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The following has the modest ambition of serving as a *vade mecum* that might help understanding the daily papers in the next weeks and months. It is based on several dozen discussions in Lebanon, north and south, east and west.

1. It is now evident to Lebanon's leaders, if not yet really to the man in the street, that a vulgar application of the zero-sum-game theory to the country's politics is not a sustainable option. The configuration of forces has changed during the war and keeps on evolving, but no sect could pretend to replace another in any automatic way. The high birthrate of the Shii Muslims is no more viewed as a successful vehicle for this sect's hegemony. The Maronites resist through geographical isolationism, the Druze with military means and awkward—even bizarre—alliances, the Sunni Muslims with Arab support, especially since the Mecca events on July 31, 1987, and the Amman Arab Summit's unambiguous condemnation of Iran. While no Maronite leader realistically dreams of a mere reassertion of the *status quo ante*, no other community seems able to assert its influence in any hegemonic or quasi-hegemonic way. The Christians are now indirectly benefiting from a growing feeling that without them, Lebanon would be quite easily swallowed by its neighbors.

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Already dissatisfied with the old elite's inability to recreate the Lebanese formula, the Lebanese are increasingly angry at the new warlords' unwillingness or inability to produce an alternative one. A renewed interest in pre-1975 institutions (ranging from the Maronite patriarchate to the trade unions, and from the Parliament to the business associations) is the sign that the Lebanese polity is now clearly opposed to anything that has to do with the militias, but

is yet unable to devise a settlement. For the time being, nostalgia for the "*belle époque*" leaders and institutions substitutes for the ability to devise a solution. Separatists and religious radicals have a strategy, but it is destined to fail. Unionists and moderates know that their hour will finally come, but they lack the determination and the strategy to bring about this outcome soon. The population is completely depressed by this duopoly of radicals who know what they want but will never reach it and of moderates who might prevail at the end but are at a loss as to how to get there.

2. Though the influence of several foreign powers is felt all over Lebanon, Syria seems to exert the only real, widespread, lasting influence. More than ever, Lebanon's stability depends on the relations between Syria and the West, however the West is defined. This has been the case from the creation of the modern republic, though very few Lebanese are ready and willing to recognize it. The creation of *le Grand Liban* in 1920 depended upon the outcome of the battle of Maysalun, in which the Arab government of Damascus opposed the troops of mandatory France. Only when General Gouraud's men were able to prevail, did Lebanon become palpable as a distinct state under French mandate. A number of years later, in 1936, only the acceptance by the Syrian national movement of the Lebanese state as a *quid pro quo* for the French government decision (under Leon Blum) to grant Syria her independence preserved Lebanon as a separate entity.

It was out of the strong bridgehead he had established for himself in Syria that Nasser was able, in 1958, to strike a deal on Lebanon with the Eisenhower administration, from which would result a decade of civil peace and state-building under President Fouad Shihab and his successors. Later, it was through Syria that thousands of Palestinian Fedayeen would come to Lebanon. Finally, Syria's pivotal role in the war that has erupted since 1975 does not even need to be documented. Yet, when Syria tried to go it alone (the Tripartite Accord of 1985), it could not succeed. A counterweight is still needed, and the Syrians will come, sooner or later, to recognize this imperative. Meanwhile, the Lebanese themselves must face the inevitable: the future of their country has heavily depended and will continue to depend on Syria's tortuous deals with the West.

There are other influential foreign powers, but they have proved to be much less effective and certainly less stalwart than Syria. Israel's interest in Lebanon seems to have reverted to the old pattern of using Lebanon as a sideshow to its militant repression of Palestinian nationalism and its containment of Syrian ambitions. Lebanon itself is still waning in Israeli policies, due

to the continuing intra-Lebanese fighting, which serves Israeli interests, the disarray of Sharon's strategy of vulgar satellization, and Israel's failure to devise a peace-targeted strategy in south Lebanon. Though it remains unlikely that Tel Aviv will actually support peace and reconciliation in Lebanon, no one expects an Israeli engagement of the horrific magnitude of 1982.

The Palestinians have made a comeback, but one that has proven to be quite fragile. While willing and able in the past to manipulate several Lebanese factions, the Palestinians seem now to be manipulated by Lebanese factions, and not only by the Muslim ones. By being pushed to defend their (political) existence in Lebanon against Amal and Syrian pressures upon them, the Palestinians have inadvertently adapted to a civil-war logic (not to one of a "national liberation"). Their strategy is increasingly defensive; to try to keep their own organizations' control over their scattered and partly destroyed quasi-cantons, the camps.

The Iranians are often portrayed nowadays as exerting the newest and (in some hasty reports) the most influential foreign influence in Lebanon. Such a view overestimates the depth of the revolutionary Iranian call among Lebanon's Shia and overlooks the heavy Iranian dependency on Syria's benevolence. It is true that Syria has accepted (and for a certain while had even encouraged) an Iranian presence in Lebanon for reasons that go far beyond Syria's policies in Lebanon, such as containing Iraqi influence to the west or preventing potential Iranian support for Assad's own fundamentalists. But it would be hazardous to draw from this that Syria is ready to share its prevalence in Lebanon with Iran, or that it would be unable, if and when it decides to do so, to substantially curtail the Iranian influence. This is all the more clear in view of two complementary factors: one is the very limited appeal of purely religious calls in Lebanon, a country where quasi-tribal confessional segmentation is very deep. The second is the increased vulnerability of the Iranian influence after the clear coalescence of a determined Sunni Arab will to oppose it, especially during and after the Arab summit

Western powers have been seriously affected by their undignified (though unequal) association with the Israeli invasion and by the nagging issue of the hostages, though Damascus seems to be coming to recognize that no lasting settlement is viable without some Western (mainly American) input. The Soviet Union, in Lebanon and elsewhere in the region, seems to build up its positions for the middle and longterm and not for the immediate moment. Lebanese are unhappy to see the great powers in retreat from Lebanon or looking at Lebanon as just an appendix to the Arab-Israeli conflict. They would be justified in these feelings if and when they would begin their hard work of finding areas of accommodation that would limit (if not cut off entirely) the Arab-Israeli dispute's spillover at their expense.

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3. The country is of course struck by an acute social and economic crisis which is on everybody's mind. The dollar was valued at some 500 Lebanese pounds in late 1987, approximately 200 times more than its value 10 years ago. A university professor is paid about \$60 a month; the minimum salary is less than \$15. Seventy to 75 percent of the population has been severely hit by this economic downturn, which is pushing even more Lebanese abroad and rapidly eliminating the middle class, the backbone of Lebanon's polity.

However, the magnitude of the crisis should not be overestimated. While the present times are exceedingly hard, the state has still some \$4.2 billion in gold reserves, and the private savings of Lebanese—some held in Lebanon and some abroad—have been estimated to exceed \$10 billion. Migrant Lebanese are still sending in money to support their families, and there are new revenues for export-oriented light industry and agricultural products. The public foreign debt is only \$500-600 million (including military debt).

If the present economic situation is almost tragic, the prospects for the future are not bad, for the state finances or for the national economy. The present crisis is mainly (though not entirely) the result of the political impasse: political money and migrants' remittances are pouring in though much reduced in volume, while the state is

handicapped by the militias' control on ports. Though no one expects a miracle, the economic situation should rapidly improve, if and when a political settlement is reached.

4. This settlement might accompany the next presidential elections (July 1988). Nobody is really challenging the Maronite grip, at least for the upcoming election. But positions are being hardened, as if negotiations were about to begin. The Lebanese Forces have been unable to prevent Husayn al-Husayni from being re-elected speaker of the House (October 1987), and they will find it difficult to have a single Maronite candidate supported by all the Christians, as they are intending to do. On the other side, Nabih Berri, the leader of Amal, is threatening to prevent the elections from taking place if a preceding political settlement is not reached. Berri will probably have to accept the idea that the election itself might be part of a settlement, though its implementation could hardly begin under the present administration.

The interest in the next election is justified. While nobody is expecting a Phalangist to be elected, everybody has come to accept the idea, especially after Hobeika's failure to deliver his community (in conjunction with the December 1985 Tripartite Agreement), that no settlement is possible without some Maronite cooperation. But this community is now leaderless, especially after the deaths of Camille Chamoun and Pierre Gemayel, the disarray in which Amin Gemayel's mandate is ending, and Sulayman Franjeh's poor health and isolation, not to mention the internal conflicts that have torn apart the Christian militia (the Lebanese Forces). The new president should therefore be willing and able to draw his community to a settlement that would curtail the Maronites' jealous identification with Lebanon. In other words, instead of becoming president because he always was a Maronite leader, the next president will have to establish himself as a leader of his community in order to bring it to the negotiation table. Though other domestic and regional factors remain extremely potent, the personality of the next president, his courage and his grasp of the fundamental causes of the war might prove to be a crucial variable in this unfortunate country's longing for peace.