out that some parties didn’t want this and their hidden intentions became clear to us. . . . It is a Syrian-Iranian plot to topple legitimate rule in Lebanon, destroy the Paris III donor conference, annul the tribunal, and place this country back under the former [Syrian] mandate.”

Saad Hariri went so far as to say that the plan was “done by the Syrian regime and the [pro-Syrian] President Lahoud . . . who wants to assassinate Rafik Hariri a second time.”

Despite the resignations, the government voted for the establishment of the international tribunal, to be drafted by the UN, to deal with the Hariri murder. In response, President Emile Lahoud, a pro-Syrian whose ouster is demanded by Saad Hariri et al., declared the government and its vote to be unconstitutional. The ministerial resignations, he said, had rendered the government illegitimate, and any cabinet meeting, “absolutely illegal and unconstitutional. . . .”

Hezbollah responded by announcing it would mobilize its forces, the actual majority in the country, in peaceful street demonstrations, to force through an enlargement of the government coalition, to include more of its and Aoun’s representatives.



www.moqawama.org

*Hezbollah leader Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah is highly acclaimed throughout the Arab and Muslim world, for defeating Israel's invasion of Lebanon last Summer. Anti-Syrian Christian forces and Nasrallah's Shi'ite, pro-Syrian supporters appear to be heading for a confrontation.*

Then came the murder of Gemayel, which catapulted the crisis to a new level.

## Regional Developments

Two other important developments on the regional level must be taken into consideration, to understand the dynamic unleashed by this latest murder. First, it occurred on the heels of a breakthrough in Baghdad, where Syrian Foreign Minister Muallem and his Iraqi counterpart Hoshiyar Zebari, restored full diplomatic relations, after a 25-year hiatus. "We have signed, a little while ago, an agreement to restore complete diplomatic relations with Syria," Zebari told a joint news conference with his visiting Syrian counterpart Walid Muallem on Nov. 21. "[The] Iraqi flag will be raised in Syria and the Syrian flag will be hoisted in Baghdad," Zebari said. He added that the agreement on closer security cooperation had been reached after repeated U.S. accusations that Syria was letting insurgents and weapons cross its border into Iraq. "There was an agreement to have meetings between security officials from both countries and we also discussed developing commercial relations," he said.

Iraq had severed ties with Syria in 1980 in protest of Syria's support for Iran after the Iran-Iraq war broke out. Muallem said he hoped the move would put an end to U.S. criticism of Syria over its role in Iraq. "I do not want to go back to the former accusations. We seek future cooperation in all fields," he said.

Coming in the context of reports from Washington, that the Baker Commission and others are pushing for bringing

Syria into regional consultations, to help stabilize Iraq, the Syrian move was a clear sign of willingness to offer assistance. It was immediately understood as a gesture both to the U.S.-backed Iraqi government, and to the United States itself. Then came the murder of Gemayel.

The second aspect to mention, is that progress was being made also on the Syrian-Lebanese front, not only regarding political relations, but also in important transportation infrastructure cooperation. On Nov. 20, the *Daily Star* of Lebanon reported that Lebanon was finalizing an agreement with the Syrian Rail Authority, on a plan to reconstruct the rail link between the northern Lebanese port of Tripoli to the northern border crossing of Abboudieh, which would integrate it into the Syrian rail network. This is part of a stalled 2002 agreement to reconstruct the entire Syrian-Lebanese rail network. While Syria's network is relatively well de-

veloped, Lebanon's was destroyed as a result of the first civil war.

The new agreement opens the potential use of the port of Tripoli, not only for Syria but also for points as distant as Iraq and Turkey, as well as the rest of the region. The Syrian network links into Iraq, which has a well-developed rail network, via Turkey. One source involved in the negotiations pointed to the economic benefits of the project for Lebanon and Syria, since their economies are so intertwined. He told the *Daily Star*, "This is a relationship that no one can untie, though the U.S. certainly tries."

Director of Lebanon's Transport and Public Works Ministry, Abdel-Hafeez Kayssi, pointed out the installation of the 150 kilometers of high-speed passenger and freight rail could be completed within 24 months, once a design is agreed upon. Kayssi emphasized that this project "will benefit all parties," and thus has the potential to restore otherwise badly strained relations between Syria and Lebanon.

The project is part of a regionwide program to develop a 19,000-kilometer rail network, which was agreed upon through the signing of the Agreement on International Railways in the Arab Mashreq in 2003, under the sponsorship of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia. The Arab Development Bank and the Kuwaiti Fund are interested in financing the rail project. The entire network, added to the ambitious Saudi project for an east-west rail project which was recently finalized, would bring the region of Southwest Asia into the Eurasian Land-Bridge.