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Lebanon: The Politics of Revolving Doors

by Wadi D. Haddad

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by Daniel Pipes

WADI D. HADDAD does two things in *Lebanon: The Politics of Revolving Doors*. He recounts the recent history of Lebanon. And, unwittingly, he offers an unusual and valuable insight into the mentality of that country's leadership.

The history is excellent. Mr. Haddad has a deep knowledge of Lebanese affairs, fine powers of analysis, and a dispassionate mind. In brief compass he explains every faction's point of view and shows why it did what it did. He provides a clear framework, clarifies many obscure twists in the complexities of factional fighting, and introduces new information.

But to an outside observer such as this reviewer, Mr. Had-

dad's unintended revelations of the thinking of the Lebanese leadership are of greater interest than his historical narrative. The author, according to the biography provided in this book, is clearly one of that leadership. He has served as professor at the American University of Beirut, as the head of a research foundation in Lebanon, and as a high-level employee of the World Bank. In December 1982, he became advisor for national security and policy affairs to the president of Lebanon, Amin Gemayel, a position he retained until May 1984. Not only did Mr. Haddad fill a major post but, by all reports, he had considerable influence on the president during that critical 15-month period.

His vantage point on Lebanon's trauma has two main peculiarities. One concerns the role of foreigners; the other concerns the role of politicians.

For Mr. Haddad, foreigners are the key to the Lebanese

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conflict. They caused it and only they can end it. Palestinians held Lebanon hostage to exchange it for the West Bank, Israel brought on Maronite-Druze fighting in the Shouf and Aley, Syria keeps the turmoil going. Except for the half-year period from October 1983 to March 1984, outsiders set the pace of Lebanese politics through the twenty years from 1965 to 1984. They put forward a succession of what Mr. Haddad delicately calls "initiatives" for Lebanon; that is, they tried to dominate it. Simplifying slightly, Egypt's initiative covered the years 1965-74, Syria's dominated until 1976, and the Arabs collectively took over until 1982. Then Israel, the United States, and Saudi Arabia took responsibility in rapid succession in 1982-83. Finally, Syria resumed the initiative in April 1984 and still holds it.

Emphasizing foreigners allows the author to absolve the Lebanese of the tragedy that has overtaken their country. Blaming others has an even more important political implication: it justifies delays in making internal reforms. For if foreigners are to blame, their presence in Lebanon must be eliminated before any domestic reconciliation can take place. The haves thus indefinitely postpone coming to terms with the have-nots.

It was Wadi Haddad's stress on outside forces that was at least partly responsible for the Lebanese government's rejection of compromise during the half year when the Lebanese did make their own decisions. The opportunity then missed will not return; the price of failing to adjust Lebanon's political system, which has already been terrible, con-

tinues to grow.

Mr. Haddad's attitude also influenced Washington. It had great importance in the ill-fated U.S. decision of late 1982 to concentrate on the withdrawal of Israeli, Syrian, and PLO forces from Lebanon (rather than seeking internal reform). If the Lebanese are really united and foreigners are making all the trouble, the reasoning went, it makes sense to arm and train the Lebanese forces so that

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they can stand up to foreign occupiers. This worked fine until a moment of crisis came in February 1984; at that time, the newly-equipped soldiers joined communal militias and used their American skills and American guns to kill each other. Some attacked the American marines. So much for blaming foreigners.

The other peculiarity of Mr. Haddad's analysis has to do with its eerie abstraction from the violence that characterizes Lebanon. The book tells nothing about car bombs, snipers, wailing sirens, and massacres, nor the passions aroused by these daily events. The reader who comes to this book ignorant of Lebanon's history since 1975 would learn nothing of the 30,000 Syrian troops, the PLO reign of terror in the

south, or the suicide bombings against Israel. Even violence with direct political repercussions disappears from Mr. Haddad's sanitized narrative. For example, the October 1983 bombing of the U.S. Marine barracks, which palpably reduced American willingness to remain in Lebanon, rates not even a single mention.

An endless bloody conflict is transformed into a rational dispute over security interests, administrative decentralization, communal identity, and the like. The "revolving door" of the title does not refer, as I first supposed, to some horrible new method of blowing up an opponent; rather, it describes the deliberate, almost elegant, procession of diplomatic "initiatives" by foreign powers. In Mr. Haddad's presentation, ethnic politics in Lebanon resemble those in Chicago.

These attitudes betray important flaws in the Lebanese leaders. To make the conflict more bearable, they ignore the carnage; the daily killings are an unfortunate but inconsequential event. For them, the real action consists of two things: decisions taken in foreign capitals and debates conducted by sensible Lebanese notables at round tables in Switzerland. This vision reduces the Lebanese leaders' own responsibility for the continued violence. It allows them to ignore the passions and the suffering of the hoi polloi and turn to the serious business of framing draft resolutions.

Lebanon: The Politics of Revolving Doors does two things. It provides a fine account of recent developments in Lebanon and it betrays the leaders' mentality. Both reasons make the book worth reading. □