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IN THE WAKE OF THE REVOLUTION

Comments on Lebanese Affairs a Year After the 1958 Uprising

by Charles F. Gallagher

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CHARLES F. GALLAGHER, the author of this report, is based in Tangier and makes occasional visits to the Middle East to write about affairs of the Arab world. Upon completing a five-year program of Islamic studies, Mr. Gallagher joined the AUFS in 1956.

A little more than a year has passed since the Lebanese revolution and counterrevolution of May-October 1958 came to an end. The celebration here last week, on November 22, of Independence Day was for this reason unusually noteworthy as the first important national celebration under normal conditions since the "events," as they are almost always referred to here, of last summer and fall. As one newspaper tactfully remarked, "Independence Day was not celebrated last year as we were just emerging from the events." It was generally looked forward to with an eagerness to see how the Lebanese would react to a day on which they had officially been asked to demonstrate the depth of their reconciliation and prove a renewed national solidarity. And it provided for the foreign observer an opportunity to assess the meaning of the revolution to Lebanon, and the effects it has had in the ensuing year on the country's unique place within an Arab world which has itself changed considerably during that period.

From beginning to end Independence Day ceremonies had a distinct martial air to them. On Saturday night there was a torchlight parade of the colors through the streets, and a reception, with public acclaim, of the officers on the balcony of the Military Club. Sunday morning saw an impressive

The Lebanese Army parades on Independence Day.

march-by of black-bereted riflemen, the Gendarmerie, cadets of the military academy, and detachments of the Navy, followed by the steady rumble of the Tank Corps, while overhead screeching jet planes added a few more decibels to Beirut's already breaking-point noise level. Receiving the salute on the tribune, after having placed a wreath at the tomb of Lebanon's unknown soldier, was Fuad Chehab, President of the Republic, formerly the Commanding General of the Armed Forces.

At first glance it might have seemed just like another military-dominated police state display. What was there to distinguish Lebanon from the succession of Asian-African countries which have found that parliamentary democracy and free institutions are highly susceptible to crises of nationalist impatience and often ridden with inefficiency and corruption? It might have seemed, too, that the acclaim of the bystanders for the impressive show put on by the country's relatively tiny volunteer forces resembled the frenzied worship of a military strength which too often exists only on the parade ground as is the situation in several nearby states.

But this similarity is more apparent than real. It is not so easy to lump Lebanon with the countries from Egypt to Burma which have sought an answer to their problems of growth and stability by turning, voluntarily or involuntarily, to a one-party regime, a strong man or a clique of officers who have established a dictatorial apparatus which, it must often be admitted, functions at least for the moment more smoothly than their democratic predecessors. For the cheers of the crowds massed on the narrow sidewalks of Beirut's apartment house laden streets rang spontaneous and true, passing soldiers were hoisted on shoulders and carried off in a wave of patriotic enthusiasm which had a good-natured, slightly inebriated New Year's Eve feeling to it; and the warmth of popular affection for the new President was evident. One sensed that the Chief Executive and the Army, which is still conceived of as General Chehab's Army, represented something beyond mere military gusto and the shoutings of jingoism, and apart from the simple solution of despair in the trappings of responsible government which, although in disrepute and viewed with some cynicism, is still far from moribund here. The answer to the question of how Lebanon differs from other countries whose course it seems to be

President Chehab inspects the Color Guard on Independence Day.

following lies in an understanding of its peculiar background circumstances, the nature of the crisis through which it passed last year, and the character of the man who is now its head of state.

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Lebanon can be reasonably described as a mosaic of peoples and sects existing within a homogeneous total culture pattern of Arabism. The internal differences that separate the Lebanese are religious in the first instance, but they are now cross-linked to separate social and economic patterns which reproduce the diversity in other terms and even, under the stress of modern civilization, accentuate it. It does not suffice simply to say that it is a half-Christian half-Muslim country with the tensions that such a split might imply. Even within the framework of these broadly-defined confessional communities there is much infighting and nuances of position which have permitted at different times different minority alliances. The Maronites, the dominant Christian community, have traditionally held fast to the distant robe of Rome, and through it to Western civilization, but they and their Patriarch also feel paternally responsible for the Christian communities throughout the whole of the Middle East, an attitude which has as one result that policy decisions must be made in the light of not only Lebanese internal realities, but the situation in Egypt, Syria, and Jordan as well. That intraconfessional fraternity is not automatic is shown by the feelings of superiority which the Maronites have toward the Orthodox sects--the latter often accused, somewhat unreasonably, of either being too close to the Muslims, or of having favored the introduction of "atheistic communism" into the Middle East through their historic ties with Russia and the Eastern Church. Much the same haughtiness of a dominant orthodox body is found among the Sunni Muslims toward their Shi'a brethren, who in turn consider themselves an intellectual elite among the Muslims, while the heretical Druze mountaineers form a substantial bloc apart from the major communities and, on a political level, are divided among themselves.

Translated into other terms Lebanon has long been a land of fragmented minorities in social isolation. Since the earliest times the mountain has been a refuge area and the sea an opening to another world, which have produced repeated instances of withdrawal to one and flight across the other. As with all mountain refuge areas there has been produced a flowering of diversity, but withal an atmosphere of mistrust in the shadow of what was looked on as a monolithic Muslim-Arabism outside the gates. And the sea, which gave rise to the first seafaring and trading traditions of the Phoenicians, became in the 19th century the magic carpet of escape for the great numbers of Christian Lebanese who emigrated overseas. Thence, in a fascinating variation of the myth of magic flight--or in Toynbeean terms withdrawal and return--they have sent back in limited numbers their sons, in greater quantity their financial remittances which nourished the Christian community to a point where it was enabled finally to surpass its rivals in the struggle to win the country in a modern economic sense.

The existence of the overseas Community and the role it plays in Leb-

The sum of these social and economic divergences has been translated into a political life marked by constant compromise. Lebanon is a land without political focus, whose balances are maintained, precariously at times, between the pulls and tugs of discordant internal and external pressures. The formal checks-and-balances of the American system are replaced here by allowing the free counter play of the communities up to a certain point, and by seasoning the whole with a good dose of liberalesque anarchy. It is true that an executive-type presidential regime giving great powers to the head of state can in theory overrule Parliament, but the President himself is held in check by the forces of public opinion when sufficiently aroused, as they have been on two occasions recently. One, in 1952, when there was danger of the transformation of presidential rule into strong-man government, and again in 1958 when the President was rightfully felt by most of the country to represent, not all the Lebanese, but only one community among them. The agreement to allot specific governmental functions to representatives of the separate religious communities is the principal means for allowing the free play of the groups, and although it guards against an excess of domination by any of them, it often leads at the other extreme to immobilism. [The first postrevolution cabinet of four that aligned Rashid Karame, a so-called extremist Muslim leader of the revolution; Pierre Gemayel, the leader of the Christian counter-revolutionary Falange (Kataib); and a moderate Muslim and Christian to bridge the gap, was most illustrative of the principle of balance, although in the end it succumbed to pressure for representation from the other minority groups.]

The same dichotomy in balance exists between the feudality which commands absolute obedience on the part of the partisans of the clan-leader (which is what most politicians here are) toward the chief, and the untoward individualism of the Lebanese in nontraditional situations. This, too, is a product of the stimulus of history. Where dissident religious groups have succeeded in establishing their right to existence and have defied over the centuries the power of an orthodox religious-state, they will be willing to render unto God what is God's--whence the power of the priestly hierarchy among the Christian communities--but they will be wary of any Caesar. It is no accident that the taxi drivers who flirt hourly with death in this country put their trust in the religious objects which adorn their vehicles and remain indifferent to the traffic policeman who represents the state, to them almost nonexistent. Nowhere more than in Lebanon can be seen the enormous difficulty of resolving, within what Riesman has called a "male vanity culture" (where every man is a rival to every other and the only possible relations are either those of submission on terms of inequality or suspicious antagonism on terms of presumed equality), the problems of adapting this kind of society to the at least reasonably co-operative norms of the modern West.

The essential problem posed by the revolution in 1958 was that of co-operation. The uneasy coexistence between the communities was giving way under the stresses of Arab nationalism and the cold war, the first expressed most dynamically in the spring of that year by the enthusiastic union between Egypt and Syria, the latter by Lebanon's acceptance of the ill-fated Eisenhower

puts to all the Lebanese he meets: What has been the most important result of the revolution? The truth, difficult to get at anywhere, is doubly so in Lebanon because it is still next to impossible to get an answer which takes into account a kaleidoscope of opinion. Having asked many Lebanese Christians of all tendencies and stations this question, the most frequent answer was: the breakup of the opposition national front after it had achieved most of its aims. Many die-hard supporters of Chamoun up in the villages of the Metn will say frankly that the Government and the Americans sold them out to the Muslims. (Most of these Chamounites, it should be remembered considered that they had won the game when the American forces "came to their rescue.") Ask Muslims and most will say, with perhaps more reason, that it brought into being a fairer Government and one which takes into account the special position of Lebanon between the rest of the Arab countries and the West.

None of these answers, however, is the whole truth. The split among the leaders of the opposition is there, but it is secondary. Ex-rebel Karame is head of the government, and Messrs. Salam and Yafi are still "outs." They would like to see Parliament dissolved, but Sabri Hamadeh, who is quite pleased to be Speaker of the House, has no intention of bringing his speakership to an end. What is essential is that ward politics have been reduced again to the level of ward politics, but it is no longer easy to stir up the streets and call out the adolescent shock troops. Likewise, the attitudes of disgruntled Christian extremists who blindly reject any policy of co-operation with their co-citizens represent a nexus of instability but they should not be evaluated as anything more than vestigially interesting; it is not that way that an independent Lebanon is going to survive and prosper, and more and more Lebanese recognize this. The Muslims are probably closest to the truth in their views of the new state of affairs, but they are nowhere near so blindly attracted in 1959 to the siren call of Arabism from outside as they were before, for they have seen the difficulties that the last year has brought to Iraq and Syria.

It cannot be denied that one fundamental result of the troubles was to bring many people in Lebanon to their senses--at almost the last minute. The legalistic compromises which established the Lebanese state in 1943, but which were never much more than arbitrary divisions of power, have been cemented by a new sense of compromise, more in spirit than in form, in which all parties now recognize that none can gain an absolute upper hand. The contending groups have realized how perilously close they came to destroying a society which, they now discover--and especially as they take a new look at some other Arab states--had much of value for each of them. Added to this is an almost contrite awareness of the gulf which in the past separated the different communities in Lebanon and prevented lucid communication among them. As one prominent Lebanese said recently, "The fact that we can now speak openly of confessional problems is a sign that we are becoming rational about them. They are not solved yet, but they are no longer a taboo subject."

It is in this context that the role of the Army, and the reaction of most Lebanese to it during the Independence Day celebrations, can best be seized. At a time last year when the hardest thing for a Lebanese Diogenes to find

It is expressed within the traditional Lebanese format of compromise, for excess of zeal here, too, would destroy the chances of success. A gradual administrative reform is one of the principal means. A reorganization of the local and provincial administrations has begun, in order to eliminate the most flagrant examples of nepotism and to provide each community with a more equitable representation in the affairs of state. One story currently being told in Beirut illustrates the subtleties of reform. The Shuf region, primarily Druze in makeup, has been a traditional battleground between opposition clans, the Arslans and the Jumblatts. When it was recently decided to appoint a new qaimaqam (regional administrator) there, each faction at first put up a candidate and brought great pressure to bear to have him chosen, but finally a compromise between them was agreed upon and a delegation visited the President to announce that both sides favored the appointment of one man. Whereupon the President refused to name him to the post on the grounds that he was either a nonentity who would not be a satisfactory civil servant or, since he had persuaded these bitter rivals both to support him, he was much too clever to be trusted. And Chehab made his own appointment. No matter how apocryphal the details of this tale, they underscore what every observer agrees is a patient presidential resolve to provide the country with a high-level, honest body of officials--to the point that both the magistrature and the foreign service have been raided to find suitable talent and, for the first time, serious educational requirements are being insisted upon for posts in the provincial administration.

The question of the prestige of the state is closely connected with that of administrative reform. Always in some shadow in Lebanon, the dignity of the state was almost completely debased just before and during the revolution. Rebuilding it, a task realized to be primary by all perceptive members of the Government, is not easy in a country which has seen the highest offices used for personal profit, where charges of venality and corruption are bandied about by opposition newspapers, and where the social mosaic tended at all times to reinforce a spoils system that was taken for granted.

In this the problem of the possession of arms is central. The Lebanese are likely the most prolific weapons carriers in the world; every Lebanese acquaintance will tell you that he is the only one in the country who does not have a weapon--which makes him even more suspect. The keeping of arms was, of course, essential to the society in the past, where each village relied upon its own strength to repulse the attacks of hostile groups. It is still a part and parcel of traditional village life with its vendettas of honor and its fanfares of firing on any occasion from birth through marriage to death. The revolution proved to what extent everyone was armed--and how easy it was to slip weapons across the border when desired. This argument is now used by the Christian half of the country as a reason for refusing to disarm; they claim that if they do so they will be defenseless whereas their possible antagonists can easily obtain replenishments from neighboring Syria, as they did last year.

The upshot is that there has been no disarmament as yet and it is unlikely that much progress will be made for some time to come. But the state realizes the danger and has made the principle of civilian disarmament a

consonance with its realization that it is much more dependent on Cairo than on Baghdad. Lebanese businessmen are one of the most useful sources of information about what goes on in Iraq, and in deference to good relations Lebanon has politely refused to grant asylum to some of the more prominent opponents of the Baghdad regime. And for a Jordan which is surrounded by Israel, a hostile Iraq, and a United Arab Republic whose friendship at best oscillates between cool and lukewarm, Lebanon is an indispensable Arab window to the outside world. Just as with almost everything in the Middle East at the moment, a continuation of the status quo in Lebanon seems for all concerned to be by far the most desirable path.

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On the morning after Independence Day, newspapers prominently displayed photographs of President Chehab and Prime Minister Karame standing together in front of the statue to Riad Solh, the "Father of Lebanese Independence," and described the scene as a symbol of the 22nd of November. It was that--the joint rededication of the insurgent of Tripoli, now chief of government, and the Army leader, now chief of state, to the cause of Lebanese independence and unity. But the following Sunday, November 29, witnessed an even more spectacular demonstration of the need for the new Lebanon to proclaim aloud its intercommunity fraternity. The occasion was the celebration of the 23rd anniversary of the Falange (Kataib), the Right-wing Christian grouping founded in the '30's under the influence of the rampant fascism of the era, which has become in the year since the eclipse of Camille Chamoun a party holding a monopoly of Christian sentiment. When for the first time prominent Muslims such as Karame, and Souheil Idriss, a militant Muslim youth leader, attended the rally and spoke in terms of national solidarity and the reinforcement of the independence of Lebanon, it was clear that a profound change had indeed arrived--at least in respect to the leaders of the communities--for the appearance of Karame caused a certain sensation among part of the Muslim community, and it appears that the elite of each group is ahead of the masses in its attempt to create durable ties of mutual respect in self-interest.[2]

Prime Minister
Karame speaking
at the Falange Rally.

It is only natural that this should be so, for the task of developing a truly integrated national personality in Lebanon is not one which can be accomplished tomorrow, and it requires bold spirits to tackle the problem now. Too many individuals still do not see the need, and it is only under the compellingly gradual persuasion of men like President Chehab and the