

The Promise and Failure of the Zionist-Maronite Relationship,
1920-1948

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ABSTRACT

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A thesis presented to the Department of Near Eastern and Judaic Studies

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Much of the historiography on the intercourse between Palestinian Jews and Lebanese Maronites concerns only the two peoples' relations in the seventies and eighties. This thesis, in contrast, attempts a departure from this scholarship, joining the handful of other works that chart the history of the Zionist-Marionite relationship in its earliest incarnation. From its inception to its abeyance beginning in 1948, this almost thirty-year relationship was marked by a search of a formal alliance. This thesis, by presenting a panoptical survey of early Zionist-Marionite relations, explores the many dimensions of this pursuit. It details the Zionists and Maronites' numerous commonalities that made an alliance desirable and apparently possible; it profiles the specific elements among the Zionists and Maronites who sought an entente; it examines each of the measures the two peoples took to this end; and it analyzes why this protracted pursuit ultimately failed. The study concludes that the liabilities of a formal association with the Zionists in the Middle East and "Arabist" developments in Lebanon beginning in the early forties conspired to prevent the Zionists and Maronites' friendship from graduating to a formal alliance.

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The Promise and Failure of the Zionist-Maronite Alliance, 1920-1948

Introduction

“Reach a [peace] agreement with one of the other Arab states first,” said the Maronite negotiators to their Israeli counterparts during the Lebanese-Israeli armistice talks in 1949; “Lebanon will be the second.”¹ The implication, conveyed as if by winking, was in any case obvious: Only after a more powerful Arab country had shattered the taboo of making peace with Israel would small and vulnerable Lebanon, ever at the mercy of the Arab world, be free to realize its natural friendship with Israel and follow suit. Flash forward to the summer of 2006: In the wake of the 34-day war between Israel and Hezbollah, Lebanese Prime Minister Fouad Siniora vowed that “Lebanon will be the last Arab country to sign a peace treaty with Israel.”² What changed? How, in the course of a half-century, did peace between Israel and Lebanon go from being so easy of attainment to so remote a prospect? To answer this question is to inquire into both the modern history of Lebanese Maronites and of Zionist/Israeli-Maronite relations.

The self-styled non-Arab³ Maronite negotiators in 1949 had given utterance to a sentiment that the Israelis had already well understood: As far as the Zionist-Arab conflict was concerned, Lebanon was different from the other states in the Middle East.

¹ Tom Segev, *1949: The First Israelis* (New York: Free Press, 1986), 9.

² John Kifner, “Lebanese Politicians, Scarce in War, Renew Bickering,” *New York Times*, September 3, 2006, <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/09/03/world/middleeast/03lebanon.html>.

³ Benny Morris, *1948: The First Arab-Israeli War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 378.

And what distinguished it was that the largest and most powerful element of the country's famously motley population was the Maronites. Decades before Lebanon's token participation in the first Arab-Israeli war—about which it was claimed that nary a Maronite soldier had crossed into Israel—⁴ the Zionists had observed not only the Maronites' deviation from the regional order but also the many commonalities of circumstance and identity they shared with them. The Maronites, for their part, had taken a similar view of Palestinian Jewry. And indeed it was they, not the Zionists, who first conceived the idea that the corollary of these many bonds was an alliance between the two neighbors.⁵ Barely had the idea gestated than Zionists and sympathetic Maronites set themselves to fulfilling it.

But as with the half-century of Israeli-Lebanese relations bracketed by the Maronite negotiators' pledge and Siniora's vow, Zionist-Maronite intercourse between 1920 and 1948 lacked in results what it offered in potential. Nevertheless, the two communities would not be dissuaded from their ambition until the 1980s, when the near-realization of the alliance proved to be such a fiasco that it finally put the quietus to the idea. But what ended with Israel's war in Lebanon in the eighties had begun not long after the First World War. And indeed many of the obstacles that prevented an Israeli-Maronite alliance in the eighties were foreshadowed in the thirties and forties. It is this lesser-known era of Zionist-Maronite attempts to forge an alliance that is the focus of this work.

⁴ Matthew Hughes, "Lebanon's Armed Forces and the Arab-Israeli War, 1948-1949," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 34, no. 2 (Winter 2005), 28.

⁵ Laura Zittrain Eisenberg, *My Enemy's Enemy: Lebanon in the Early Zionist Imagination, 1900-1948* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1994), 30.

The juxtaposition of the two quotations above captures the two great themes of the Zionist-Maronite relationship: promise and failure. Throughout this study, which charts the history of Zionist-Maronite relations from the two communities' first flirtations to the establishment of the state of Israel, these two themes dominate. The first chapter begins with the theme of promise, as it surveys the histories of Zionists and Maronites in the Levant with particular accent on the two communities' distinctiveness and incongruity in the region. From there, it collates the Zionists' and Maronites' similarities to each other and their mutual differences with the Middle East's Arab Muslim majority. Chapter two looks at the Zionists and Maronites' earliest contacts and outlines each side's interests in an entente. Further, it presents a prosopography of the three Maronite circles that aspired to an alliance with the Zionists, revealing that pro-Zionist Maronites were athwart the tide of Lebanese history. Promise begins to give way to failure in the third chapter, which traces the arc of the Zionists and Maronites' attempts an alliance from 1933, when the pursuit for a partnership began in earnest, to 1948, when Israel was created and the quest for an alliance suspended. Special attention is given in this chapter to post-Vichy Lebanon's drift toward the Arab states and the concomitant decline of the Maronite pro-Zionists. Gloomy is the tenor of the fourth and final chapter, appropriately titled "An Appraisal of Failure." This section analyzes the manifold reasons that a Zionist-Maronite alliance never became more than an achingly tantalizing prospect for its seekers.

Chapter One: Affinities

“And there was peace between Hiram and Solomon; and they two made a league together.”⁶ So reads a rather indistinctive Biblical verse relating the amity and cooperation between the Phoenician king of the Lebanese city-state of Tyre and his Israelite counterpart. One might well grasp to find relevance for this verse in the geopolitics of the modern Middle East. But for many of the Maronite and Jewish proponents of an alliance between Lebanon and the Zionists, this passage and its like served as no less than a historical template for reviving the ancient entente between the two Levantine states.

At times during the last century, the quixotic champions of this alliance who repaired to the Bible for inspiration might have seemed justified in their romanticism. Indeed, so numerous were the resemblances between Maronites and Zionists that the disparities between antiquity and modernity, romanticism and reality, appeared comparatively trifling. And so, before the disillusionments of Middle Eastern statecraft dispelled their idealism, many Maronites and Zionists believed that it was these many resemblances that made an alliance not only desirable, but natural and inevitable.

Alterity and Affinity

Any survey of the *dramatis personae* of the Levant in the early twentieth century would quite quickly reveal two protagonists, Lebanese Maronites and Palestinian Jews,

⁶ 1 Kings 5:12 (KJV)

as the region's most conspicuous anomalies. Even within the Levant's Balkanized social landscape, the two communities stood apart as outliers in confession, cultural sensibility, national sentiment, and political aspiration. But this isolation carried a curious inversion: Lebanese Maronites and Palestinian Jews were, in respect to identity, as near to each other as they were distant from the Levant's majority. It was this duality of alterity to their neighbors and affinity to each other that seemed to almost foreordain a Maronite-Zionist rendezvous. As Zionist representative Chaim Arlosoroff put it in 1933, the two nations partook of a "natural community of fate."⁷ To appreciate how these social alignments came about, it is well to probe the Maronites' and Zionists' respective histories in the region and, finally, their similarities of circumstance and identity.

The Maronites' History as a Distinctive Levantine Community

In the seventh century, amid yet another Christological controversy roiling within Christendom, the first stirrings of the Maronite church were felt. Attempting a reconciliation of Orthodox and Monophysite conceptions of Christ's nature, the Byzantine emperor Heraclius and a retinue of theologians proposed a synthesis. Their formulation held that Christ possessed two natures but a single will.⁸ This doctrine, known as Monothelism, found currency among Syrians in the Orontes valley and was adopted by the monastic order of Marun. Owing in part to its propagation by the abbot of this monastery, John Marun (the namesake of the Maronites and the evangelist they would later venerate as their first patriarch), Monothelism won many communicants in

⁷ Chaim Arlosoroff to Victor Jacobson, January 2, 1933, CZA, Z4/20177.

⁸ William Harris, *Faces of Lebanon: Sects, Wars, and Global Extensions* (Princeton: Markus Wiener, 1997), 68.

the seventh century.⁹ In 680, however, its spread was stanchd when Monothelism was condemned as heresy by Orthodox Christianity.

Having been pronounced heretics, the Maronites—for so the Monothelite followers of John Marun were named—were held in aversion by their Orthodox co-religionists. When Byzantium, the vanguard of Orthodoxy, wrested the Orontes valley in the tenth century from the Muslim Ikhshidids and set about persecuting Monothelites, the Maronites embarked on a southward migration from Syria into Lebanon that would wear on for centuries. The Byzantine interregnum in Syria proved ephemeral, though, and the Muslims soon restored their writ over the entire Levant. But in due course, another Christian power would oust the Muslims from the Levant, with far-reaching implications for the Maronites.

The irruption of the Frankish Crusaders into the Levant heralded the French-Maronite nexus that, despite its vicissitudes, would endure into the next millennium. The Maronites abetted the Crusaders in subjugating the Levant and, in 1180, their clergy acknowledged the supremacy of the sponsor of the Crusades, the Roman Catholic Church. Although their association with Rome fell fallow after the Crusaders were uprooted, the Maronites entered into full communion with the Holy See in the sixteenth century¹⁰ and so became the first Uniate church in the East.¹¹ The Vatican established a Maronite College in Rome in 1584 that graduated Maronite clergy who returned to their Lebanese parishes and became founders of schools and vectors of Western mores. In the

⁹ Matti Moosa, *The Maronites in History* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1986), 37.

¹⁰ William Harris, *The Levant: A Fractured Mosaic* (Princeton: Markus Wiener, 2005), 199. Many scholars date the union to 1736, when the Vatican and the Maronite Church concluded a concordat to bring Maronite liturgy into conformity with Rome. The union, however, resulted not from a single event or agreement, but came about rather through a gradual process commenced in the sixteenth century.

¹¹ Asher Kaufman, *Reviving Phoenicia: In Search of Identity in Lebanon* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 26.

ensuing centuries, as the Ottomans languished and the Europeans flourished, considerable material and political advantages accrued to the Maronites from their connection to the West and most especially, to France. The fruits of French patronage were made plain to Maronites in 1535, when the French and Ottomans concluded the first of several Capitulations, granting the former custodianship of all Catholics, Maronites included, within the Sultan's dominion.¹² The French found much use for their Lebanese tributaries, often retaining Maronites in Ottoman lands as dragomans, consular functionaries, or factotums that disposed of their general affairs. As France rose to become Europe's uncontested Catholic hegemon under Louis XIV, the Maronites had begun to perceive the French as their fatherly guardian.¹³ Some Maronites indeed fancied themselves, "the French of the East."¹⁴ Their affection was far from unrequited. The French, too, looked on their protégés as simulacra of themselves. As early as the thirteenth century, the Crusading French king Louis IX said of the Maronites, "We are persuaded that this nation...is a part of the French nation, for its love of France resembles which Frenchmen bear one another."¹⁵ Centuries later the French took to styling their clients, "*les Français du Levant*."¹⁶ The French Jesuit penetration of the Maronite heartland of Mount Lebanon in the nineteenth century further deepened this bond.

The growing Gallicization of the Maronites generated a more prosperous, skilled, and better educated Maronite collective. True, many Maronites remained indigent

¹² Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age: 1798-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 39.

¹³ Kamal Salibi, *A House of Many Mansions: The History of Lebanon Reconsidered* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 39.

¹⁴ Moosa, 283.

¹⁵ Charles Glass, *Tribes with Flags: A Dangerous Passage through the Chaos of the Middle East* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1990), 314.

¹⁶ Kaufman, 27.

peasants consigned to eking out a hardscrabble existence, but the community also boasted a burgeoning middle class.¹⁷ Maronites predominated in Beirut's banking sector and liberal professions and commanded Mount Lebanon's silk economy, thanks in part to the voracity of French industrialists. The Maronites' French aegis proved pivotal in 1860, a singular *annus horribilis* in Maronite history, when 11,000 Maronites were massacred by Druze and normative Muslims as a result of a Maronite *jacquerie* begun two years earlier. Napoleon III interceded for his beleaguered tributaries, dispatching a 6,000-strong expeditionary force to Lebanon with the mandate to succor the Maronites and carve out an autonomous Christian enclave.¹⁸ Thus the *Mutasarrifiya* was born. This autonomous province of the Ottoman Empire was governed by a Catholic, administered by a Christian-dominated council, and guaranteed by France and four other European powers.

Though modest in size and lifespan (1861-1915), the *Mutasarrifiya* was epochal in Maronite history. With Maronites at the helm, the enclave enjoyed a material and cultural efflorescence unmatched in any Ottoman domain, European or Asian.¹⁹ The Maronites were the mainspring of this boom, and they reaped its rewards in heaping measure. They boasted the best schools, owned the most land, wielded the widest influence, and followed the highest professions. Linked umbilically to the *Mutasarrifiya's* growth was Beirut, which lay beyond the frontiers of their economically dependent enclave but functioned as its de facto capital. By century's end, Maronites and

¹⁷ Mordechai Nisan, *Minorities in the Middle East: A History of Struggle and Self-Expression* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2002), 198.

¹⁸ Fawwaz Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon* (London: Pluto, 2007), 37.

¹⁹ Phillip K. Hitti *Lebanon in History: From the Earliest Times to the Present* (London: Macmillan, 1967), 447.

other Christians had come to number 60 percent of Beirut's population.²⁰ The city stood as the central node of the Middle East's commerce with the West and the preeminent center of Western education in the Ottoman Empire, of which the Maronites were the leading supporters and beneficiaries. So rapid was the modernization the Maronites engineered that Phillip Hitti noted that "within a brief span of a half-century, [the *Mutasarrifiya*] practically evolved from medievalism to modernism."²¹

Their experience in the *Mutasarrifiya* profoundly shaped the Maronites' conception of themselves and their attitude toward Lebanon. Though a rudimentary Maronite communal consciousness dates from the eighteenth century,²² it was during the *Mutasarrifiya*—and before the advent of Arab or Turkish nationalism--that Maronite nationalism came to full bloom. Maronite national sentiment and solidarity, which were encouraged by their church, were incubated by the *Mutasarrifiya*, where the Maronites were preponderant at every level, not least numerically and economically. Not only did they hold a plurality of the seats on the *Mutasarrifiya*'s 12-member administrative council, they were, by some distance, the most moneyed and landed element in the population. Maronites thus grew habituated to preeminence and came to regard Lebanon as their exclusive patrimony and their privileges as no more than their due. Significantly, this attitude prefigured the Maronites' posture toward the *Mutasarrifiya*'s successor, the modern Lebanese state, which the Maronites likewise viewed as their preserve.

Maronites and Their Neighbors

²⁰ Traboulsi, 56.

²¹ Hitti, 450.

²² Moosa, 284.

A corollary of the Maronites' newfound perceptions of themselves and their role in Lebanon was their sense of incongruity in the Middle East. Apart from their differences from their neighbors in religion, outlook, and wealth, their experience in the autonomous *Mutasarrifiya*, the only such entity in the Ottoman Empire, reinforced the Maronites' sense of singularity in the mostly Arab Muslim Levant. When the Ottoman *Gottterdammerung* came at the close of the First World War, Maronite distinctiveness was thrown into greater relief. Whereas nearly all of the Middle Eastern states that arose from the ruins of the Ottoman Empire were novelties and imperialist confections, the Maronites had behind themselves decades of organization into a polity, the *Mutasarrifiya*, which became the nucleus of the enlarged, modern Lebanese state the Maronites had coveted. Moreover, unlike most Levantines who had but an inchoate and opaque sense of identity after the First World War, the Maronites' communal consciousness had fully ripened in the nineteenth century. Maronites, then, had a well-defined sense of who they were and what they wanted, an oddity in the Levant around the First World War, when most of the region's people knew what they were against more than what they were for. Following the First World War, when the Middle East was being partitioned and recast by the imperialists, the Maronites' self-awareness translated into political action. While the Arab Muslims of the Levant were immobilized by the inertia of an identity crisis, Maronite nationalists rallied to consummate their supreme political aspiration: the aggrandizement of the *Mutasarrifiya* and its rebirth as a sovereign Lebanese state. Midwifed though it was by France, modern Lebanon, or *Grand Liban*, owes its existence to the initiative and the lobbying of Maronites between 1918 and 1920.

Still another distinction between the Maronites and their neighbors was an opposite temper vis-à-vis the French. Whereas most of the population of Greater Syria saw France's entrenchment in Lebanon during the First World War as little more than a return of the Crusaders their ancestors dislodged,²³ the Maronites welcomed their "tender, loving mother" with alacrity. Indeed, when French troops disembarked at the port of Beirut in October 1918, they were met by the spectacle of Maronite well-wishers brandishing the Tricolor and greeting their beloved guardian.²⁴ This Francophilia was as much a function of enthusiasm for the West as it was adulation of their longtime patron. And so, as the Great War ended and a new political dispensation dawned in the Middle East, the Maronites were the Levant's outliers. Only the Jews of Palestine, because of their political program no less than their communal characteristics, likewise deviated from the regional order.

Jewish Immigrants and the Development of Palestine

Just as the Maronites were the engines of Lebanon's growth, so the Jews were the architects of Palestine's regeneration. The hinge year of 1882 brought the first of successive influxes of Jews to Palestine. These migrants were impelled by an idea as old as its aim was ambitious: the restoration of the ancient Jewish commonwealth within its historic frontiers. This was *Zionism avant la lettre*. So intoxicating was this idea that it would galvanize Jews from hardscrabble Yemen no less than their kinsman in sumptuous Odessa to pull up stakes and enact this dream, whatever the attendant hardships. But instead of "ascending" to the fabled "land of milk and honey," these first proto-Zionists

²³ Walid Khalidi, *Conflict and Violence in Lebanon* (Cambridge: Harvard Center for International Affairs, 1979), 34-35.

²⁴ Salibi, 32.

found in Palestine a deplorable backwater. Their cherished motherland lay in squalor and desolation. Undeterred, they set themselves to rehabilitating the land they called *Eretz Israel*. After such daunting exertions as draining marshes, foresting hills, leveling dunes, and leaching soil, these plucky Jewish pioneers had created more than a dozen habitations that enjoyed a standard of living that, though modest, was little known in the area. The settlers' apparently hopeless cause now seemed to hold promise.

The next wave of Jewish immigration to Palestine began in 1904, seven years after the Zionist movement was formally launched. Known as the Second Aliyah (1904-1914), this period witnessed a maturation of the Palestinian Jewish collectivity. The newcomers busied themselves establishing schools, banks, hospitals, factories, industries, cooperative farming settlements (*kibbutzim*), a technical institute in Haifa (the Technion), and the first exclusively Jewish city, Tel Aviv. Jewish building enterprise grew more organized after 1908, when the Zionist movement opened an office in Jaffa that systematically charted the hitherto haphazard Zionist settlement. The following year, a band of dauntless new immigrants formed a defense organization, HaShomer, to safeguard vulnerable Jewish settlements from hostile encroachment. By any measure, the development of Palestinian Jewish society was proceeding at a dizzying tempo.

The cumulative effect of these endeavors was that something of a "Hebrew society," as Abba Eban described it, had germinated during the Second Aliyah.²⁵ Indeed, the *Yishuv* (pre-state Israel) had already begun to assume the architecture of a promising, if still rather undeveloped, state. Apart from its institutions and organizations, it possessed many of the touchstones of any creditable modern state, not least a thriving

²⁵ Abba Eban, *My Country: The Story of Modern Israel* (New York: Random House, 1972), 29.

civil society and an egalitarian ethic. The harvest of early Zionist enterprise was already in evidence.

Zionist Jews and Their Neighbors

But if Palestinian Jewish society had begun blossoming in the early twentieth century, Palestinian Arab society remained woefully stagnant. Such was the natural result of fundamental disparities between the two communities. Owing to their mostly European provenance and hence more advanced education and acquirements, the Jews were far better prepared for, not to say more receptive to, modernizing their society. While many Palestinian Jews were intellectual, secular urbanites, their Arab neighbors were largely unlettered, devout peasants. Naturally, this vast qualitative difference in “human capital” counted in the Jews’ favor. No less significant was the Jews’ unity and *esprit de corps* in contrast to the Arabs’ fragmentation and lack of identity. Jewish nationalists, as noted, were animated by Zionism and pursued their programmatic mission with zeal. The Arabs, contrarily, partook of no similar ethos of nationalism or nation-building. They had still to evolve a political consciousness, and their society was atomized, with local loyalties paramount. Even as late as 1948, in the throes of the first Arab-Israeli War, the U.N. mediator for Palestine, Folke Bernadotte, could enter in his diary, “The Palestinian Arabs had at present no will of their own. Neither have they ever developed any specifically Palestinian nationalism. The demand for a separate Arab state in Palestine is consequently relatively weak.”²⁶ When, around the First World War, the Palestinian Arabs finally did alight on a political desideratum—but not yet a distinctive identity—they opted to have Palestine remain an inseparable part of Greater Syria. The

²⁶ Folke Bernadotte, *To Jerusalem* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1951), 113.

consequence of early Palestinian Arab indecision, then, was inaction. And this malaise was dramatized by the contrasting progress then being made in Palestinian Jewish society.

Insofar as modernization is coterminous with Westernization, the Arabs' and Jews' opposite orientations toward the West likewise figured in the development of their respective societies in Palestine. Zionism, itself an artifact of the nationalist *Zeitgeist* in nineteenth century Europe, envisaged a modern, Westernized Jewish polity in Palestine. Herzl's vista of the future Jewish state, as delineated in his utopian novel *Altneuland*, was of a technologically advanced society on the model of Western Europe. This aspiration was shared by most Zionists, not least Arthur Ruppin, the movement's first official representative in Palestine, who affirmed that "the Jews wish to maintain in Palestine a European standard of civilization."²⁷ It also bears noting that Zionism was not conceived as a zero-sum program that could only be realized at the expense of Palestinian Arabs. Many Zionists and their sympathizers believed that the modernization wrought by their movement could not but have a salutary impact on the welfare of Palestinian Arabs. No less an Arabist than T.E. Lawrence remarked that he looked on the Jewish immigrants "as the natural importers of Western leaven so necessary for countries of the Near East."²⁸ But the Palestinian Arabs thought otherwise. As the Peel Commission stated, "We have found that, though the Arabs have benefited by the development of the country owing to Jewish immigration, this has had no conciliatory effect."²⁹ Aggrieved though they were by the excesses of feudalism, Palestinian Arabs valued their traditional way of life and

²⁷ Yakir Plessner, *The Political Economy of Israel: From Ideology to Stagnation* (Albany: State, 1994), 154.

²⁸ Martin Gilbert, *Churchill and the Jews: A Lifelong Friendship* (New York: Holt, 2007), 51.

²⁹ Palestine Royal Commission, *Report. Presented to the Secretary of State for the Colonies in Parliament by Command of his Majesty*, July 1937 (London: HMSO, 1937), 393.

looked askance at Westernization and, derivatively, the imperatives of modernization. Europe's imperialist ventures and alien culture had made the West more an object of suspicion than of emulation. So rather than look to the West as a lodestar as the Jews did, the Palestinian Arabs turned inward, viewing themselves as an organic part of Greater Syria, with whose Arab Muslim majority they were mostly kindred.

Just as fervidly as Palestinian Arabs sought continued integration with Greater Syria, Palestinian Jews sought separation from it. The Jews, however, enjoyed a decisive advantage. Their community was organized, mobilized, and resourceful; they had exerted themselves determinedly to build up their society; and their labors had produced a Jewish para-state. The Palestinians, as has been seen, were hobbled by disunity, inaction, and a lack of identity, still less a nationalist program. Politically, the Jews' upper hand paid off. When the British began deliberating the post-war disposition of Ottoman domains, Zionist initiative yielded its crowning political victory: the Balfour Declaration. In vouchsafing this pledge to the Zionists, the British merely agreed to play midwife to a Jewish homeland in Palestine, the makings of which had already been underway for more than a decade. Nevertheless, Palestinian Jews greeted the Balfour Declaration with exultation. Some fifteen years after Herzl's abortive bid to secure Great Power auspices for the Zionist project, political Zionism had registered its first victory. But as much as the Balfour declaration had enraptured the Jews, it had enraged the Arabs. They saw Britain's charter as nothing less than a warrant for usurpation. If the Jews had yet to apprehend Arab rancor, it would become plain to them in the ensuing years, as the Arabs imparted to the conflict over Palestine one of its most recognizable features: organized violent resistance.

Similarities of Circumstance and Orientation

The foregoing surveys of Zionist and Maronite history make plain the many convergences between the two peoples. To underscore these commonalities, it is useful to expound and restate--in juxtaposition--the shared features and predicaments of both communities.

Identity

When most Levantines had yet to awake to a communal consciousness, Zionists and Maronites benefitted well-defined sense of identity, seeing themselves as distinctive peoples in the region. Aside from their religious and manifold other differences with the Levant's Arab Muslim majority, Zionists uniformly and Maronites partially conceived of themselves as non-Arabs. The Maronites who disclaimed an Arab pedigree for themselves held that they were descended from the Phoenicians, the fabled seafarers of antiquity who controlled Mediterranean trade for a millennium and originated in Lebanon. As if to highlight the affinities between the two peoples, those who noted the same revivalist spirit in Zionism and Phoenicianism went so far as to dub the latter "Lebanese Zionism."³⁰

While not all Maronites subscribed to Phoenicianism, it did command the sympathies of much of the community's leadership, particularly the church and the intelligentsia. The Maronites' literati who indulged this myth hymned their Phoenician legacy in poems and newspaper articles. Many Maronite adepts also claimed that the

³⁰ David Hirst, *Beware of Small States: Lebanon, Battleground of the Middle East* (New York: Nation, 2010), 25.

Arabic vernacular spoken in Lebanon was not Arabic at all;³¹ rather, it was “Lebanese” and was quite unrelated to that stilted, fossilized language of the Qur’an. (This idea was later to find its most eloquent expression in the verse of the Maronite poet and Phoenicianist Said Akl). But Phoenicianism was not just a philosophical abstraction of the elite; it had practical implications too. By claiming a non-Arab cultural and ethnic inheritance, Maronite Phoenicianists drew nearer the Zionists and, in consequence, further from the Levantine majority. Thus, if Maronites were not Arabs, then they had no vested interest in the *causes célèbres* of the Arabs, most notably the Palestine question.

Political Ambitions and European Connections

Zionists and Maronites alike aspired to, and eventually won, secession from Greater Syria. The former sought self-determination in a nascent Jewish homeland in Palestine, and the latter sought to preserve their primacy in the *Mutasarrifiya* in a territory twice its size. With initial success, Zionists and Maronites were able to marshal the support of the Great Powers in the service of these ambitions. Britain issued the Balfour Declaration, and France created *Grand Liban*. Most of the other peoples in the Levant, in contrast, were political orphans, benefitting from no European tutelage. Though they would eventually be betrayed by their European patrons—Britain defaulted on the Balfour Declaration and France refused Lebanon independence until 1943, and then with ill grace—the Zionists’ and Maronites’ political backing from the Great Powers was initially indispensable, at least between 1917 and 1922.

³¹ Tim Llewellyn, *Beirut and the Spirit of Lebanon* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2010), 31.

Regional Status

Zionists and Maronites were the Levant's sophisticates. They stood at the vanguard of Middle Eastern progress, being the most politically articulate, prosperous, and literate elements in the region. Amid the general political torpor in the Levant in the early twentieth century, Zionists and Maronites distinguished themselves by their communal cohesion and political organization. In consequence of this advancement, the two peoples regarded themselves as superior. Zamir observes that the Maronites "felt superior to the Muslims in religion, culture and opposed assimilation into Muslim society."³² Zionist self-perception was not dissimilar. Zionist leader Chaim Weizmann intimated this in a letter to the anti-Arab Maronite archbishop of Beirut, referring to their constituencies as "the two progressive peoples of the Middle East."³³

Western Orientation

Fancying themselves Westerners in all but geography, many Maronites and Zionists judged their communities to be *in*, but not *of*, the Middle East.³⁴ The Levant's Arab Muslim majority shared this perception of the two communities, regarding Zionists and Maronites as the West's Trojan horses and their territories as forward bases of the imperialists.³⁵ That the Zionists and Maronites were seen as in sympathy with the West, either culturally or politically, only widened the chasm between them and the rest of the Levant.

³² Meir Zamir, *The Formation of Modern Lebanon* (London: Croom Helm, 1985), 6.

³³ Laura Zittrain Eisenberg, *My Enemy's Enemy: Lebanon in the Early Zionist Imagination, 1900-1948* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1994), 31.

³⁴ Walid Khalidi, *Conflict and Violence in Lebanon*, 34.

³⁵ Harris, *The Levant*, 13.

Relationship to the Levant's Majority

Their national ambitions athwart the regional consensus, Palestinian Jews and Lebanese Maronites found themselves arrayed on the same side of a political battle against the Levant's majority. Just as the Maronites met with resistance from Syro-Lebanese Arabs committed to the integrity of Greater Syria, so Palestinian Jews encountered opposition from Palestinian Arabs who likewise rejected the division of Greater Syria—not to say the establishment of a Jewish national home in what they regarded as their patrimony.

In word and deed, Levantine Arab Muslims made plain that Lebanese separatism and Zionism were the region's political crosscurrents. At the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, President Woodrow Wilson proposed dispatching an investigative commission to the Levant to survey possibilities for the region's postwar disposition. In undertaking its mandate, the King-Crane Commission canvassed Levantines to sound out their political aspirations. Although the commission was negligible in its impact³⁶ and dubious in its methodology, it nonetheless reported that a majority of the respondents interviewed (80.4 percent) favored the unity of Greater Syria and thereby rejected an independent Lebanon and a Jewish national home in Palestine.³⁷ Further evidence of local opposition to Zionist and Maronite aims abounded. While the King-Crane Commission conducted its inquest, leading Arab nationalists assembled in Damascus to hold the first General Syrian Congress. The congress adopted the Damascus Program, which expressly rejected the

³⁶ Elie Kedourie, *England and the Middle East: The Destruction of the Ottoman Empire, 1914-1921* (London: Bowes & Bowes, 1956), 147.

³⁷ Harry N. Howard, *The King-Crane Commission: An American Inquiry in the Middle East* (Beirut: Khayat, 1963), 144.

separation of Lebanon and Palestine from Greater Syria.³⁸ The anti-secession resolution was affirmed the following year when the congress reconvened.³⁹

Encirclement by the Levant's Arab Muslim majority never stopped haunting the Zionists' and the Maronites' psyches. Both communities tracked demographic developments in their territories obsessively. Communal size being central to the success of their movements, this vigilance was not exaggerated. The Maronites especially had occasion for apprehension. In forming *Grand Liban*, four mainly Muslim districts were annexed to the *Mutasarrifiya*, which hitherto had a Christian—mostly Maronite—population numbering eighty-five percent. In *Grand Liban*, however, the Christians' preponderance was whittled down to little more than half of Lebanon's population. So while *Grand Liban* gave the Maronites a state twice the size of the *Mutasarrifiya*, it also threatened their demographic preeminence. The Maronites, ever beset by the specter of Muslim engulfment, thereafter guarded Lebanon's precarious Christian majority as though it were of existential importance. Pierre Gemayel, one of the five founders of the Maronite Phalange party, would later capture this disquiet in stark terms: "The Christian psychosis of fear is internalized, visceral, and tenacious. We can do nothing about it. It is the Muslims' task to reassure us."⁴⁰ The Zionists were no less attuned to demographic disadvantage. With the serial *Aliyot*, the Zionists hoped Palestine's Jewish community would swell to the critical mass necessary for statehood. But this aspiration was to meet with several setbacks. Palestine's Arab population surged due to high natural increase and modest in-migration of Arabs from ambient lands. Still more adverse to the Zionists'

³⁸ Zamir, 3.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁴⁰ Sandra Mackey, *Lebanon: Death of a Nation* (New York: Anchor, 1989), 53.

demographic ambitions was Britain's retreat from the Balfour Declaration. No sooner had Britain asserted its control over Palestine than it began curtailing Jewish immigration to Palestine,⁴¹ thereby contravening the Balfour Declaration and checking the growth of Palestine's Jewish sector. Zionists and Maronites, then, shared many similar anxieties about their numbers. But whatever the demographic vicissitudes, it remained that the two peoples were the Levant's outliers; population size was just another specter reminding them of their vulnerabilities.

Zionists' and Maronites' Dawning Awareness of their Affinities

Feeling themselves isolated and imperiled, Zionists and Maronites needed to consolidate their fragile positions. Arab Muslim opposition threatened their safety no less than their hard-won political gains. Already in April 1920, Palestinians Jews in Jerusalem had become targets of organized violence by Arabs. The following month, Shias in the southern Lebanese village of Ayn Ebel set upon Maronites, killing scores of them. It was hardly fortuitous that just weeks before these two attacks the second General Syrian Congress convened in Damascus and proclaimed Greater Syria both indivisible and independent—to no avail, of course. Arab Muslim anger was crescendoing. So in this bleak and friendless climate, the embattled Zionists and Maronites hoped to fortify their communities by marshaling outside support. But the British and French made defective patrons. Notwithstanding their initial political backing, they were untrustworthy and increasingly even treacherous. Besides, the European presence licensed by the mandates was neither desirable nor permanent. No, Zionists and Maronites would need to secure

⁴¹ Benny Morris, *Righteous Victims: A History of the Zionist-Arab Conflict, 1881-2001* (New York: Vintage, 2001), 89.

credible local support. And to that end, they would find each other. It was not before long that members of each community observed each other's resemblances with a far-sighted eye, realizing that common features can make for common cause.

Chapter Two: The Beginning of a Relationship

Early Zionist Interest in Lebanon

Initially, Zionist interest in Lebanon was more territorial than social or political. Southern Lebanon held a special historical resonance for Jewish nationalists, it having been the seat of the ancient Israelite tribes of Asher and Naphtali. Zionist leaders who aspired to make the reestablished Jewish state coextensive with its ancient precursor thus nursed a deep attachment to the upper Galilee. But it was practical rather sentimental considerations that mostly engaged Zionist interest in southern Lebanon. That the area boasted two of the Jordan's headwaters, the Wazzani and Hasbani Rivers, as well as Lebanon's most copious water source, the Litani River, made southern Lebanon an especially inviting prize. The Litani in particular was coveted by the Zionists, which could be harnessed to generate hydroelectric power or irrigate the Galilee's vast plains. Besides development, defense figured in southern Lebanon's importance to the Zionists. The area's craggy topography ensured that the future Jewish state's northern defenses would be sufficiently fortified. So for these reasons, Chaim Weizmann, representing the Zionist Organization and the Zionist Commission for Palestine, petitioned the Paris Peace Conference to include Lebanon up to the Litani in the Jewish homeland. His lobbying proved unavailing, though, and in 1923, the original border dividing the provisional military administrations of Palestine and Lebanon (OETAs South and North, respectively) became permanent.

Maronite Interest in an Alliance with the Zionists

But if Zionists originally looked to Lebanon because of the potential of its land, some Maronites looked to Palestine because of the potential of its population—or, more exactly, the Jewish sector thereof. As early 1913, Maronites had announced their support for the Zionist movement and proposed a Christian-Jewish front against the region's Muslim preponderance.⁴² Reaching out to the Zionists with an eye to a partnership was a natural move for the Maronites, congruent with their history as much as with their psychology. After all, recourse to outsiders was a hoary Maronite tradition, the French and the Vatican having been their usual foreign saviors. But unlike the remote Europeans, the Zionists had the added virtue of proximity. That the Zionists were a burgeoning non-Muslim presence in the Levant was a further palliative for the Maronites, soothing their fears of Muslim encirclement. Forging a common front with the *Yishuv* against the region's Islamic behemoth might ensure the Maronites' survival as a distinctive minority community. Complementing these strategic aims, the two peoples' similarities of circumstance and identity had convinced some Maronites that the *Yishuv* would make an ideal ally.

Such a Maronite was Najib Sfeir, an activist and a tireless seeker of a partnership with the Zionists. In 1919, before the disposition of former Ottoman lands had been settled, Sfeir approached Chaim Weizmann with a scheme to trifurcate Greater Syria along confessional lines, with Lebanon for Christians, Palestine for Jews, and lesser Syria for Muslims.⁴³ The following year, at Sfeir's initiative, he and two other Maronite

⁴² Eisenberg, *My Enemy's Enemy*, 30.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

activists concerted a treaty with Yehoshua Hankin, an Arabist and a land-purchasing agent for the Zionist Organization. The agreement provided for reciprocal recognition of Palestine as Jewish national home and Lebanon as an independent Christian state decoupled from Syria. But the treaty proved a dead letter. The signatories on each side commanded no representative authority. True, Hankin was a Zionist agent, but his institutional competence was limited to buying land, not negotiating treaties.⁴⁴ Having neither solicited nor received the relevant mandate from the Zionist Organization, he was thus conducting freelance diplomacy. The three Maronites' accession to the treaty was even more presumptuous. They represented no one, yet they arrogated to themselves the prerogative to negotiate on behalf of all the Christians of Lebanon, a state which would not be established for another five months. But for all the treaty's political insignificance, it stands as the first testimony to the Zionists and Maronites' serial attempts at an accord, and it captures, however modestly, the early sentiment of fellowship in both communities. It also holds the inglorious distinction of being the first in a concatenation of failed agreements between Zionists and Maronites. Subsequent treaties were floated in 1936, 1946, and 1983, only to meet the same fate as the original nugatory pact in 1920.

The formation of *Grand Liban* on September 1, 1920, gave further impetus to Maronite interest in an entente with the Zionists. Whereas the Maronites had enjoyed a decisive majority in the *Mutasarrifiya*, they now numbered just thirty percent of *Grand Liban*—though they still comprised a plurality among Lebanon's seventeen sects and ethnicities. Thus it was demographic anxieties—arising from both the annexation of

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 56.

largely Muslim territories (a move which Maronites overwhelmingly supported) and comparatively higher Muslim birthrates—that impelled the Maronites, more than anything else,⁴⁵ toward an alliance with the Zionists.⁴⁶

Zionist Interest in an Alliance with the Maronites

The Zionists were likewise ranged against mostly Muslim neighbors who viewed their political ambitions with hostility. Palestinian Arabs, like Lebanese Sunnis, were much embittered by their detachment from Syria. Just as most Lebanese Sunnis declined to recognize an independent Lebanon and thus boycotted its civil institutions into the 1930s, so Palestinian Arabs rejected the British mandate for Palestine—the League of Nation’s treaty for which embodied the Balfour Declaration—and boycotted many of the mandate’s elections, investigative commissions, and intercommunal discussions. Palestinian Arabs further registered their discontent in outbreaks of violence directed against the *Yishuv*. In April 1920 in Jerusalem and in May 1921 in Jaffa, for example, they mounted large-scale attacks against Jewish civilians. So against this backdrop of crescendoing conflict, the Zionists had begun to despair of any kind of accommodation with Arabs in general and Palestinian Arabs in particular. But before this disillusionment set in, the Zionists had made overtures to several Arab Muslim Arab personalities in the region. They did so in the hope of securing Arab acquiescence in the Zionist program and thus dispelling the proposition that Arab and Zionist goals were irreconcilable. One such initiative was the so-called Weizmann-Faisal agreement of January 1919. This effectively

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 50.

⁴⁶ It was not just Muslims *qua* Muslims that disconcerted the Maronites and drew them to the Zionists; it was also Muslims *qua* staunch opponents of the Maronites’ flagship ambition: a separate Lebanese state.

stillborn pact between Chaim Weizmann and Emir Faisal—the Hashemite leader of the Arab Revolt, titular ruler of Syria, and, later, king of Iraq—recognized the Balfour Declaration in return for Zionist development assistance for Faisal’s Arab state-to-be—a *quid pro quo* referred to in early Zionist diplomatic parlance as “exchange of services.” But Faisal’s word was defective. He had signed the agreement only in a desperate bid to marshal Zionist and British support in his battle over Syria with the French. Furthermore, Faisal understood that an agreement with the Zionists was too great a political liability for him to bear, not least because his administration in Syria was manned by many Palestinians, and his constituency was aswarm with Arab anti-Zionists. Thus was a resolution carried at his First General Syrian Congress in July 1919 proclaiming the establishment of a united Greater Syria under his kingship, thereby voiding the Faisal-Weizmann Agreement. So with the prospect of a *modus vivendi* with the Palestinian Arabs or a traditional Arab Muslim leader receding, the Zionists awoke to the potential of a partnership with the Maronites, the only people in the region with opponents and characteristics of same.

By the Zionists’ reckoning, an alliance with the Maronites stood to fulfill many of their political desiderata. The alliance’s main allure was that it promised to end or at least mitigate their growing regional isolation. As they had with Faisal, the Zionists aspired after a regional partner whose support they could flaunt to the region and the West. Such ostentation would serve them well. First, it would demonstrate to the Arab world that, despite the crystallizing impression to the contrary, Zionism was in fact not anathema to all the region’s peoples. Several benefits would then accrue from such a reappraisal of Zionism. The Arab world’s anti-Zionist animus would soften, conditioning Arabs to

follow the Maronites' lead and likewise reach an accommodation or better with the *Yishuv*. Further, the seemingly implacable opposition of the Palestinian Arabs, whose goodwill had proven so elusive, might also thaw. Failing that, Zionist-Maronite amity might at least endear the latter's Christian co-religionists in Palestine to Zionism. An alliance with the Maronites would improve the Zionists' standing not just in the Arab world, but in the West too. Western skeptics alienated from Zionism because of its hostile reception among the Arabs might be disabused of their reservations if they saw that the Zionists had made peace with Lebanese Maronites. Moreover, since the Maronites' Christianity and Western temper had made them their favorite Middle Easterners, the West would be further impressed by a Zionist-Maronite league. But appearances were not the only incentive for the Zionists to forge an alliance with the Maronites; there were compelling strategic reasons too. Naturally, it was in the interest of the two regional minorities to close ranks to combat the perceived Arab Muslim hegemon that threatened their security and their national programs. What is more, perhaps a sympathetic West might even be moved to come to the aid of the two peoples should they find themselves together embattled.⁴⁷

Optimists contra Skeptics

So for all these potentialities, there was little reason for an alliance with the Maronites not to commend itself to Zionist policymakers. But if Zionist—and later Israeli—officialdom was united on the desirability of an alliance, it was divided on its

⁴⁷ Eisenberg, *My Enemy's Enemy*, 29.

viability. It is useful, then, to remark a distinction noted by several observers⁴⁸ and classify Zionist officials under two rubrics vis-à-vis an alliance with the Maronites: optimists and skeptics. The optimists believed that a Zionist-Maronite alliance was as attainable as its dividends would be considerable. Accordingly, establishing an entente with the Maronites ought to be a priority in the regional “foreign policy” of the Jewish Agency, the Zionists’ chief administrative organ and de facto government. Yet several myopias distorted the optimists’ view of the Maronites, and consequently, of the Jewish Agency’s prospects for an alliance with them. Principal among these was the mistaken perception that the Maronites were a more or less homogenous community that was united in its pro-Zionist sympathies. Thus did the optimists airily dismiss as eccentric the many Maronite opponents of Zionism and supporters of an accommodation with Lebanese Muslims. No less untrue than the conceit of Maronite unity was the optimists’ view that “Maronite” was coterminous with “Lebanese.” A second misconception that proceeded from this was that Lebanon’s sixteen other sects, particularly the Muslim ones, were inconsequential. As the country’s largest and most influential sect, the Maronites, or so the optimists believed, were completely secure in their primacy. Whatever threatened their indefinite paramountcy—be it Lebanon’s Muslim population and its growth at the Maronites’ expense or pressure from the Arab and Muslim world—the optimists tended to trivialize or overlook.

The skeptics, contrarily, harbored few illusions about the Maronites’ ability to forge an alliance. They understood that it was Lebanese Muslims, not Palestinian Zionists, with whom the Maronites needed to reach an agreement. For the Maronites,

⁴⁸ Kirsten E. Schulze, Laura Zittrain Eisenberg, and David Hirst have all observed this distinction, though they do not use the terms “optimist” and “skeptic.”

unlike for the Zionists, the option of a *modus vivendi* with Arab Muslims had yet to be foreclosed. The skeptics thus understood that a great many Maronites, recognizing that their community was in eclipse, accepted that it was better to compromise with the Muslims and to conclude an agreement with them while they still could than to spurn them. As for the Maronite nationalists who recoiled from any compromise with Lebanese Muslims—this was the only kind of pro-Zionist Maronite, incidentally—the skeptics were receptive to an alliance with them, but dubious of its viability. They divined that such Maronites would, in the long run, make unreliable partners. Self-preservation would keep them from taking *overt* measures in support of the Zionists, and a loss of pro-Zionist influence—not to speak of secrecy— would divest any such measures of meaning.

Throughout the Jewish Agency's relations with Maronites, a happy equilibrium prevailed between optimists and skeptics. The effect of this was two-fold: First, the Jewish Agency never devised a strategy or a policy for pursuing an alliance with the Maronites.⁴⁹ All its diplomacy to this end was thus desultory and haphazard. Second, the Jewish Agency's investment in an alliance always remained comparatively minor, limited mostly to material and diplomatic assistance to its Maronite friends.

The dichotomy between optimists and skeptics endured after Israel's creation. But after 1948, the skeptics remained, but the optimists had metamorphosed into interventionists. This iteration of optimists (e.g., Ben-Gurion in the fifties and Eitan, Sharon, and Begin in the eighties) advocated intervention in Lebanon on behalf of pro-Israel Maronites. A steady counterpoise remained between the two camps until the formation of Menachem Begin's interventionist-laden government in 1981.

⁴⁹ Hirst, 26.

Early Contacts

Zionist-Maronite intercourse in the twenties was modest, limited mostly to personal relationships and commercial dealings. True, the decade had opened with a Zionist-Maronite treaty (albeit a moot one), but this did not inaugurate a determined pursuit of a partnership. Contacts indeed remained largely informal, apolitical, and extragovernmental until the early thirties, and even then they were official, but ad hoc. Interactions throughout the twenties were facilitated by the ease with which the two peoples could shuttle between the Palestinian and Lebanese mandates. Indeed, until the Arab Revolt intensified in the late thirties, Palestinians and Lebanese of all stripes freely crossed into one another's territory with little encumbrance. All that was needed—as stipulated by the 1926 *Bon Voisinage* treaty between France and Britain—was a readily accessible transit document. Anticipating Gulf Arabs decades later, Palestinian Jewry were particularly fond of taking holidays in Lebanon, a penchant happily accommodated by Lebanese in the Maronite-dominated tourist sector. These overwhelmingly positive encounters seemed to give credence to the two peoples' impression that a fruitful partnership between them beckoned.

So when the Jewish Agency began cultivating relationships with Maronite notables in the early 1930s, the prospects for a political relationship seemed propitious. The instrument through which Zionist officialdom pursued contacts with the Maronites was the Political Department of the Jewish Agency, the organization's "foreign ministry." In 1931, the controversial Zionist leader Chaim Arlosoroff became director of the department and thus received charge over a small staff and few funds and resources. No sooner had Arlosoroff taken up his new post than he was approached by Najib Sfeir—

the Maronite activist who spearheaded the 1920 treaty—with an offer to rally Christian opposition to the anti-Zionist Islamic Conference held in Jerusalem in December 1931.⁵⁰

Arlosoroff entrusted the Maronite file to the 28-year-old “optimist” Eliyahu Epstein (Elath). In contrast to his later eminence as Israel’s first ambassador to the United States, Epstein was, between 1931 and 1934, merely a lowly student at the American University of Beirut on Arlosoroff’s payroll to make contacts with Lebanese.⁵¹ Throughout his residence in Beirut, Epstein evolved cordial ties with many Maronite personalities, contacts that would serve the Jewish Agency well in the ensuing years.⁵² The first prominent Maronite with whom Epstein took up a friendship was the wealthy industrialist Albert Naccache, a scion of one of Lebanon’s leading Maronite dynasties—his cousin Alfred, for example, served as president from 1941 to 1943. Naccache singularly incarnated the marriage between Zionists and Maronites—literally and metaphorically. For he was both a champion of a Zionist-Maronite entente and the husband of a Jewish woman from a family of influential Russian Zionists.⁵³

A Prosopography of Three Pro-Zionist Maronite Circles

It was through the good offices of Albert Naccache that the Jewish Agency, by way of Epstein, established relationships with three separate, but kindred, Maronite circles: the Young Phoenicians, the Maronite Church, and the Lebanese politician Emile Edde and his stalwarts. Similarities in outlook and in ideology often confounded the lines between each circle, with the result that each group’s members often overlapped.

⁵⁰ Kirsten E. Schulze, *Israel’s Covert Diplomacy in Lebanon* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1998), 18.

⁵¹ Eliyahu Elath, “‘Phoenician Zionism’ in Lebanon,” *The Jerusalem Quarterly*, no. 42 (Spring 1987):38.

⁵² Eisenberg, 19.

⁵³ Elath, 38.

This was natural enough, they all having subscribed to a similar particularist conception of Lebanon as a Westernized, non-Arab Christian homeland dominated by Maronites. The by-product of this nativism was often a scorn for the neighboring Arab world, which they viewed as a medieval backwater. Most of these Maronites could not speak or only smattered the Arabic language, French being their mother tongue. But as far as the Zionists were concerned, what ranked paramount was that the three cliques were united in their desire for an alliance.

The Young Phoenicians

Of these three Maronite circles, Epstein first formed an acquaintance with the Young Phoenicians. Co-founded by Naccache, the Young Phoenicians was a literary society given over to illuminating and reviving Lebanon's Phoenician legacy. The Zionists' foremost Maronite ally in Lebanese politics, Prime Minister and President Emile Edde, flatteringly called the group "the Zionists of Lebanon."⁵⁴ (Political exigencies kept Edde from joining the movement himself, but he was assuredly a "fellow-traveler").⁵⁵ The Young Phoenicians also addressed itself to political matters, upholding Lebanon's independence from Syria, its expanded borders, and its distinctive identity.⁵⁶ Not long after Epstein arrived in Beirut in 1931, Naccache introduced him to another founding member of the Young Phoenicians—not to say its most brilliant ornament—Charles Corm.⁵⁷ Corm was the doyen of Lebanon's Francophone poets—he

⁵⁴ Judith Miller, *God Has Ninety-Nine Names: Reporting from a Militant Middle East* (New York: Touchstone, 1996), 514.

⁵⁵ Kaufman, 142.

⁵⁶ Franck Salameh, *Language, Memory, and Identity in the Middle East: The Case for Lebanon* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010), 170.

⁵⁷ Eisenberg, 65.

detested Arabic, of which he was altogether ignorant,⁵⁸ as “an Asian language”—⁵⁹and composed many odes glorifying his homeland’s Phoenician inheritance. He was also a cordial admirer of Jews and Zionism, the latter having been something of a muse for his own project to awaken a Phoenician consciousness among the Lebanese.⁶⁰ Corm accordingly aspired to an alliance with the *Yishuv*, and in this, he shared the sympathy of most of his confederates in the Young Phoenicians. But as the thirties advanced, the Young Phoenicians, under pressure of a dispute that absorbed the whole of Maronite society, polarized between two visions of Lebanon’s political destiny. While both camps of Young Phoenicians believed in Lebanon’s vocation as Westernized polity enshrining Christian privilege, they diverged on the question of Lebanon’s role in the Middle East. Simply put, the dissension was between isolationists and integrationists. Whereas the former conceived of Lebanon as a Christian homeland, a French dependency, and an indissoluble part of the West, the latter believed that Lebanon’s interest lay in becoming a pluralistic, multi-confessional state, and a nexus between the Western and the Arab worlds. The most conspicuous and articulate exponents of these two currents of “Phoenicianism” were Charles Corm, representing the isolationists, and Michel Chiha—the anti-Semitic,⁶¹ anti-Zionist Chaldean journalist and architect of the Lebanese constitution—representing the integrationists. It was only the isolationists, naturally, who were anxious for an alliance with the Zionists.

The Maronite Church

⁵⁸ Asher Kaufman, *Reviving Phoenicia: In Search of Identity in Lebanon* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 143.

⁵⁹ Fawwaz Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon* (New York: Pluto, 2007), 95.

⁶⁰ Elath, 44.

⁶¹ Michel Chiha, “Memorandum after the Truce,” in *Palestine* (Beirut: Trident, 1969), 73.

Naccache also introduced Epstein to the newly installed Maronite patriarch, Antun Arida,⁶² for whom the Young Phoenician co-founder served as economic adviser.⁶³ Like the Phoenicianists of an isolationist bent, Arida held as his *beau ideal* a Lebanon that would be a Western, Gallicized, Christian refuge. But whereas these wanted Lebanon to remain a French protectorate indefinitely, Arida agitated for immediate independence—a position he was driven to in part by an economic and political rivalry with the French authorities. Arida was also a longtime sympathizer of Zionism. As early 1919, when he was still archbishop of Tripoli, he called for the creation of a Jewish national home in Palestine.⁶⁴ Not long after he assumed the patriarchate in 1932, he genially welcomed Epstein to his bishopric in Bkerke.⁶⁵ The Zionists, for their part, regarded Arida as an earnest and trusty friend of their movement.⁶⁶ Arida was surpassed in his avidity for cooperation with the Zionists by another cleric of the Maronite Church, the archbishop of Beirut, Ignatius Mubarak. Whereas consideration for Muslim sensibilities had disposed Arida to mildness in his public pronouncements on Zionism, Mubarak felt no such constraints. He quite often blazoned his sympathy for the movement, together with his desire for a league with the *Yishuv*. Emblematic was a speech he made in Beirut's Magen Abraham Synagogue in 1937. Apparently indifferent to the political demonstrations that convulsed Beirut even to the point that civil war threatened, Mubarak won over his Jewish audience by proposing Lebanon as a sanctuary

⁶² Eisenberg, 62.

⁶³ Elath, 39.

⁶⁴ Hilal Khashan, "The Evolution of Israeli-Lebanese Relations: From Implicit Peace to Explicit Conflict," in *Conflict, Diplomacy and Society in Israeli-Lebanese Relations*, ed. Efraim Karsh, Michael Kerr, and Rory Miller (New York: Routledge, 2010), 3.

⁶⁵ Eisenberg, 62.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

for Jewish refugees from Europe and announcing himself “the archbishop of the Jews.”⁶⁷ Mubarak’s intrepid outspokenness made him perhaps the *Yishuv*’s most reliable friend in Lebanon. Out of genuine sympathy for Zionism and fear of the region’s Muslims, he never tired of calling for an alliance with Jewish Agency.

But it was not just apprehension over Lebanon’s position in the Middle East that drew the Maronite Church toward the Zionists; it was also apprehension over the Maronite Church’s position in Lebanon. Proving the wisdom of the precept “be careful what you wish for,” the Maronite Church had successfully led the drive to create *Grand Liban* after the First World War, only to see this triumph result in the erosion of its power.⁶⁸ Under the mandatory regime, with its immiscible separation between civil and religious authority, the Maronite Church was increasingly marginalized, rivaled by such alternative centers of power as the Chamber of Deputies, the presidency, and the high commission. The Church was likewise undermined by the transfer of political power from the Maronite heartland in the mountain, where it had always been a major political force, to Beirut, where a *mélange* of sects coexisted, the Maronites being just one among many—albeit a very influential one.⁶⁹ Moreover, because their temper was more secular, Maronites in Beirut were far less devoted to the Church than were their kinsmen in the Mountain.⁷⁰ The decline of ecclesial influence was especially dismaying for the Church in light of its previous power, as under *Mutasarrifiya*, in which the patriarch’s temporal authority was far-reaching.⁷¹ More dismaying still, the Church had for centuries held

⁶⁷ Eisenberg, *My Enemy’s Enemy*, 79.

⁶⁸ Eyal Zisser, *Lebanon: The Challenge of Independence* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2000), 34.

⁶⁹ Zamir, 122.

⁷⁰ Zisser, “Maronites, Lebanon and the State of Israel,” 899.

⁷¹ Matti Moosa, *The Maronites in History* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1986), 289.

centrality in Maronite life. It was the Church—through its historiography— that had conceived and fostered Maronite nationalism, the Church that had exalted the Maronites by championing and propagating modern education , and the Church that had fulfilled the Maronite dream of Greater Lebanon. But now this once vastly influential institution that Khalil Gibran deplored in *Spirits Rebellious* for its inflated power was, inexorably, in eclipse.

The Church's relegation under the mandate was compounded by a series of rivalries and rows that weakened it still further. Apparently not realizing the marginal role the French had envisioned for it in the new Lebanese state, the Church regularly intervened in Lebanese politics throughout the twenties. The French, for their part, despite their long history of amity with the Maronite Church, much resented the Church's meddling, and the two occasionally clashed in the twenties, particularly when the aggressively anti-clerical Maurice Sarrail was high commissioner in 1925. But after Patriarch Arida's investiture in 1932, the checkered relations between the Church and the high commission during the past decade frosted into an outright *froideur* that was to endure for as long as the mandate itself. The French and Arida got off to an acrimonious start, with the former opposing the new patriarch's election.⁷² There followed several back-and-forth ripostes, as when Arida headed a campaign against the mandatory regime's granting a concession for Lebanese tobacco to a French concern, or when he joined mostly Syrian Arab nationalists in agitating for independence for their respective republics.

⁷² Eyal Zisser, "The Maronites, Lebanon and the State of Israel: Early Contacts," *Middle Eastern Studies* 31, no. 4 (October 1995): 900.

The French, to be sure, were not Arida's sole rival and opponent. Unlike his immediate predecessor, Elias Howayek, who was beloved and respected, Arida was unpopular and divisive.⁷³ Curmudgeonly and stubborn, he was a man of many foibles. And, in consequence, of many foes. Besides the French, the Vatican, too, opposed his ascension to the cathedra and even delayed sending him the ceremonial episcopal cloak.⁷⁴ More embittering to Arida were the Vatican's later attempts to aggrandize its local power at his expense. The two remained at variance throughout Arida's tenure. Arida's relations with Lebanese Muslims were likewise fraught. Save for a fleeting honeymoon with Lebanese and Syrian Sunnis in 1935-36 during the patriarch's anti-French entente with Arab nationalists, Arida and the Muslims were as irreconcilable as were their discrepant visions of Lebanon. Even Arida's own community splintered under his leadership. On the death of Patriarch Howayek at the end of 1931, there erupted a succession struggle within the Church, the result of which was that tensions among the clergy percolated for the entire decade, undercutting the Church all the while.⁷⁵ One of the frustrated patriarchal aspirants was Bishop Abdullah al-Khoury, whose cousin Bishara al-Khoury was the leading Maronite politician of integrationist camp. While Arida's relations with Abdullah were uneasy,⁷⁶ his relations with Bishara were outright hostile. What began as a disagreement between the two over isolation and integration had in short order become envenomed by personal animosities. The implications of this discord were significant for the Church's support base. For by alienating Bishara al-Khoury, Arida had alienated al-

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 899.

⁷⁴ Moosa, 288.

⁷⁵ Meir Zamir, *Lebanon's Quest: The Road to Statehood, 1926-1939* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 1997), 42.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 122.

Khoury's faction too. And since al-Khoury's was one of the two main blocs within Maronite politics, the Church had disaffected a large swath of its constituency.

So the Church, its institutional decline abetted by the divisive figure of Arida, had few friends within Lebanon and without. Riven by internal conflict, alienated from the Vatican and the French, opposed by the Muslims, and aloof from part of its communion, it needed allies. And the Zionists seemed a promising prospect. Perhaps the Church could harness a relationship with the *Yishuv* to rescue its declining leverage and arrest its fall from grace. So with desperation looming, the Maronite clergy initiated contacts with the Jewish Agency and proposed the idea of a minority-alliance.⁷⁷

Emile Edde and the National Bloc

Along with the isolationist Young Phoenicians and the Church, the political faction of Emile Edde completes the trio of Maronites anxious for a partnership with the *Yishuv*. Edde was one of mandatory Lebanon's premier politicians. A prominent lawyer and activist, he embarked on his political career as soon as the Ottomans were ousted in 1918, when he took up the appointment of chief adviser to the French high commission.⁷⁸ Having participated in the Lebanese deputations to the Paris Peace Conference,⁷⁹ he soon became a fixture in Lebanon's governing apparatus.⁸⁰ He served in Lebanon's first consultative and representative bodies, the French-appointed Administrative Commission and its partly elected successor, the Representative Council (constituted in 1922), of

⁷⁷ Schulze, 14.

⁷⁸ Kamal Salibi, *The Modern History of Lebanon*, 171.

⁷⁹ Meir Zamir, "Emile Edde and the Territorial Integrity of Lebanon," *Middle Eastern Studies* 14, no. 2 (May 1978): 232.

⁸⁰ Throughout the mandate, the organs of local governance were completely subordinate to the French high commission.

which became president in 1924. His rise to prominence continued apace throughout the decade. After a very lackluster five-month stint as prime minister in 1929-30, he went on to win the presidency –albeit by one vote—⁸¹in 1936 and became, thereby, the first Lebanese president to be nominated by the votes of the Chamber of Deputies rather than by the ukase of the French high commissioner.⁸²

Edde embodied the Francophile, isolationist Maronite milieu in which he moved. His mentor was Charles Corm, whose Phoenicianism and repudiation of an Arab identity he shared.⁸³ Also, as with Corm, Edde’s mother tongue was French. In fact, so rudimentary was Edde’s Arabic that he conducted the affairs of state in French during his presidency (1936-1941), requiring assistance when conversing with Arabic-speakers.⁸⁴ Edde’s disregard of Arabic was symptomatic of his general high-handedness toward Lebanon’s Arab and Muslims. By Edde’s lights, Lebanon was a Christian preserve to be aligned with the West and divorced from the Arab world. Sure, Arabs and Muslims could live in Edde’s Lebanon, but on sufferance and in the knowledge that Maronite advantage was inviolate. Naturally, Edde’s rhetorical and political expressions of Maronite communalism scandalized Lebanese Muslims. He once ventured that Mecca was the proper place for Muslims who did not wish to live in a Christian-supremacist Lebanon.⁸⁵ His premiership in 1929-1930 was in fact one long exercise in ignoring Arab and Muslim sensibilities. His education policy in particular was seen as “anti-Arab.”⁸⁶ He strengthened Catholic missions that the Arab nationalists suspected, and he advocated

⁸¹ Traboulsi, 98.

⁸² Kaufman, 126.

⁸³ Kamal Dib, *Warlords and Merchants: The Lebanese Business and Political Establishment* (Reading: Garnet, 2004), 78.

⁸⁴ Eisenberg, *My Enemy’s Enemy*, 63.

⁸⁵ Traboulsi, 94.

⁸⁶ Kamal Salibi, *The Modern History of Lebanon* (Delmar: Caravan, 1965), 175.

school curricula that promoted Phoenicianism.⁸⁷ The coup de grace, which occasioned his resignation,⁸⁸ was his attempted closure of a hundred public schools attended by mostly Muslim pupils.⁸⁹ Muslims saw this measure as an artifice for assimilating Muslim children by forcing them to attend Christian schools.⁹⁰ Yet, for all Edde's apparent disdain for Arabs and Muslims, Lebanese history records him as something of a trailblazer in forging Maronite-Sunni cooperation.⁹¹ Paradoxically, as president, he enlisted moderate Muslim allies and set the precedent whereby the presidency would be earmarked for a Maronite and the premiership for a Sunni.⁹² Edde reasoned that, with the French safeguarding Lebanese independence in the form of the mandate, he risked little, and perhaps could gain much, from cooperating with Sunnis.⁹³

Less palatable to Sunnis, though, was Edde's ideology. As befitted a Maronite of his convictions, Edde was firmly in the isolationist camp. Indeed, he was the leader of its political faction, the National Bloc (*al-Kutla al-Wataniyya*). But Edde differed from the Church, with which he was otherwise fully aligned, in that he wanted Lebanon to remain a French mandate indefinitely as a guarantee of Lebanese independence from Syria and the Arab world,⁹⁴ a position he shared with Corm.⁹⁵ Edde further differed from the Church—as well as from the bulk of Maronites of all stripes—in his willingness to relinquish some of the Muslim-majority areas that were annexed to *Mutasarrafiya* to

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ D.K. Fieldhouse, *Western Imperialism in the Middle East* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 320.

⁸⁹ Traboulsi, 94.

⁹⁰ Kaufman, 115.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 161.

⁹² Zamir, "Emile Edde and the Territorial Integrity of Lebanon," 234-35.

⁹³ Raghid El-Solh, *Lebanon and Arabism: National Identity and State Formation* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 15.

⁹⁴ Kamal Salibi, *Crossroads to Civil War: Lebanon, 1958- 1976* (Delmar: Caravan, 1976), 4.

⁹⁵ Kaufman, 158.

form Greater Lebanon. A dread of being overwhelmed by Lebanon's ever-expanding Muslim sector had pushed him in this direction. (In this, Edde anticipated Bashir Gemayel, who coquetted with returning to a "Little Lebanon" whenever the Maronites fared badly in the Lebanese Civil War). Because Edde was aware of the unpopularity of this position in his constituency, he took great care to be discreet in discussing any proposal for retrocession. So when the French high commissioner, Henri de Jouvenel, proposed transferring Tripoli and Akkar to Syria in 1926, Edde quietly seconded the plan.⁹⁶ Six years later, Edde privately petitioned de Jouvenel's successor, Henri Ponsot, to retrocede Tripoli and southern Lebanon.⁹⁷ The French having repeatedly declined, Edde dusted off the proposal, amended it, and floated it to the Zionists in the forties—*after* Lebanon won independence. Twice in 1945 and once in 1946 he offered the Jewish Agency Tyre and Sidon, along with their 100,000 Muslim residents.⁹⁸ The Zionists balked, though, with Chaim Weizmann quipping that his grandfather had told him never to accept "a gift that eats."⁹⁹

In Lebanese politics, the contest between Maronite isolationists and integrationists was waged between Edde and his National Bloc and Edde's inveterate rival, Bishara al-Khoury, and his Constitutional Bloc (*al-Kutla al-Dusturiyya*).¹⁰⁰ Ironically, al-Khoury had once been a protégé and ally of Edde's,¹⁰¹ in whose law office he had previously

⁹⁶ Zamir, "Emile Edde and the Territorial Integrity of Lebanon," 233.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 232.

⁹⁸ Eisenberg, *My Enemy's Enemy*, 129.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ Al-Khoury's cousin, Abdullah, it will be remembered, was a frustrated candidate for the patriarchate and, consequently, a somewhat disgruntled cleric in the Church. While Arida and much of the Church were aligned with Edde, Abdullah al-Khoury was often aligned with his cousin, Bishara.

¹⁰¹ D.K. Fieldhouse, *Western Imperialism in the Middle East*, 320.

worked.¹⁰² But the two men had an ugly falling out. Theirs was a bitter contention, personal as well as political, and it dominated Lebanese politics for the entire mandate.¹⁰³ Having thrice served as premier in the twenties, al-Khoury led his Constitutional Bloc against Edde in the Chamber of Deputies throughout the thirties. At stake, as the political combatants saw it, was Lebanon's destiny: isolation or integration. This certainly did not stamp al-Khoury as an Arab nationalist,¹⁰⁴ but he, his political allies in the Constitutional Bloc, and his intellectual ones at his faction's newspaper, *Le Jour*, were pragmatists, not ideologues. They believed, first, that Lebanese demography had precluded any alternative to accommodation with Lebanon's Arabs and Muslims and, second, that the isolation Edde and the National Bloc championed would, perforce, result in Lebanon's political and economic suffocation. And so, there raged a struggle between Edde's isolationists and al-Khoury's integrationists and their respective political blocs that lasted for two decades, until the mandate ended with Bishara al-Khoury's triumph.

As invariably happened in Maronite politics, one political faction's friends were its rival faction's enemies. So, because the Zionists were aligned with Edde's camp, they were alienated from al-Khoury's. Al-Khoury accordingly espoused anti-Zionism publicly, which enabled him to punish Edde (whose Zionist sympathies were an open secret), while satisfying the Muslims and, in turn, promoting interfaith cooperation and ensuring Maronite security.¹⁰⁵ In any case, Edde was a consistent, if publicly sheepish, advocate of a Zionist-Maronite entente. Before Edde first made contacts with Zionists, his wife's family had for years maintained a relationship with the *Yishuv*. Lodi Edde was

¹⁰² Eyal Zisser, *Lebanon: The Challenge of Independence*, 18.

¹⁰³ Kaufman, 160.

¹⁰⁴ Kamal Salibi, *The Modern History of Lebanon*, 173.

¹⁰⁵ Eisenberg, *My Enemy's Enemy*, 123.

a member of the Sursuq clan of Beirut, one of the wealthiest families in the entire Middle East.¹⁰⁶ Although they were Greek Orthodox, the Sursuqs, unlike most of their Lebanese co-religionists, favored the creation of *Grand Liban*.¹⁰⁷ But far more important for Zionist-Lebanese relations, the Sursuqs were absentee landlords with vast holdings in Palestine, and as such, they became the single largest seller of land to the *Yishuv*.¹⁰⁸ But it was not until 1931,¹⁰⁹ when he first met Epstein that Edde inaugurated his nearly twenty-year relationship with *Yishuv*. Edde scarcely needed to be convinced of the virtues of a Zionist-Maronite partnership; from the beginning, he believed that Jews and Maronites, as the region's "two Occidental nations," were fated to join together in solidarity against the Muslim Arab menace that stalked around them.¹¹⁰ Indeed, as early as 1933, Edde suggested to the Jewish Agency that *Yishuv* and the Maronites forge a political and military union.¹¹¹ But, as we shall see, for Edde, in his desire for an alliance with the Zionists, there often yawned a gulf between private word and public deed.

The Three Maronite Circles as Only One Part of the Maronite Community

As emerges from the foregoing profiles, these three Maronite elements were overwhelmingly similar in cultural and political orientation. Thus was there amity and cooperation between them—not to mention an overlap in membership. With scant exception, members of all three conceived of themselves as non-Arab descendants of the Phoenicians and of their country as a Western-aligned Maronite domain—as Albert

¹⁰⁶ Kais M. Firro, *Inventing Lebanon: Nationalism and the State under the Mandate* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2003), 108.

¹⁰⁷ Kamal Dib, *Warlords and Merchants*, 52.

¹⁰⁸ David McDowall, *Palestine and Israel: The Uprising and Beyond* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 271.

¹⁰⁹ Eisenberg, *My Enemy's Enemy*, 63.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹¹¹ Kirsten E. Schulze, *Israel's Covert Diplomacy in Lebanon*, 19.

Hourani put it, “not the Western edge of the Arabic Muslim world but the eastern edge of Western Christendom.”¹¹² Their Arabic either non-existent or barely serviceable, they were nearly all Francophone as well as Francophile. Even Arida, who fell out with mandatory regime, conducted his affairs in French¹¹³ and embraced French culture. Furthermore, they all feared and often disdained the Arab Muslim world, which they saw as culturally retrograde and politically minatory. So for the Maronites who chose isolation, the Zionists were their only potential ally in the region. And for the Zionists who were forced into isolation, the Maronites were theirs. But the not insignificant rub was that these Maronite isolationists represented but one segment of Lebanon’s politically variegated Maronite community. And more importantly as far as the Zionist-Maronite relationship was concerned, it was they, the isolationists, who were on the losing side of Lebanese history. Like the skeptics, the integrationists, in their prescience, understood that an isolationist Lebanon may have been desirable as an abstraction, but it was certainly untenable as a reality. Lebanon’s demographic trends and the Arab Muslim leviathan that surrounded it had convinced them that an accommodation with the Muslims in return for Muslim recognition and relations with the Arab world was their best bet. But the Zionists and isolationist Maronites were unaware that theirs was a losing struggle. And the result of this was that integrationist Maronites and Lebanese Muslims and isolationist Maronites and the Zionists worked at cross-purposes throughout the mandate.

¹¹² Albert Hourani, *Minorities in the Arab World* (London: Oxford University Press, 1947), 71.

¹¹³ Eisenberg, *My Enemy’s Enemy*, 62.

The Consolidation of Relations

By 1933, the Jewish Agency, in the person of Epstein, had already built a warm rapport with the three Maronite circles. So in the spring of that year, when Chaim Arlosoroff dispatched Victor Jacobson to Lebanon on a fact-finding mission, Jacobson hardly needed help finding Maronites who were alacritous to meet him to discuss collaboration. Jacobson was the World Zionist Organization's emissary to the League of Nations and the first Zionist functionary to propose partition publicly.¹¹⁴ His visit to Lebanon in 1933 heralded a new and more serious phase in the Zionist-Maronite relationship.¹¹⁵ He met "representatives" from each of the three Maronite circles Epstein had cultivated. Addressing a gathering of the Young Phoenicians, Jacobson drew a salvo of protracted applause when he instanced the partnership between Kings Hiram and Solomon as a precedent for a renewed alliance between Lebanese and Jews.¹¹⁶ But more substantively, Jacobson was approached directly by Arida and Edde with offers for a league.¹¹⁷ Arida proposed a general partnership between the Yishuv and Christian Lebanon, while Edde pressed for a close political and military union.¹¹⁸ Edde was joined in touting his proposal by Georges Naccache,¹¹⁹ yet another member of the Naccache dynasty as well as the editor and co-founder of Edde's faction's newspaper, *L'Orient*, and one of the five founding members of the Phalanges Party (*Kataeb*). Jacobson referred the

¹¹⁴ Avraham Sela, *The Continuum Political Encyclopedia of the Middle East* (New York: Continuum, 2002), 122.

¹¹⁵ Ian Black and Neil Caplan, "Israel and Lebanon: Origins of a Relationship," *The Jerusalem Quarterly*, no. 27 (Spring 1983): 49.

¹¹⁶ Eisenberg, *My Enemy's Enemy*, 65.

¹¹⁷ Laura Zittrain Eisenberg, "'Desperate Diplomacy: Zionist-Maronite Treaty of 1946,'" *Studies in Zionism* 13, no. 2 (1992): 150.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ Eisenberg, *My Enemy's Enemy*, 89.

proposals to the political department for consideration, but they fizzled out.¹²⁰ But on Jacobson's return to Palestine, Epstein followed up on his colleague's diplomacy.¹²¹

Meanwhile, the political department underwent something of a minor shake-up. In June 1933, Chaim Arlosoroff was gunned down by two unknown assailants on the beach in Tel Aviv.¹²² Arlosoroff was duly succeeded as head of the political department by its former secretary, Moshe Shertok (Moshe Sharett from 1949). Having spent two years of his youth on the Arab village of Ain Sinya in the Samarian hills, Shertok spoke Arabic and understood the politics of the Arab world with illusionless discernment. He was the consummate "skeptic." His political acumen and sobriety made him a good counterbalance to the "optimist" Epstein, whose deep affection for and camaraderie with the Maronites often colored his assessments of Lebanon's hard political realities. For his part, the now thirty-one-year-old Epstein, having finished his studies at AUB, returned to Jerusalem in 1934 to take up his appointment as head of the Political Department's Middle East division. Charged with overseeing the Yishuv's contacts with its Arab neighbors, Epstein was well placed in his new post to further the relationships he had formed during his three years in Beirut. Sharing the Lebanon portfolio with Epstein was the political department's head of the Arab Affairs Bureau, Eliyahu Sasson. A Mizrahi Jew fluent in Arabic, the "skeptic" Sasson was born in Damascus and educated at the august Maronite-dominated Université Saint Joseph in Beirut. He was officially charged with managing relations with Palestinian Arabs, but his familiarity with and contacts in

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ Schulze, 17.

¹²² Edwin Black, *The Transfer Agreement: The Dramatic story of the Pact between the Third Reich and Jewish Palestine* (New York: Carroll & Graf, 2001), 157. Originally fingered for the assassination were members of Brit HaBironim, a militant Revisionist sect founded by Abba Achimeir and Uri Zvi Greenberg, among others.

Lebanon and Syria broadened his purview.¹²³ In the Yishuv's officialdom, these were the personnel to be involved most directly in the stewardship of relations with the Maronites.

¹²³ Eisenberg, *My Enemy's Enemy*, 19.

Chapter Three: Elusive Objectives

Three Abortive Endeavors: The Plan to Settle German-Jewish Refugees in Lebanon, the Palestine-Lebanon Club, and the Yishuv-Lebanon Treaty of December 1936

In 1933 and 1934 the Jewish Agency got a foretaste of the central problem that was to dog the Zionists' pursuit of an entente with the Maronites for the rest of the mandate—and beyond, for the state of Israel. This was the refusal of most of the Zionists' Maronite friends to translate private assurances into public action. 1933-35 brought the first instance of this leitmotif, when the travail of German Jewry had prompted Chaim Weizmann, in discussions with the French, to propose Lebanon as a sanctuary for Jewish refugees from the Third Reich. (Palestine was not an option, the British having sharply curtailed Jewish immigration). When word of Weizmann's parleys leaked, many Maronites were agog at the prospect of a German Jewish refugees settling in Lebanon. As far as Lebanese demography was concerned, the Jewish newcomers would be, by the Maronites' reckoning, honorary Christians. Indeed, the German Jewish refugees promised to be the largest windfall for Lebanon's Christian demographic edge since Armenian refugees fleeing Turkish massacres in the First World War flooded the country. What is more, since Maronites were large landowners and Lebanon's leading industrialists, they stood to reap a profit bonanza from land sales to and collaboration with German Jews,¹²⁴ a community whose abundant talents had made them the *corps*

¹²⁴ *ibid.*, 79.

d'élite of Europe. There followed a profusion of land sale offers and encouragements from Maronites, not least from those in the three circles. Charles Corm tipped off the Jewish Agency to choice coastal villas and volunteered himself to be the Zionists' broker.¹²⁵ Arida, a huge landowner in his own right, offered to sell the Zionist Organization patriarchal property near Beirut.¹²⁶ Edde proposed that 100,000 Jews be settled in and around Tyre and Sidon to offset southern Lebanon's Muslim preponderance.¹²⁷ Even Najib Sfeir reemerged with a proposal on the general lines of Edde's.¹²⁸ But it was not just the prospect of demographic and economic gain that appealed to these Maronites; in many Maronite quarters, there appeared to be an earnest humanitarian sympathy for the anguished German Jews as well as a desire to furnish relief. While some Catholic bishops in Germany and throughout Europe were inciting anti-Semitism,¹²⁹ Patriarch Arida and Archbishop Mubarak were deploring it. Indeed, in 1933, when Hitler signed a concordat with the Vatican—the Nazis' first bilateral treaty with a foreign power¹³⁰—Arida was issuing statements and publishing letters denouncing the Germans' persecution of Jews.¹³¹ But in the end, all these discussions, proposals, and offers were for naught. The French high commissioner, Damien de Martel, vetoed the plan in dread of a possible Muslim backlash. Paranoia that Jews were British agents and

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 78.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 79

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 78.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ John Cornwell, *Hitler's Pope: The Secret History of Pius XII* (New York: Penguin, 1999), 280.

¹³⁰ James Carroll, *Constantine's Sword: The Church and the Jews: A History* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2001), 498.

¹³¹ Kirsten Schulze, *The Jews of Lebanon: Between Conflict and Coexistence* (Portland: Sussex, 2009), 58.

that Jewish settlement in southern Lebanon would foment Zionist irredentism also figured in de Martel's opposition.¹³²

But for Zionist-Maronite relations, more significant than the failure of the plan was the failure of many Maronites who supported it to say so publicly. True, Edde and Arida were both delighted to greet a possible influx of German Jews, but neither would register his satisfaction or his proposals publicly. The specter of a Muslim outcry had frightened them into timidity. Only the doughty Archbishop Mubarak, never one to retreat from his convictions, would not be deterred by the possible repercussions of public support. Even after the plan had been aborted, Mubarak revived it during his previously mentioned visit to Beirut's Magen Abraham Synagogue. The furor that ensued among Lebanese Muslims seemed to vindicate Edde's and Arida's fears. So febrile was their response that Muslims staged demonstrations, assailed Mubarak in the press, and even impugned his mental soundness.¹³³

Had more of the Zionists' Maronite friends followed Mubarak's lead and countered Muslim resistance publicly, the French high commission might have been prevailed upon to give the refugee plan its imprimatur. Moreover, that the main rationale for the Zionists' pursuit of a partnership with the Maronites was to demonstrate *publicly* that Palestinian Jews were not regional pariahs, the Maronites' discretion availed the Zionists nothing. Since this was the first occasion of Zionist disappointment with Maronite inaction, Laura Zittrain Eisenberg—the foremost expert on this chapter of

¹³² Eisenberg, *My Enemy's Enemy*, 80.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 81.

Zionist-Maronite relations—¹³⁴ contends that the German refugee plan ought to have served as a “test case” for the feasibility of forming an alliance.¹³⁵ At the very least, the plan’s failure ought to have been instructive, enlightening the Zionists to the Maronites’ dilemma, and conditioning Zionist policymakers to expect less of their Maronite friends. But this first Maronite failure to come through, like subsequent ones, appears not to have prompted any such reconsideration.

Other unfulfilled and abortive proposals attended the years that followed. In 1935, Charles Corm floated a proposal to a warmly receptive Epstein for founding a “Palestine-Lebanon club.” The project he envisaged was a scholarly society of Jews and Lebanese (mostly Maronites) that would assemble in Beirut and Jerusalem for seminars on the Judeo-Phoenician past and present.¹³⁶ Discussions for launching the club drew in such personages from both camps as Shertok and Arida.¹³⁷ But the plan fell into abeyance, only to be revived by Corm two years later, in 1937, when the Peel Commission’s deliberations gave some to believe that the birth of a Jewish state was imminent.¹³⁸ This time, Corm proposed broadening the mandate of the society to include economic and political cooperation.¹³⁹ The Jewish Agency, for its part, received the proposal with alacrity.¹⁴⁰ The following year, Corm framed articles of association for the society. Wanting to give the society an official air, he landed the patriarch’s endorsement

¹³⁴ Benny Morris, *Righteous Victims: A History of the Zionist-Arab Conflict, 1881-2001* (New York: Vintage, 2001), 496.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ Kaufman, 158.

¹³⁷ Eisenberg, *My Enemy’s Enemy*, 89.

¹³⁸ Elath, 50.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 50-51.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

for the initiative.¹⁴¹ Corm thereupon presented the draft charter to Shertok, who reviewed the document, making only minor revisions before setting his seal to it.¹⁴² But the “Palestine-Lebanon Friendship Society” was stillborn. The upheavals the Second World War occasioned in Lebanon—the Vichy occupation, Emile Edde’s deposition as president, the British invasion—had scuttled the venture. And when the curtain rose on the 1940s to reveal the integrationists ever more ascendant, the society stood even less of a chance of being realized.

For Zionist-Maronite relations, 1936 seemed to open auspiciously, Emile Edde having won election as president on January 20. But by year’s end, the Palestinian and Lebanese mandates had weathered their gravest crises yet. Armed insurrection raged in Palestine while civil war threatened in Lebanon. But amid the chaos that overtook their societies, Zionists and Maronites continued their flirtations with a partnership in view.

Edde had no sooner been elected than his Zionist friends in the Jewish Agency Executive, exulting that their foremost ally in Lebanese politics had risen to his country’s highest office, offered their congratulations and reminded him of the proposal he made to Jacobson in 1933 for a political and military union.¹⁴³ But before the Zionists and Edde addressed themselves to forming an alliance or concluding a treaty, the Palestinian Arabs erupted in revolt. This greatest challenge to British colonialism in history,¹⁴⁴ “The Great Arab Rebellion,” as it was styled by its participants, began in April 1936 and wore on spasmodically until September 1939,¹⁴⁵ impinging significantly on Zionist-Maronite

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 54.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

¹⁴³ Eisenberg, *My Enemy’s Enemy*, 89.

¹⁴⁴ Traboulsi, 98.

¹⁴⁵ Much of the high-intensity violence had dropped off by May 1939.

relations. One immediate if minor consequence of the revolt was that Emile Edde's expected attendance at the Tel Aviv Levant Fair in May 1936 was cancelled.

Nevertheless, the Lebanese government did participate in the exposition,¹⁴⁶ in defiance of a regional Arab boycott and to the indignation of Lebanese Muslims.¹⁴⁷ The boycott-boosters of south Lebanon's coastal cities were especially incensed by Edde's effusive letter to the fair's organizers announcing the government's support.¹⁴⁸

Another election in 1936 delighted the Zionists and augured well for their relations with the Maronites. In June, Leon Blum became France's first Jewish—as well as its first socialist—prime minister. Blum was a friend both of Chaim Weizmann and the Zionist movement he lead. (Weizmann was then president of the World Zionist Organization). But better still, in the first month of his premiership, Blum suggested to Weizmann that the Yishuv and Lebanon conclude a formal accord.¹⁴⁹ Weizmann relayed Blum's suggestion to Shertok, who in turn dispatched Epstein to call on Edde in Beirut.¹⁵⁰ There, Epstein found the Lebanese president quite keen on Blum's proposed demarche. Edde, however, registered one proviso: he would conclude a pact with the Zionists only with the sanction of High Commissioner de Martel. Although it was Blum who proposed the accord, securing the acquiescence of his subordinate in Lebanon, the conservative and cautious de Martel, was a far more difficult proposition than it seemed.

Meanwhile, as the Zionists lobbied the French, the dislocation in Lebanon escalated. Conceiving of their country as a Syrian *irredenta* amputated from its body,

¹⁴⁶ Elath, 55.

¹⁴⁷ El-Solh, 82.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ Eisenberg, *My Enemy's Enemy*, 93.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 91.

many Lebanese (mostly Greek Orthodox and Muslim) thronged the streets in violent protest. These malcontents had been galvanized by a series of happenings in the course of 1936. Twice that year, Lebanese Muslims had convened conferences¹⁵¹ calling for unity with Syria.¹⁵² Then, in September, the French and the Syrians negotiated a treaty acknowledging Syrian independence. Two months later, the Lebanese government followed suit and won French recognition of their independence. Although the French never ratified these two treaties and refused Syria and Lebanon independence until 1946 and 1943,¹⁵³ respectively, the effect of the treaties was to inflame the Syrian unionists, who saw these measures as positing Lebanese secession as a *fait accompli*. Skirmishes thus erupted between Lebanese patriots and Syrian unionists. In response to the disturbances, a number of paramilitary organizations, the Kataeb among them, sprouted up throughout the country and clashed with one another.

So against this tableau of chaos and conflict, the French high commissioner was loath to confer his blessing on a pact between the Yishuv and Lebanon. To de Martel, it was of little consequence that the French prime minister (his superior), the Lebanese president, and the highly influential president of the World Zionist Congress all converged on the wisdom and desirability of an agreement. Nor did it matter that the Zionists had already presented, on December 23, a draft treaty for mutual recognition to an excited Edde.¹⁵⁴ De Martel was implacable. Not even the storied diplomatic charms of Chaim Weizmann or further instruction from Blum could move him. Amid the ferment

¹⁵¹ The first assembly, Salim Salam's famous Conference of the Coast, was not an exclusively Islamic affair, though Muslims predominated among the attendees.

¹⁵² Walid Phares, *Lebanese Christian Nationalism: The Rise & Fall of an Ethnic Resistance* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1995), 84.

¹⁵³ The French mandate in Lebanon was abolished on November 22, 1943, but French troops remained in the country until December 1946.

¹⁵⁴ Ian Black and Neil Caplan, 54.

and sectarian strife in Lebanon, he was simply not prepared to risk what might have provided the *casus belli* for all-out civil war. Indeed, such was de Martel's aversion to a Zionist-Maronite treaty that he was willing to defy the French prime minister but unwilling to defy Lebanon's Muslims.

Edde's conditioning his acceptance of the treaty on the high commissioner's assent prompts an interesting if unanswerable question: Did Edde stipulate de Martel's approval as necessary in the knowledge that it would not be forthcoming? If so, then Edde's was, of course, a cynical and shrewd calculus. For by setting up the French as the foil to an *open* alliance with the Zionists—the public backlash of which he feared—Edde was able to avoid both blame from the Zionists and outcry from the Muslims (to say nothing of the Greek Orthodox and other Lebanese opponents of Zionism). So having successfully negotiated this quandary, Edde could continue to enjoy the, albeit discreet, friendship of the Zionists and the influence and contacts it afforded without having to formalize the relationship and brave the political fallout. This brazen one-sidedness was, *mutatis mutandis*, the essence of Israel's relationship with Bashir Gemayel in the early 1980s.

It is quite possible that Edde was not channeling Machiavelli after all, but there is much to suggest he anticipated de Martel's rejection. It will be remembered that de Martel had vetoed the German-Jewish refugee plan little more than a year previously. This rejection and de Martel's conservative temperament had perhaps impressed on Edde that the high commissioner would not be amenable to so bold an initiative as a treaty with the *Yishuv*. This was the more plausible in view of the ferment throughout Lebanon when the treaty was deliberated. What is more, de Martel, like many of his predecessors in the

high commission and his colleagues in the Quai d'Orsay, was anti-Zionist,¹⁵⁵ if not anti-Semitic.¹⁵⁶ Edde was assuredly aware of Martel's anti-Zionist animus, it having scarcely been a secret.¹⁵⁷ Yet whatever Edde expected of the treaty, the Zionists appeared not to entertain any suspicions of his reliability. It was not until the Peel Commission conducted its inquest that Edde was would first be put to the test.

The Peel Commission

Arriving in Palestine in November 1936, the Peel Commission was set up by the British government to inquire into the causes of the “Great Arab Rebellion” and to propose prescriptions for the ending the conflict in Palestine. Ultimately, the commission recommended— five years after Victor Jacobson first had—that Palestine be partitioned between Jews and Arabs. But before this conclusion was advanced publicly in July 1937, the Zionists had labored doggedly to ensure that the commission's findings would be favorable to their purposes. As for the Maronites and the Peel Commission, the Zionists pursued two aims. First, they sought contiguity between their prospective state and Lebanon. Their amity with the Maronites had convinced leading Zionist personalities that a shared border between Christian Lebanon and Jewish Palestine was a desideratum. Ben-Gurion, an “optimist” and a lifelong proponent of a Jewish-Maronite entente, joined the more guarded Shertok and Weizmann in lobbying for this. In a speech in 1937, he declared that “Lebanon is the natural ally of the Jews of the Land of Israel....The proximity of Lebanon will furnish a loyal ally for the Jewish state as soon as it is

¹⁵⁵ Chaim Weizmann, *Trial and Error: The Autobiography of Chaim Weizmann* (New York: Harper, 1949), 365.

¹⁵⁶ See David Pryce-Jones, *Betrayal: France, the Arabs, and the Jews* (New York: Encounter, 2006).

¹⁵⁷ Eisenberg, *My Enemy's Enemy*, 92.

created.”¹⁵⁸ But abutment between the Jewish state-to-be and Lebanon was far from guaranteed. The contingency the Zionists feared was that the British would award the Palestinian Galilee to the Arabs and thus deny the prospective Jewish state the border with Lebanon it had coveted.¹⁵⁹ (In the event, the Peel Commission’s moot proposal did in fact cede the Palestinian Galilee to the Jews). Second, to satisfy their first ambition—contiguity with Maronite Lebanon—and to enhance their position generally by demonstrating that they were not the region’s outcasts, the Zionists sought to have their Maronite friends to testify on their behalf before the Peel Commission. The Peel Commission also gave occasion for the Zionists to redeem a debt. While the Lebanese negotiated their treaty with France, Weizmann maneuvered to influence the French in support of the Maronites’ objectives.¹⁶⁰ If reciprocity was to be applied, it followed that the Zionists, having interceded with the Maronites’ mandatory rulers, the French, could expect the Maronites to intercede with theirs, the British. But such an expectation would have been confounded. Epstein appealed to Edde, but the Lebanese president, his courtship of moderate Muslims in parliament succeeding, was averse.¹⁶¹ Edde rhapsodized about the prospect that Lebanon’s southern neighbor would be a Jewish state but said he could not share this sentiment with the Peel Commission.¹⁶² Rebuffed by Edde, Epstein tried Arida. But the patriarch echoed Edde, adding that to testify before the Peel Commission on the Zionists’ behalf would be to invite a massacre of Lebanese

¹⁵⁸ Jonathan C. Randal, *Going All the Way: Christian Warlords, Israeli Adventurers, and the War in Lebanon* (New York: Vintage, 1983), 188.

¹⁵⁹ It was still possible that the French would retrocede southern Lebanon to Syria and so create a mostly Muslim-populated buffer between Christian Lebanon and Jewish Palestine.

¹⁶⁰ Ian Black and Neil Caplan, 50.

¹⁶¹ Eisenberg, *My Enemy’s Enemy*, 100.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

Christians by their Muslim compatriots.¹⁶³ Weizmann then lobbied Arida, but, again, to no avail. And so it was that the Zionists' senior-most friends in Lebanon's first and second estates (Lebanon's *Zaim*-¹⁶⁴dominated political class being a kind of nobility) refused to say publicly what they belabored privately.

Despite the Maronites' refusal to testify, the Zionists were able to extract some political benefit from their relations with their Lebanese friends. While the *Yishuv*'s protocol with Edde for mutual recognition was being deliberated in December 1936, Weizmann addressed the Peel Commission and testified that the Jewish Agency was in the midst of "negotiating some sort of open treaty of friendship" with Lebanon.¹⁶⁵ Whether this impressed the commissioners, however, is an open question. Nevertheless, although the Lebanese government did not testify on behalf of the Zionists, Lebanon's was the only "Arab" government not to decry the partition plan the Peel Commission recommended.¹⁶⁶ Accordingly, when, in September 1937, Mohammed Amin al-Husseini, convened the non-governmental Bludan Conference in Syria to rally the Arab world against the Peel proposal,¹⁶⁷ *L'Orient* (the government-aligned newspaper of Edde's faction) reported that it was not in Lebanon's "interest to antagonize the Jews or the Arabs."¹⁶⁸ That this neutrality (or perhaps, tacit backing of the Zionists) was seen as the government's official line enraged Lebanese Muslims. So furious were they with Edde's

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ Political bosses from entrenched, aristocratic families. Lebanon's third post-independence president, Fouad Shihab, was fond of calling them *fromagiste*, or "cheese-eaters."

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 94.

¹⁶⁶ El-Solh, 82.

¹⁶⁷ Elie Kedourie, "The Bludan Conference on Palestine, September 1937," *Middle Eastern Studies* 17, no. 1 (January 1981): 107-8.

¹⁶⁸ El-Solh, 82.

Lebanon, the Lebanese participants at Bludan even sponsored an ineffectual resolution condemning their own government.¹⁶⁹

Although the Maronites did not come through during the Peel Commission episode, much of the Jewish Agency remained sanguine that when circumstances changed in the Maronites' favor, the alliance the two communities longed for would be consummated.¹⁷⁰ So, despite the disappointment of the Zionists, their amity with and expectations for the Maronites had not flagged. Indeed, as the Peel Commission's findings were readied for publication in June 1937, Weizmann and Edde held a council in Paris. In the course of this warm and affectionate meeting, Edde congratulated a delighted Weizmann on being the "first president of the coming Jewish state" and remarked that he hoped Lebanon would be the first country with which the Jewish state would sign an international treaty.¹⁷¹ Weizmann answered that the Lebanese president was a "true friend, a loyal friend."¹⁷²

Maronites, Zionists, and the Insurrection in Palestine

The intensification of "The Great Arab Rebellion" provided occasion for open Zionist-Maronite cooperation. But as before, the Maronites were not prepared to venture across that forbidding bridge between privacy and publicity. In July 1937, the Peel Commission brought out its report to disastrous effect. Rather than appeasing the mutinous Palestinian Arabs, the partition proposal aggravated them. So after an eleven-month lull, the insurgency resumed afresh. The leader of the revolt—as well as of the

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁰ Eisenberg, *My Enemy's Enemy*, 102-3.

¹⁷¹ Ian Black and Neil Caplan, 56.

¹⁷² Miller, 514.

Palestinian Arabs—¹⁷³ Mohammed Amin al-Husseini, decamped to Lebanon and took up residence in the Maronite village of Zouk north of Beirut. For British and Zionist consumption, the French authorities stipulated that their Palestinian guest was free to remain in Lebanon provided he hold aloof from all political activity. But no sooner had al-Husseini accepted this condition than he flouted it—with the complete connivance of the French. So in due course, al-Husseini, much like Yasser Arafat in Tunis during the First Intifada, established an autocracy-in-exile from which he directed rebel activities in Palestine. Further anticipating the PLO chairman, al-Husseini transformed Lebanon into a locus of anti-Zionist activity. Lebanon became, writ large, not only a command center where Hussein orchestrated guerilla operations, but an army base where Palestinian militants sheltered and a press room where inflammatory propaganda against the British and the Jews was churned out.

For their part, the Zionists' Maronite friends observed the events in Palestine and the attendant agitation in Lebanon with horror. Epstein, after visiting Edde and Arida, reported that his interlocutors saw the revolt as signifying the wages of "Muslim majority rule."¹⁷⁴ Shertok shared this perception, commenting that "the experience of the present disturbances in Palestine has been grist to our mill as far as our relations with the Maronites are concerned."¹⁷⁵ Maronites from all three circles urged the Jewish Agency to press the French to enforce their ostensible ban on al-Husseini.¹⁷⁶ But when the Jewish Agency in turn petitioned their Maronite friends to do likewise, they were met with what

¹⁷³ Besides being the mufti of Jerusalem, al-Husseini was the chair of both the Arab Higher Committee and the Supreme Muslim Council.

¹⁷⁴ Eisenberg, *My Enemy's Enemy*, 109.

¹⁷⁵ Ian Black and Neil Caplan, 50.

¹⁷⁶ Eisenberg, *My Enemy's Enemy*, 109.

had by now become a familiar refusal. Edde, in particular, declined to confront the French, apparently not wanting to disturb his relations with Lebanon's mandatory overlords.¹⁷⁷

To be sure, Edde's presidential mandate, circumscribed as it was by the high commission, barred him from taking any meaningful measures against al-Husseini and the anti-Zionist agitation in Lebanon. Still, Edde appears to have done nothing whatever on the Zionists' behalf in the course of the revolt. The Jewish Agency nevertheless continued to repose its faith in him and its other Maronite contacts. And as the decade drew to a close, the Zionists, far from being dispirited by the serial misfires with their friends in Lebanon, were no less committed to an alliance with the Maronites than they had been at the beginning of the thirties.¹⁷⁸ As Laura Zittrain Eisenberg notes, the cumulative effect of the discussions and proposals for an alliance was, perversely, "to give the illusion of progress."¹⁷⁹

The Decline of the Pro-Zionist Maronites

As the thirties gave way to the forties, global and regional events prescinded Zionist and Maronite attention from forging an alliance. The two years before the outbreak of World War II found the Zionists preoccupied with challenges from both Palestinian Arabs and the British administration. In Palestine, as in Europe, the British government of Neville Chamberlain hewed to a policy of appeasement. So as the revolt proceeded with galloping intensity, the British took great pains to conciliate the Arabs at the expense of Zionism. Whitehall retreated not only from partition—as prescribed by

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 114.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 116.

1938's Woodhead Commission—but from the League of Nations mandate and, derivatively, from the Balfour Declaration too.¹⁸⁰ Superseding Arthur Balfour's famous single-sentence charter was the MacDonald White Paper of May 1939, which called for, among other offenses against Zionism, curtailing Jewish immigration to 75,000 for the coming five years. Particularly dismaying to the Jewish Agency was the White Paper's timing, promulgated as it was “in the darkest hour of Jewish history.”¹⁸¹

So with the onset of the war, the Zionists saw themselves as embroiled in a battle on two fronts: against British immigration quotas and against the Nazis. Hence, Ben-Gurion's famous catchphrase, “We shall fight the war as if there were no White Paper, and we shall fight against the White Paper as if there were no war.”¹⁸² The *Yishuv*, however, proved ineffectual in both theaters. Despite its efforts, it succeeded in smuggling barely sixteen-thousand illegal immigrants to Palestine from 1939 to 1945,¹⁸³ thanks to the punctiliousness with which the British enforced the restrictions. And as for the war against Hitler, while nearly a quarter of the *Yishuv* had volunteered for military service by the end of the war's first month, September 1939,¹⁸⁴ it was not until late 1944 that the 5,000-strong Jewish Brigade Group of Palestinian enlistees was fielded in Europe.¹⁸⁵ These frustrated ambitions notwithstanding, the Zionists' energies were in any

¹⁸⁰ Britain's concessions were idle; the Palestinian Arabs boycotted the Woodhead Commission and rejected the White Paper.

¹⁸¹ Statement by the Jewish Agency for Palestine, “The Zionist Reaction to the White Paper,” in *The Israel-Arab Reader*, ed. Walter Laquer and Barry Rubin (New York: Penguin, 1995), 65.

¹⁸² Abba Eban, *My Country: The Story of Modern Israel* (New York: Random House, 1972), 39.

¹⁸³ Morris, 163.

¹⁸⁴ Efraim Karsh, *Palestine Betrayed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 61.

¹⁸⁵ Yoav Gelber, “The Jewish Brigade in Belgium,” in *Belgium and the Holocaust: Jews, Germans, Belgians*, ed. Dan Michman (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1998), 477.

event completely absorbed by the war's dislocations, the mandatory regime's obstructions, and statehood's prerequisites.

The pro-Zionist Maronites were no less distracted and weakened. In the declining years of his presidency, Emile Edde had been reduced to even more of a figurehead than was befitting *ex officio*. At every turn he was undermined by de Martel and the more so by his successor, Gabriel Puaux.¹⁸⁶ He was thwarted further by the parliamentary obstructionism of his old antagonist Bishara al-Khoury, then the leader of the opposition.¹⁸⁷ In fact, so negligible had Edde's powers become that he no longer troubled to go to government headquarters, preferring instead to "preside" over the state from his private home.¹⁸⁸ Edde was finally relieved of his post altogether in April 1941, when the Vichy-aligned high commissioner, Henri Dentz, deposed him.

World War II impinged even more directly on Lebanon than it had on Palestine. In the summer of 1940, before Italy's aerial bombardments of Palestine and after Germany's defeat of France, Lebanon fell under Vichy rule. Having dismissed Edde, Henri Dentz installed Alfred Naccache as president. But contrary to Zionist hopes, Naccache's appointment scarcely affected Zionist-Maronite relations. Although Albert Naccache was an unreserved pro-Zionist and Epstein's original gateway to the three Maronite circles, his cousin, Alfred, was more measured. To be sure, Alfred Naccache nourished the Zionist sympathies of his family, but he was even more diffident than Edde when it came to acting on them.¹⁸⁹ Moreover, the president's mandate had been so

¹⁸⁶ Kamal Salibi, *The Modern History of Lebanon*, 183.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 184.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁹ Eisenberg, *My Enemy's Enemy*, 119.

restricted by Dentz that Naccache was even more of a ceremonial head of state than Edde.¹⁹⁰ Further militating against Naccache was his estrangement from Arida. Naccache's closeness to the Jesuits, whose relations with Arida were rancorous, antagonized the patriarch.¹⁹¹ The byproduct of this enmity was that, throughout Naccache's two-year incumbency, the pro-Zionist isolationist camp was divided between two centers of power, the presidency and the patriarchate. It was during these twelve months of Vichy rule in Lebanon that the pro-Zionist Maronites' fortunes began to flag.

In June 1941, after the Nazi-inspired Golden Square coup in Iraq, Rommel's advance toward Egypt, and Dentz's provision of air fields to the Germans and matériel to the Iraqi putschists, the British and the Free French Forces¹⁹² embarked on Operation Exporter, the 34-day liberation of Lebanon. For the next two years, Lebanon was ruled by an Anglo-French condominium. The insinuation of the British into Lebanese decision-making was an unhappy development for the Zionists, the isolationist Maronites, and their prospects for an alliance. Whitehall was afraid of losing the Arab world to the Axis, so it set about courting the Middle East's Arab majority. In Lebanon, this meant pressing the French to declare independence and establishing a regime more congenial to the country's disenchanted Muslims. The British accordingly favored the integrationists, whose ambitions—immediate Lebanese independence and Muslim-Christian cooperation—cohered with their own. The agent of Whitehall's Lebanese policy was its minister plenipotentiary in the Levant states, Edward Spears. Devotedly anti-Zionist as

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁹¹ Eyal Zisser, *Lebanon: The Challenge of Independence*, 37.

¹⁹² The Allies were joined in this campaign by the nascent Israeli army's newly formed striking force, the Palmach. Three veterans of this elite soldiery, Moshe Dayan, Yigal Allon, and Yitzhak Rabin, all served in Operation Exporter.

well as anti-Semitic,¹⁹³ Spears harbored no affection for the Maronite isolationists either and most especially not for Edde, whom he derided as a “French stooge.”¹⁹⁴ So in opposition to the interests of the Zionists, the isolationist Maronites, and the French, Spears set Lebanon on a course for independence and pluralism.

Meanwhile, the march toward independence saw the pro-Zionist Maronites, already coalesced around the two camps of President Naccache and Patriarch Arida, fracture still further. In advance of Operation Exporter, the British, hoping to forestall local opposition to their invasion, extracted a commitment from the Free French to grant Lebanon independence. To this end, allied aircraft dropped leaflets signed by Free French commander Georges Catroux promising independence. But after they had ensconced themselves in Lebanon, the Free French reneged, delivering an Irish bull that at once “affirmed” Lebanese sovereignty while upholding France’s continued prerogatives. In the two-year struggle for independence that followed, the isolationist Maronites sundered between those who wanted the French to remain indefinitely and those wanted independence immediately. In this contest, such longtime partisans of French rule as Corm and Edde supported Alfred Naccache, who stayed on as president after Vichy’s ouster and, as such, championed continued French rule. Opposing them was the more numerous group headed by Naccache’s detractor, Arida who was backed by Mubarak and most of the Church. That Arida’s was the more popular group among the Maronites was hardly an astonishment. Independence had increasingly commended itself to the Maronites during the war. A litany of French abuses—the omission to ratify the 1936

¹⁹³ See Rory Miller, “Sir Edward Spears’ Jewish Problem: A Leading anti-Zionist and His Relationship with Anglo-Jewry, 1945-1948,” *Journal of Israeli History* 19, no. 1 (Spring 1998): 41-60.

¹⁹⁴ Traboulsi, 106.

treaty, the suspension of the constitution in 1939, the trivialization of the presidency, the false promises of independence—had soured many Maronites on their longtime guardians. And now, a majority wanted them out.¹⁹⁵

Naturally, the divisions among the pro-Zionist Maronites weakened the entire isolationist bloc, which at least remained united in its sympathies with the Yishuv. As Lebanese discontent with the French mounted, Alfred Naccache, Edde, and Corm found themselves in the lonely position of siding with a regime that was deeply unpopular. They were thus courting disgrace. But Arida and Mubarak's strident support for independence was not without its perils either. For by making common cause with the Maronite integrationists and Lebanese Muslims with whom they were otherwise out of sympathy, Arida and Mubarak were unwittingly engaging in a Faustian enterprise. By supporting independence, they were indirectly aiding their adversaries and midwifing the pluralistic integrationist Lebanon they would rebel against after independence.

While the isolationists rallied around their conflicting causes, Bishara al-Khoury and the integrationists began their ascent to power. Since Vichy's ouster, al-Khoury had worked to consolidate his ties to the moderate Sunni elites he had been courting for fifteen years. In advancing his vision of an integrationist Lebanon, he found a sympathetic ally in the pragmatic Muslim politician Riyad al-Solh. The al-Khoury-al-Solh tandem appealed to the Lebanese majority by casting itself as the alternative to (as well as the antithesis of) the French-aligned anti-independence Maronite nationalists represented by Naqqash and Edde. It was an easy sell to make. So in early 1943, when the Free French, after much foot-dragging and equivocation, yielded to Spears' pressure

¹⁹⁵ Harris, 119.

to hold elections, al-Khoury and al-Solh were poised to make a strong showing. The two-stage balloting took place in the late summer of 1943 and, as expected, delivered a decisive victory to al-Khoury's Constitutional Bloc and its partners. The election's loser was Edde's status quo-supporting National Bloc. But in the Maronite heartland of Mount Lebanon, the largest and most heavily Maronite of the five electoral districts, the result was the opposite. There, Edde's list garnered nearly twice the votes of al-Khoury's.¹⁹⁶ And this, despite the fact that al-Khoury was a child of the Mountain while Edde was a lifelong Beirut. But al-Khoury did not need to carry the Maronite vote; his strength lay in his cross-confessional appeal. And he would harness this strength to change the course of Lebanese history and, with it, the prospects of a Zionist-Maronite alliance.

On September 19, 1943, al-Khoury, fresh off his electoral triumph, met with his Sunni partner, Riyad al-Solh, in the town of Aley in Mount Lebanon. The informality of this meeting belied its historic significance. For what emerged from this tête-à-tête was nothing less than Lebanon's unwritten constitution, the National Pact. This covenant between Lebanon's first post-independence president and prime minister outlined the modalities of Lebanon's famous confessional system: the ultra-powerful president would be a Maronite, the prime minister a Sunni, and the parliamentary speaker a Shia. According to a compromise formula devised by Spears,¹⁹⁷ political and administrative posts would be allocated to Christians and Muslims on the basis of a 6:5 ratio, respectively. But what bore most directly on Zionist-Maronite relations was the National Pact's acknowledgement of Lebanon as a country with an "Arab face" (*wajh arabi*). This formulation implied that Lebanon would be integrated into the Arab world without

¹⁹⁶Eyal Zisser, *Lebanon: The Challenge of Independence*, 48.

¹⁹⁷ Harris, 137.

renouncing its sovereignty, its friendship with the West, or its distinctiveness. For the isolationist Maronites and the Zionists, though, Lebanon's association with the Arab world, however modest, was tantamount to the country's irretrievable defection to the Arab side. And while the National Pact did not give explicit evidence of this, Bishara al-Khoury's foreign policy as president did.

On September 21, clinching the Constitutional Bloc's success at the polls, al-Khoury was duly elected president. He thereupon nominated al-Solh as his prime minister and formed a pluralistic government. But the triumph of the integrationists was dampened by France's continued presence. So on November 9, at al-Khoury's initiative, a bill carried in the Chamber of Deputies expunging all of France's mandatory privileges from the Lebanese constitution. The French reaction was as swift as it was bungling. The mandatory authorities rounded up and arrested al-Khoury, al-Solh, Camille Chamoun, and three other leading politicians, carrying them off to the Crusader fortress at Rashaya and jailing them. Meanwhile, as Lebanese of all sects inundated the streets to agitate against France's despotism, High Commissioner Jean Helleu nominated Edde president in al-Khoury's absence. Forever discrediting himself in the eyes of the Lebanese, Edde obliged, assuming office immediately. Most Lebanese, even a few isolationist Maronites, thus regarded Edde as a quisling all too willing to serve France's designs on Lebanon. In any event, Edde was unable to form a government, boycotted as he was by the entire political class.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁸ Traboulsi, 107.

Following the arrest, Spears sent an ultimatum to French: free the six detainees or see them freed. The French yielded, and on November 22, 1943, the sextet was released and Lebanese independence proclaimed. The nearly twenty-year battle between Edde and the isolationists and al-Khoury and the integrationists was over. A Maronite-supremacist Christian homeland severed from the Arab world was not to be. The alternative had arisen: a pluralistic state—albeit one honoring Maronite privilege—integrated into the Arab world but friendly to the West. But although they had lost, many isolationists were not prepared to surrender their conception of Lebanon. For the next few years, they made grasping attempts to rescue Lebanon from “Arabism.”

After independence, Edde, whom Kamal Salibi described as “completely out of touch with the country” during the struggle with French,¹⁹⁹ saw his political fortunes plummet. He was expelled from the Chamber of Deputies, and his loyalists were purged from the civil service.²⁰⁰ Corm despaired as his close friend and ally was ostracized. Epstein reported that Corm “was in a panic” after Edde’s fall and that the great Lebanese bard was committed to reversing Lebanon’s course.²⁰¹ But for the time being, the National Bloc was consigned to irrelevance. It remained dormant until Edde’s anti-Zionist son, Raymond, revived it a decade later.

Bishara al-Khoury’s presidency gave the unresigned isolationists even more occasion for anxiety. And insofar as isolationist and Zionist interests converged, the Jewish Agency was no less disquieted by al-Khoury’s Lebanon. Al-Khoury set himself to reconciling Lebanon with the Arab world. In a move portentous of his presidential

¹⁹⁹ Salibi, *The Modern History of Lebanon*, 190.

²⁰⁰ As’ad Abu Khalil, *Historical Dictionary of Lebanon* (Lanham: Scarecrow, 1998), 159.

²⁰¹ Kaufman, 184.

policy, al-Khoury, even before taking office, visited Cairo to conclude an economic treaty with Egypt, Syria, Iraq, and Jordan.²⁰² There followed a series of pan-Arab initiatives. In 1944, Lebanon was one of five Arab states to accede to the Alexandria Protocol, committing itself to joining a confederation of Arab states. This appalled even some of al-Khoury's Maronite partisans among the integrationists.²⁰³ In any event, the following year the Alexandria Protocol was realized, and Lebanon became a founding member of the Arab League. In December 1945, the Arab League launched its boycott of the *Yishuv*, its goods, and its people, binding Lebanon to shun its southern neighbor. In 1946, Lebanon participated in the Arab League's summit in Bludan, Syria, at which Lebanon joined the rest of the Arab League in pledging assistance, economic and military, to the Palestinian Arabs. As war in Palestine loomed, al-Khoury's government even hosted two Arab summits, in Sofar and Aley in 1947, at which the League's commitments to the Palestinians were affirmed and coordinated. Thus did anti-Zionism, which al-Khoury had been espousing since the early thirties, become official Lebanese policy.

As al-Khoury led Lebanon's drive toward Arabism, the isolationists waxed ever more desperate. Their interests were two-fold: reversing Lebanon's Arab apostasies and restoring isolationist influence. Even before the integrationists had sealed their victory, the isolationists had begun scrambling to preserve Lebanon's identity as they conceived it. A particularly egregious attempt at this came in the summer of 1943, when the newly appointed president, Ayoub Thabet, instituted a number of measures aimed at consecrating Lebanon to the isolationists. An Edde loyalist and a Maronite convert to

²⁰² Traboulsi, 106.

²⁰³ El-Solh, 255.

Protestantism, Thabit decreed that the already inequitable number of parliamentary seats for Muslims be reduced and that Lebanese emigrants—who were overwhelmingly Maronite—be enfranchised in the country’s elections. Thabit’s demographic gerrymandering found support among leading isolationists, including Arida and Mubarak, but ultimately his decrees, as well as his presidency, were scuttled by vehement Muslim opposition. Nevertheless, the isolationists, desperate but unbowed, continued to propose correctives to Lebanon “descent” into Arabism. After Lebanon’s accession to the Arab League as a founding member, Mubarak, who had emerged as the isolationists’ leader in the forties,²⁰⁴ commissioned a group of Christian intellectuals that included the celebrated Maronite historian Fouad Afram al-Boustany to write a pamphlet called *S.O.S Lebanon: A Homeland for the Christians of the Near East*. Besides rejecting the National Pact and positing a non-Arab character of Lebanese Christians, this *cri de coeur* proposed a transfer of one million Lebanese Muslims to Syria in exchange for an equal number of Syrian and other Middle Eastern Christians to Lebanon.²⁰⁵ But the pamphlet’s publication succeeded only in raising an outcry. Lebanese history nevertheless assigns *S.O.S. Lebanon* importance not as a policy paper but as a documentary capsule of the isolationists’ desperation in the forties. As Lebanon expert John Entelis notes, “The appearance in 1945 of the publication was probably the last open attempt to assert the supremacy of the Maronite nationalist ideology, at least until the outbreak of sectarian conflict in 1975.”²⁰⁶ During this season of isolationist despair, retroceding Muslim-majority territories even began to look palatable to the hardline Maronite nationalists. It was at this time that Emile Edde made his three bids to the Zionists to accept southern

²⁰⁴ Phares, 95.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 96.

²⁰⁶ Quoted in *Ibid.*

Lebanon and its Shia masses along with it. Even such longtime proponents of Greater Lebanon as Mubarak were now prepared to relinquish some or all of the country's non-Christian areas.²⁰⁷ Dire circumstances had prompted their about-face. Faced with a choice between a truncated Christian homeland and an Arabist-oriented Greater Lebanon, many isolationists opted for the former as a *pis aller*.

The 1946 Treaty between the Jewish Agency and the Maronite Church

So as the knell of the isolationists' power tolled and desperation became the order of the day, the Maronite Church, in the person of Arida, sought recourse to the Zionists. For their part, the Zionists were characteristically receptive to Arida's renewed overtures. True, the new political order in Lebanon had made the Church the weakest it had been for centuries, but it now wielded more clout than the two other pro-Zionist Maronite circles. Edde and his stalwarts had become political nullities while the Young Phoenicians, whose influence was never really more than cultural, had petered out. The Church, then, despite its marginality, was the Zionists' last hope.

So in April 1946, the 83-year-old Arida initiated through his representatives negotiations for a treaty with the Jewish Agency. And on May 30, 1946, after two months of discussions and correspondence, the Maronite Church and the Jewish Agency gave official sanction to their fifteen-year relationship and concluded a six-article treaty. The signatories, who were invested with plenipotentiary power by their principals, were Tawfik Awad (a onetime cabinet minister and a close associate of Arida's) and Bernard

²⁰⁷ Atallah Mansour, *The Christian Presence in the Holy Land under Muslim and Jewish Rule* (Pasadena: Hope, 2004), 148-149.

Joseph²⁰⁸ (the deputy head of the Jewish Agency's political department and Chaim Weizmann's representative).²⁰⁹ The accord provided for mutual recognition of Christian Lebanon and Jewish Palestine and called for substantial cooperation between the two polities. But the treaty had two intrinsic defects. First, although its sixth article stated that the agreement was to become operative upon signing, much of the treaty was contingent. The provisions that dealt with modalities of normalization and cooperation could not be activated *until* Christian Lebanon and Jewish Palestine were established. And in 1946, not only was the creation of a Jewish state far from guaranteed, but the creation of the "Christian" Lebanon the Church envisaged, three years after the isolationists' decisive political defeat, was fanciful, to say the least. Second and more significant was the Church's stipulation that the Jewish Agency keep the treaty confidential. Although the Zionists appeared not to appreciate it fully when the agreement was concluded, this "gag order" completely divested the treaty of its political utility to the Jewish Agency. That Arida insisted that the treaty remain *sub rosa* was, of course, consistent with the discretion that he had always taken care to exercise in his traffic with the Zionists. Moreover, not long before the treaty was signed Arida had again witnessed the dangers of bucking the regional *vox populi*. In 1945, he addressed a letter to the American Maronite community in which he attacked the Arab League and sounded the tocsin for Lebanon's survival, claiming that the Arab world had aggressive designs on Lebanon.²¹⁰ Somehow Arida's opponents got hold of this jeremiad and succeeding in discrediting him by

²⁰⁸ Later Dov Yosef.

²⁰⁹ Eyal Zisser, *Lebanon: The Challenge of Independence*, 147-48.

²¹⁰ Barry Rubin, *The Arab States and the Palestine Conflict* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1981), 139.

leaking it to the Lebanese press.²¹¹ This episode, as well as the previous furors raised by Mubarak's comments, only emphasized the Church's need for stealth.

But in the end, it was the Church itself, not the Zionists, that doffed the treaty's veil of secrecy. In January 1948, Awad and Arida became embroiled in a bitter dispute. In the midst of the row, Awad, attempting to disgrace the patriarch, revealed that Arida had authorized him to negotiate a treaty with the Jewish Agency.²¹² Arida then hastened to disassociate himself from the treaty,²¹³ though he did not actually deny signing it either.²¹⁴ In any case, the contretemps that resulted appears to have been limited to a small clique at the patriarchal see, Awad's incriminating disclosure not having provoked the kind of backlash one would have expected.²¹⁵ Nevertheless, if the treaty ever had any teeth, it did not after Awad's revelation. So once again, the Zionists and Maronites attempted another treaty that proved a dead letter, and once again, the pro-Zionist Maronites declined to publicize their diplomacy with the *Yishuv*.

The treaty debacle was the plainest expression yet of the asymmetry that characterized the Zionist-Maronite relationship. The all-important secrecy clause that the Church insisted on encapsulated this imbalance. A secret treaty posed no risk to the Maronites and consequently delivered no benefit to the Zionist. After all, the Zionists' principal aim in pursuing a relationship with the Maronites was to demonstrate that not all the people in the region were antagonistic to their program. But if the Maronite Church was unwilling to formalize their relationship with *Yishuv* publicly, then what

²¹¹ *Ibid.*

²¹² Eisenberg, "Desperate Diplomacy: Zionist-Maronite Treaty of 1946," 160-161.

²¹³ Itamar Rabinovich, *The War for Lebanon: 1970-1985* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 104.

²¹⁴ Zisser, "The Maronites, Lebanon and the State of Israel: Early Contacts," 901.

²¹⁵ Eisenberg, "Desperate Diplomacy: Zionist-Maronite Treaty of 1946," 161.

good was the treaty? For the Church, however, a secret treaty was an asset and a public one a liability. Thus the Church used the treaty to avail itself of the Zionists' political influence and material resources. Hoping to offset its marginalization, it sought to leverage the Zionists' sway in the United States to mobilize American support for their (isolationist) cause.²¹⁶ Indeed, the Church "made no secret of the fact that they believed they could benefit from the ties and experience of the Jewish Agency in their cause," writes Eyal Zisser, "and were even encouraged in this by the Agency itself."²¹⁷ The treaty itself, in its fourth article, even stipulates that the Jewish Agency's international offices were to aid the Church in promoting its interests.²¹⁸ So before Awad definitively quashed it, the treaty languished in secrecy while the Church continued to enjoy funding and diplomatic assistance from the Zionists.

The Anglo-American Commission

Although the treaty miscarried, 1946 did bring the Zionists some (albeit modest) benefit from their relationship with the Maronites. After the war, controversy riveted on the British government for restricting Jewish immigration in the face of the Jewish refugee crisis in Europe. In line with Whitehall's penchant for commissions of inquiry, Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin proposed setting up an investigative body to examine the immigration question and to recommend a new administrative disposition for Palestine. The result was the half-American half-British half-baked Anglo-American Commission of Inquiry. Before three of the twelve rapporteurs visited Syria and Lebanon in March

²¹⁶ Zisser, "The Maronites, Lebanon and the State of Israel: Early Contacts," 901.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*

²¹⁸ CZA S25/3269

1946,²¹⁹ the Jewish Agency set itself to lobbying its Maronite friends to register their Zionist sympathies to the commission. Although in 1936-1937 the Zionists failed to inveigle testimony from their Maronite friends for the Peel Commission, this time they met with more success. The change, however, was not due to any newfound audacity on the part of the pro-Zionist Maronites; it was rather because the manner in which the Anglo-American Commission conducted its inquest allowed for greater discretion.

On March 21, the last day of the commission's visit to Lebanon, one of the American rapporteurs, Professor James McDonald, held meetings *in camera* with Arida, Mubarak, and Abdullah al-Khoury.²²⁰ If McDonald had hitherto heard only anti-Zionism from his subjects in Lebanon, then his audiences with the three church dignitaries were a marked departure. The clerical trio held forth on the dangers of Muslim fanaticism, and Mubarak and Arida expressed their admiration for the *Yishuv* and their support for its aspiration to statehood.²²¹ Mubarak, as usual, was the most candid. In fact, two days before his meeting with McDonald, he gave an interview to the Palestine Post (the original name of the Jerusalem Post) in which he spoke of Zionism in laudatory tones. "If the committee had heard the true voice [of Lebanon]," he offered, "it would have heard that voice declaring support for Jewish reconstruction in Palestine, the support of Zionism as a symbol of progress and security for all the people of the Middle East."²²² When McDonald inquired if Mubarak was afraid of the backlash the interview might stir,

²¹⁹ Amikam Nachmani, *Great Power Discord in Palestine: The Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry into the Problems of European Jewry and Palestine, 1945-46* (London: Frank Cass, 1987), 152.

²²⁰ Allen H. Podet, "Husni al-Barazi on Arab Nationalism in Palestine," in *Zionism and Arabism*, ed. Elie Kedourie and Sylvia G. Haim (London: Frank Cass, 1982), 181-83.

²²¹ *Ibid.*

²²² Gerold Frank, "Interview with Monsignor Mubarak," *Palestine Post*, March 21, 1946.

the archbishop answered, “I have never known fear.”²²³ Mubarak demonstrated this supposed immunity to fear when the Anglo-American Commission published its findings, proposing that 100,000 Jewish displaced persons be admitted to Palestine. Amid the riots and protests that the Commission’s recommendations provoked throughout the Arab world—the United States Information Center in Beirut was even set alight—²²⁴ Mubarak distinguished himself as the only pro-Zionist Maronite notable to support the commission openly.

United Nations Special Committee on Palestine

In February 1947, the British government, having antagonized Arabs and Jews alike, announced that it would offload the responsibility for resolving the Palestine question on the United Nations. So when the General Assembly convened in special session in the spring, it set up a commission of representatives from eleven member states to propose a settlement. The United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP) had originally been detailed to spend five weeks just in Palestine, but the “anti-Jewish”²²⁵ Indian delegate, Abdur Rahman, prevailed upon his colleagues to sound out regional Arab leaders.²²⁶ It was this decision that took the commission to Lebanon. There, the committee was regaled with attacks on Zionism and partition by Lebanese politicians. It was not just Muslim anti-Zionists like Riyad al-Sulh among the fulminators; such prominent Maronite integrationists as Hamid Franjiyeh and Camile Chamoun likewise inveighed against the creation of a Jewish state. For their part, the Zionists’ isolationist friends, with the exception of Mubarak, were too apprehensive to voice their support for a

²²³ Podet, 182.

²²⁴ Morris, *Righteous Victims*, 179.

²²⁵ Brian Urquhart, *Raphe Bunche: An American Odyssey* (New York: Norton, 1993), 142.

²²⁶ Morris, 1948: *The First Arab-Israeli War*, 45.

Jewish state on the record. Outside Sofar in the Mountain, both Arida and Edde met privately with the commission and encouraged their visitors to recommend partition and the creation of a Jewish state.²²⁷ Once again, private protestations of support were all the Zionists could expect from their highest-placed Maronite friends. Mubarak, however, was a different matter. Evidently banished to Rome²²⁸ by al-Khoury's government so he would not give pro-Zionist testimony,²²⁹ Mubarak could not be silenced. His counterstroke was to send a letter to UNSCOP's chairman, Emil Sandstrom, arguing on the Zionists' behalf: "It is an incontestable historical fact that Palestine was the home of the Jews...the Lebanon and Palestine must continue to be the permanent home of minorities."²³⁰ As before, Mubarak, the only native of the Arab World to appeal publicly to UNSCOP in favor of Zionism,²³¹ was also the only one of the Zionists' Maronite allies to come through when most needed. His emphatically supportive letter was the most substantial reward the Zionists had yet reaped from their Maronite connection.

But if Mubarak's letter was a minor victory for the Zionists, it was a major defeat for Mubarak. No sooner had had Mubarak sent his missive than it provoked a furor in Lebanon. Demonstrations flared up and denunciations issued from all corners of the country. Twenty Lebanese parliamentarians in the Chamber of Deputies signed a motion deploring the letter and called on the government to take action against Mubarak.²³² Characteristically undaunted, Mubarak refused to recant amid the avalanche of criticism.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*

²²⁸ Jihane Sfeir, *L'exil Palestinien au Liban: Le Temps des Origines, 1947-1952* (Beirut: Karthala, 2008), 120.

²²⁹ Eisenberg, *My Enemy's Enemy*, 142.

²³⁰ Mubarak's letter to Emil Sandstrom (August 5, 1947) in Bat Ye'or, *The Dhimmis: Jews and Christians under Islam* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1985), 402-403.

²³¹ Mansour, 150.

²³² Phares, 96.

Arida, for his part, was far less intrepid; indeed, he buckled completely. Although his treaty with the Jewish Agency was technically still operative, he was unwilling to expose the Church to further opprobrium for its association with Mubarak. He joined the chorus of critics and may have even dismissed Mubarak from his parish.²³³ But whatever Arida's involvement, by year's end, Mubarak was gone, leaving the Zionists bereft of their only Maronite friend who openly dared to defy Lebanon's anti-Zionist consensus.

Mubarak's fall was a cautionary tale for pro-Zionist Maronites. More than any other episode in the preceding two decades of Zionist-Maronite intercourse, it demonstrated the hazards of openly supporting Zionism in Lebanon. For his one epistolary exercise, Mubarak had suddenly become the *bete noire* of Lebanon. He was condemned by the government, reviled by the public, and likely defrocked by the Maronite church. His refusal to recant and his acceptance of the consequences surely marked him out as uniquely principled among the pro-Zionist Maronites. But if being as principled as Mubarak meant suffering a fate like his, then nearly all pro-Zionist Maronites were understandably unwilling to follow the archbishop into the fire. Mubarak's end also vindicated the fears the Zionists' more reticent friends like Edde and Arida. As has been seen, dread of a public backlash had always caused these pro-Zionist Maronites to refuse the Zionists' their public support. But despite this much-warranted anxiety, their fears had never really been tested--that is, until the Mubarak imbroglio. And as it turned out, open support of the "Zionist enemy" was just as prohibitive as they had always suspected. Nevertheless, subsequent generations of pro-Zionist Maronites did produce a few heirs to Mubarak, Maronites who were willing to brave the consequences

²³³ William Haddad, "Christian-Arab Attitudes towards the Arab-Israeli Conflict," *Muslim World* 67, no. 2 (1977): 129-30.

of open collaboration with Israel. Only their fates were more grievous than the hapless archbishop's: permanent exile and death sentences in absentia.

The Mubarak affair further revealed the inherent limitations of a Zionist-Maronite alliance. For the Maronites, not only did it show the risks--political, professional, and personal--of indiscreet friendship with the Zionists, but it also showed what ostentatious pro-Zionists were up against in Lebanon and the Arab world. For the Zionists, it showed the fickleness of their Maronite friends who were not as audacious as Mubarak and the political futility of a "secret alliance." Twenty years of friendship and a treaty with the Jewish Agency was ultimately of no help to the Zionists when Arida was submitted to the crucible. In fact, Arida's was a double-betrayal, treacherous to both his colleague and longtime friend as well as the Zionists from whose patronage he had long benefitted. Ironically, it may have been Arida's own guarded pro-Zionist sympathies that ordained a fate for him similar to Mubarak's. Bat Ye'or claims that the Vatican--which denied recognition to Israel thanks in part to the lobbying of the Maronite integrationist Charles Helou²³⁴ forced Arida's resignation in 1954 because of the patriarch's history of amity with the Zionists.²³⁵ Edde, for his part, did not come through for the Zionists either--though he did not join Arida in condemning Mubarak. Edde's silence was, of course, congruent with his long-established modus operandi in his relationship with the Zionists.

The Mubarak affair provided the coda to twenty years of ongoing Zionist-Maronite diplomacy. Mubarak was ousted from his parish, Arida was thereafter too

²³⁴ Michael C. Hudson, *The Precarious Republic: Political Modernization in Lebanon* (Boulder: Westview, 1985), 325.

²³⁵ Bat Ye'or, *Islam and Dhimmitude: Where Civilizations Collide* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2002), 169.

timorous to revive his ties with the Zionists, and Edde died in 1949. The decline of Zionist fortunes in Lebanon was dramatized on May 15, 1948, when Lebanon entered the pan-Arab war against newborn Israel. (Official Lebanese involvement in the war was minimal. Irregulars from Lebanon captured two villages in northern Palestine on the first day of the pan-Arab invasion, but Fouad Shihab, the Maronite chief of staff and, later, Lebanon's third post-independence president, declined to commit troops to the war against Israel).²³⁶ For the next thirty years, contacts between the Maronites and the Israelis were desultory and infrequent. But although the Mubarak affair was the definitive object lesson in the impediments to a Zionist-Maronite alliance, the Zionists' Israeli successors and some of their Maronite sympathizers were not deterred in their quest for an alliance. They both held out hope that if circumstances in Lebanon changed and isolationist Maronites gained ascendancy, then the two peoples would finally be able to realize the partnership that they saw not just as necessary, but as natural--a word the two camps often employed.²³⁷ It was this hope that sustained proponents of an alliance on both sides and brought about their convergence three decades later. But in the seventies and eighties, the same obstacles to an alliance that the Mubarak affair typified were even more forbidding.

²³⁶ Morris, *Righteous Victims*, 234-35.

²³⁷ See Kirsten E. Schulze, "Israeli and Maronite Nationalisms: Is a Minority Alliance Natural?" in *Nationalism, Minorities, and Diasporas: Identities and Rights in the Middle East* (London, I.B. Tauris, 1996), 158-170.

Chapter Four: An Appraisal of Failure

Divisions among the Maronites

A repeated foil to the Zionist-Maronite bid for an alliance was the Maronites' proverbial disunity. For the Zionists, the effect of this fragmentation might be thus distilled: The Maronites were but one of Lebanon's seventeen religious and ethnic sects, and the Maronites who favored an alliance with the Zionists were but a sect of a sect.

True, Maronites in the first half of the twentieth century were still the largest and most powerful element in Lebanon's sectarian mosaic, but since the beginning of the forties, increasingly little of this leverage had been wielded by the pro-Zionist isolationists. Yet by the reckonings of starry-eyed optimists like Epstein, the Maronites were a more or less politically undifferentiated community. Such anti-Zionist integrationists as Bishara al-Khoury or Camille Chamoun were not, by the optimists' lights, authentic Maronites; they were aberrations and heretics who deviated from the Maronite mainstream by not subscribing to the particularism and Maronite nationalism espoused by Edde and Mubarak. No, they were not far-sighted pragmatists who saw understood that Lebanese Muslims and the Arab world could not be ignored; they were rather self-serving careerists who did not scruple to subordinate their community's interest to personal ambition. But what optimists like Epstein failed to appreciate was that the Maronites were, and had always been, a famously fissiparous community. And the pro-Zionist isolationists he and the Jewish Agency had courted were just one Maronite

current—and a declining one withal—in a greatly divided community.

Even within the pro-Zionist isolationist camp personal disputes occasionally acted as a solvent to unity. During Alfred Naccache's presidency (1941-1943), for example, when a unified isolationist front might have been effective in countering the emboldened integrationists, the pro-Zionist Maronites splintered between Alfred Naccache and Arida. This division arose from little more than Arida's suspicion of Naccache because of his closeness to the Jesuits, whom the patriarch distrusted. Further weakening the already weak isolationists during this critical period was the more substantive disagreement over independence. Corm, the Naccache clan, and Edde rallied to the French, whose rule they sought to prolong *sine die*, while Arida and Mubarak, together with the integrationist gravediggers of an isolationist Lebanon, agitated for the immediate termination of the mandate. The result, as with the Naccache-Arida dispute, was a weaker isolationist camp.

Even the Church succumbed to internal division brought on by personal squabbles. Given that the Church had been seething with tensions since Arida's election in ended a bitter succession struggle for the patriarchate, it was not incongruous that Tawfik Awad should have attempted to embarrass Arida by disclosing the 1946 treaty with the Jewish Agency. Although Awad's revelation dealt the death blow to the treaty, the agreement was empty anyway, its vacuity having been demonstrated the previous year by Arida's refusal to testify openly to UNSCOP and his condemnation and possible dismissal of Mubarak.

The rupture between the isolationists and integrationists was in fact a continuation of an inveterate tradition of intra-Marionite feuding. Almost every major event in the Maronites' history throughout the past millennium has been attended by internal discord.

The Maronites were divided over allying with the Crusaders, over uniting their church with Rome,²³⁸ over the governance and dimensions of the *Mutasarrafiya*, and over the establishment of *Grand Liban*—²³⁹ to name but a few of the community's major disagreements. The history of Greater Lebanon has itself been in some measure a condensed history of Maronite division.²⁴⁰

In the light of this tradition of disunity, it was natural enough that the Maronites should have polarized on the question of Lebanon's political destiny and, derivatively, on its relationship with the *Yishuv*. But amity with the Arab world, with its concomitant anti-Zionism, was far from being the only reason some Maronites opposed or even resented the *Yishuv*. Other reasons quite unrelated to the integrationist vision also obtained.

The Zionists as Economic and Political Competition

The much-remarked similarity between Zionists and Maronite as enterprising, mercantile peoples had an underside: For some Maronites, it spawned a rivalry.²⁴¹ The Zionists, owing to their advanced skills and entrepreneurship, challenged the Maronites' and other Christians' monopoly on certain goods and services in the Levant. Such was the growth of the port of Haifa, for example, that by 1934 it had overtaken the port of Beirut thanks to the *Yishuv's* brisk regional and international trade.²⁴² So when the Arab Revolt erupted in 1936 and the Arab world staged its first boycott of the *Yishuv*, the Zionists' Maronite competitors had a vested economic interest in encouraging and

²³⁸ Salibi, *A House of Many Mansions*, 93.

²³⁹ Phares, 70-72.

²⁴⁰ Maronite fratricide was a recurring theme during Lebanon's Second Civil War (1975-1990). In the war's final year, an all-out civil war raged within the Maronite community for eight months.

²⁴¹ Fouad Ajami, *The Arab Predicament: Arab Thought and Political Practice Since 1967*, updated ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 193.

²⁴² Traboulsi, 96.

prolonging the revolt, offering as it did an opportunity to regain the market share and consumer base they had lost to Palestine's Jewish sector.

Rivalrous Maronites also feared that the Zionists' Western-orientation could lead to a competition with the *Yishuv* for the affection and patronage of the West. Since all Maronites admired the West and prized their centuries-old relationship with it, they were naturally disquieted by the prospect of ceding to the *Yishuv* the "most favored nation" status that the West had long ago accorded them.

Fear of Zionist Expansionism

It having been widely known that the Zionists originally coveted southern Lebanon up to the Litani River, many Maronites feared, with some justification, continued Zionist designs on their country. After all, long after the Lebanese-Palestinian border had been delimited by the French and the British in 1923, many leading Zionists like Ben-Gurion would not relinquish their hope of absorbing southern Lebanon. (In Israel's War of Independence²⁴³ and in the 1956 Sinai Campaign,²⁴⁴ for example, Ben-Gurion advocated annexing Lebanon south of the Litani to Israel). So pervasive was the suspicion of the *Yishuv's* aggrandizement at Lebanon's expense that even some of the Zionists' friends like Arida worried about losing Lebanese territory to the *Yishuv*. The second article of Arida's treaty with the *Yishuv* attests to this apprehension, stating as it does that Jewish Agency forswears all claims to Lebanese territory.²⁴⁵

The Conflict in Palestine as a Blight on Lebanon's Stability and Precarious Sectarian

²⁴³ David Ben-Gurion, *Yoman Hamilhama Tashah-Tashat* (Tel Aviv: Ministry of Defense Publishing House, 1983), entry on May 24, 1948.

²⁴⁴ Hirst, 67.

²⁴⁵ CZA S25/3269.

Coexistence

Some Maronites resented Zionism for its subversive effects on Lebanon. This element was particularly unnerved by the Palestine question's radicalization and aggravation of Lebanese Muslims. The Arab Revolt only amplified their anxiety, as the instability in Palestine radiated to Lebanon. This concern, too, was not without some justification. Indeed, both of Lebanon's civil wars were precipitated in part by the Arab-Israeli conflict.²⁴⁶ Maronites of this persuasion were the ones most likely to be incensed against Israel—not the Arab states—for the influx of 100,000 Palestinian refugees into Lebanon in 1948. These mostly Muslim refugees further threatened the Christians' shrinking demographic advantage and, from 1968 onwards, Lebanon's territorial integrity.

A corollary of the Palestine conflict's destabilizing effect on Lebanon is what might be called the “*dhimmi* dimension.” This was the notion that the fortunes of Middle Eastern minorities, especially non-Muslims, were linked. By this reasoning, one minority's troubles with the majority in Palestine would rebound on another minority in Lebanon. The *dhimmi* dimension is pithily captured by the Lebanese Christian proverb “After Saturday, Sunday,” which implies that, after the Muslims have dispensed with the Jews, they would train their sights on the Christians.²⁴⁷ Arab nationalists evolved their own variations of this threatening sentiment. Some sneered that the Maronites were a “second Israel.” Abu Iyad, the unofficial leader of the Palestinian terrorist organization

²⁴⁶ Lebanon's First Civil War of 1958 was occasioned in part by the fallout from the Suez Crisis, and Lebanon's Second Civil War (1975-1990) by Palestinian-provoked dislocation in Lebanon.

²⁴⁷ Hirst, 39.

Black September, blustered that “the road to Jerusalem passes through Jouniya.”²⁴⁸ For some Maronites, being conflated with the *Yishuv* or with Israel was reason enough to seek common cause with their Jewish neighbors. But for others, it had a contrary effect: disassociation from the *Yishuv* and identification with the Muslims.

The Maronites’ Genuine Sympathy for the Palestinian Arabs

Some Maronites earnestly shared the Lebanese majority's partisanship for the Palestinian Arabs. The notion that Zionism constituted an injustice was hardly alien to the Maronites. Indeed, the Maronite literati can claim a modest tradition of marshaling their copious intellectual gifts to polemicize against Zionism. The Arab world's first *coup de plume* against Zionism, *Le Reveil de la Nation Arabe*, was in fact produced in 1905 by the Maronite Najib Azoury.²⁴⁹ A segment of the Maronite intelligentsia continued Azoury's legacy in 1963, when such Maronite grandees as Maurice Gemayel (a parliamentarian and Pierre Gemayel's cousin), Pierre Edde (Emile Edde's younger son), and Charles Helou (Lebanon's fourth post-independence president) took part in launching the prominent research center and advocacy outfit, the Institute for Palestine Studies.

One Maronite Faction Opposed the Zionists Because a Rival Maronite Faction Supported

Them

For the integrationists, amity with both the Zionists and the Arab world were mutually exclusive. So even if their isolationist rivals had not been friendly with the

²⁴⁸ Mordechai Nisan, *The Conscience of Lebanon: A Political Biography of Etienne Sakr* (Portland: Frank Cass, 2003), 24. Perversely, Abu Iyad and Amin Gemayel maintained a close friendship. During Israel's siege of Beirut in the summer of 1982, Gemayel twice visited his old friend. See Ze'ev Schiff and Ehud Ya'ari, *Israel's Lebanon War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1984), 219.

²⁴⁹ David Pryce-Jones, *The Closed Circle: An Interpretation of the Arabs* (New York, Harper, 1989), 190.

Zionists, the integrationists may hardly have been less averse to allying with the *Yishuv*. But Maronites outside of the political class in the thirties and forties, most notably the Kataeb (the Phalange), were a different matter. Pierre Gemayel's Kataeb was the first Maronite mass movement in Lebanon,²⁵⁰ and by late 1943, it boasted a membership of 39,000.²⁵¹ But the rivalries and feuds endemic to Maronite society precluded the Zionists from courting the Kataeb because the Jewish Agency had already maintained ties with Edde's faction, from which the Kataeb was alienated. So it was always in Maronite politics.

For the Zionists, the result of this rivalrous dynamic was a kind of zero-sum relationship with the Maronites. Befriending one Maronite faction meant alienating another. David Hirst summarizes this peculiarly Lebanese dialectic in broader terms: “In...Lebanon, any position anyone took automatically generated its own antithesis, between the rival sects internally, and between the rival states, to which the sects were invariably linked, regionally and internationally.”²⁵² So whenever Maronites outside the three circles (including the Kataeb) made overtures to the Jewish Agency, the Zionists had no choice but to rebuff them, lest they antagonize the Maronite friends they already had.

Maronite Divisions in Perspective

Notwithstanding the hostility of the integrationists and the foregoing reasons for Maronite opposition to the Zionists, optimists in the Jewish Agency persisted in homogenizing the Maronite community, entertaining the illusion that pro-Zionist

²⁵⁰ Kaufman, 27.

²⁵¹ John P. Entelis, “Party Transformation in Lebanon: Al-Kata’ib as a Case Study,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 9, no. 3 (1973): 328.

²⁵² Hirst, 27.

sentiment burned in the hearts of all Maronites. But as we have seen, this was wishful thinking. The Zionists' friendships and camaraderie with the isolationists, affinities with the Maronites in general, and their yearning to break out of their regional isolation all conspired to convince optimists in the Jewish Agency that the Maronites were monolithic in their eagerness for an alliance. It was this chimera that led the optimists among the Zionists to believe that the isolationists spoke for the Maronite community and, consequently, that the isolationists were the winning team against the integrationists. The truth, however, was that the Zionists' Maronite friends were not only unrepresentative of the Lebanese majority; they were unrepresentative of the Maronite majority too. Optimists like Epstein and Ben-Gurion might not have understood this unpleasant reality, but Moshe Sharett and the skeptics surely did.

Sharett's lucid understanding of Maronite politics served him well as prime minister between 1953 and 1955. In an exchange of letters with Ben-Gurion in 1954, the two statesmen jostled on the wisdom helping disaffected isolationists come to power in Lebanon. Sharett entered in his diary that he cautioned his zealous correspondent that an isolationist Lebanon "is an empty dream," and that "the Maronites are split. Those who favor Christian separatism are weak and will not dare do a thing."²⁵³

Although a greater appreciation of Maronite divisions might have induced the optimists in the Jewish Agency to pitch their expectations for the Maronites lower, the Jewish Agency's failed investment in an alliance in the thirties and forties was more of a disappointment than a disaster. For Israel in the 1980s, however, after optimists had transformed into unchecked interventionists, it was a disaster.

Decline of the Isolationists

²⁵³ Randal, 189.

The creation of Grand Liban in 1920 was, to be sure, a historic achievement for the Maronites. But it was a pyrrhic one too. True, the Maronites had at last consummated their ambition to enlarge the *Mutasarrafiya*, but in so doing, they had almost equalized Christian population figures in the new state with those of the Muslims. It was this dialectic between territory and demography that gave rise to the integration-isolation dispute. So with *Grand Liban* finally a reality, the Maronites' choice was stark: Should they pursue an accommodation with Lebanese Muslims and, by extension, with the Arab world, or should they ignore their new Muslim compatriots, accept ostracism from the Arab world, and establish a Christian homeland?

Naturally, it was the isolationists, proponents of a "fortress Lebanon," who aspired to an alliance with the Yishuv. But from the first, the isolationists were in a losing struggle. Lebanese demography and regional geopolitics--to say nothing of moral considerations--had made the isolationists' ambitions untenable. The Maronites' population decline was paramount. Lebanon has in fact been hemorrhaging Maronites since the late 1860s, when the community commenced an emigration pattern that has continued with few interruptions to the present day. Further diminishing Maronite demographic proportions was the inexorable fact that, after *Grand Liban* was established, Lebanon's Muslim sector (particularly the Shia community) had expanded in inverse proportion to its Christian counterpart (particularly the Maronite community). To obfuscate this unpleasant circumstance instead of accepting it, the isolationists often resorted to chicanery. Lebanon's 1932 census, the dubious basis for the National Pact's 6:5 ratio and the last census to have been taken, is a case in point. The heavily isolationist Maronite establishment took pains to fix the results so that Maronite and Christian

numbers would be inflated and Muslim numbers underrepresented. To that end, the government included overwhelmingly Maronite emigrants as citizens while excluding mostly Muslim resident foreigners and preventing Muslims from enlisting in the census registries.²⁵⁴ But no amount of skullduggery could hide the fact that the twilight of unchallengeable Christian hegemony was upon the Maronites. So against this backdrop, the clash between the isolationists' and integrationists' visions was really a choice between a minoritarian regime not unlike the Assad clan's Alawite dictatorship in latter-day Syria, and a reasonable accommodation with Lebanese Muslims, and with them, the Arab world beyond. In other words, it was a choice between intransigence and compromise, between holding out for a Christian homeland—Lebanese Muslims and the Arab world be damned—and coming to terms, however resignedly, with Lebanon's heterogeneity.

Insofar as integration was in Lebanon's best interest, what was good for Lebanon was bad for the Zionists. A pluralistic consociational Lebanon was viable; a Christian "fortress Lebanon" was not. Had the isolationists prevailed and their vision been fulfilled, Lebanon would have found itself in the same regional position as the *Yishuv*, which was itself isolationist, not by choice, but by circumstances. An isolationist Christian Lebanon, freed from concern for Arab and Muslim sensibilities, and the *Yishuv* would have had only one another to turn to in the Middle East. Then, an alliance between the two probably would have succeeded, at least until the isolationist Lebanon imploded under Arab Muslim pressure from within and without.

In the Zionists' defense, despite the demographic and political trends against the

²⁵⁴ Rania Maktabi, "The Lebanese Census of 1932 Revisited: Who are the Lebanese?," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 26, no. 2 (Nov. 1999), 230.

isolationists, it did not become inescapably clear that the isolationists were on the losing side until Vichy was ousted from Lebanon and the march to independence began. Still, optimists in the Jewish Agency could not be dissuaded. Wishful thinking was once again operative. After all, the Zionists' only Maronite friends were isolationists and an isolationist Lebanon was the *Yishuv's* only hope for an alliance. Yet even after Lebanon's political orientation had been decided in 1943, the likes of Epstein were still disinclined to recognize that their investment in the Maronites, modest though it had been, and their prospects for an alliance with them were dubious.

Pro-Zionist Maronites: Opportunists or True Believers?

"Look, never forget something. You Israelis are just instruments for us," confided Maronite leader Dany Chamoun to an Israeli official in the late 1970s.²⁵⁵ Chamoun's admission, though uttered in a moment of vinous candor, nevertheless epitomized the Maronites' relationship with the Israelis in the seventies and eighties. In the thirties and forties, the sort of flagrant opportunism that characterized, for example, Bashir Gemayel's use of the Israelis was largely absent in the Maronites' relationship with the *Yishuv*, but there still often was an element of expediency in some pro-Zionist Maronites' dealings with the Jewish Agency.

Without taking any measures to reciprocate, pro-Zionist Maronites were often keen to leverage the Zionists' resources, financial and diplomatic, to consolidate their positions. Thus during the French-Lebanese treaty negotiations in 1936 Weizmann lobbied the French for Edde, but Edde nonetheless refused to testify before the Peel Commission the following year. Similarly, the Church stipulated in its 1946 treaty with

²⁵⁵ Thomas Friedman, *From Beirut to Jerusalem* (New York: Doubleday, 1989), 139.

the Zionists that the Jewish Agency would use its international offices to advance the Church's interests. Yet the following year, when the Church was benefitting from such assistance--as well from regular funding from the Jewish Agency--Arida declined to testify openly to UNSCOP.

Just as a public partnership with the Zionists was an asset for their Maronite friends and a public one a liability, it was no less true that in weakness, the Zionists were useful, and in strength, they were unnecessary, detrimental even. Thus in 1933, when Edde was out of power and most in need of assistance, he approached Victor Jacobson with a proposal for a military and political union with the Jewish Agency. But three years later, after assuming the presidency, Edde declined to sign a friendship treaty with the Zionists. This prefigured Israel's relationship with Bashir Gemayel in the early eighties. With blandishments and promises of a peace agreement, Gemayel lured the Israelis to Lebanon to do his bidding: defeating the Syrians, expelling the PLO, and securing the presidency. But after Israel invaded Lebanon and consummated these objectives (albeit temporarily), president-elect Gemayel backed down, leaving his Israeli patrons crestfallen. As David Kimche, the Mossad spymaster and Israel's main liaison to the Maronites in the seventies and eighties, recorded in his memoirs, "Begin and Sharon could not understand how Bashir could go back on his promises after all the Israelis had done for the Lebanese Christians from the very first consignment of arms and military training to the war itself."²⁵⁶

That some pro-Zionist Maronites sought to use the Zionists instrumentally---

²⁵⁶ David Kimche, *The Last Option: The Quest for Peace in the Middle East* (New York: Macmillan, 1991), 155.

to restore their strength or to aggrandize their power—was evident in the case of the Church. Ever since the creation of *Grand Liban*, the Church's influence and authority had been in precipitous decline. As patriarch, Arida determined to reverse this trend, an effort made exceedingly difficult by his fraught relations with the integrationists, the Vatican, the French, and the Muslims. Arida thus needed friends and external support. And the Zionists, ever receptive to overtures from any potential ally in the region, were glad to oblige. The Zionists' disposition to accommodate Arida indeed never appeared to wane, not even after the patriarch had repeatedly shown himself unwilling to deliver.

But for all the opportunism on the part of some of the pro-Zionist Maronites, there still were proven "true believers" whose commitment to an alliance with the Zionists partook of no cynicism or self-serving ambition. Mubarak and the Young Phoenicians (specifically, its founders Albert Naccache and Charles Corm) were exemplars of this element. But the rub with these true believers was not just that they were anomalous in the Maronite community or that their unabashed pro-Zionism made them marked men in Lebanon and the Arab world, it was that they were often marginal figures, commanding very little power and influence. To be sure, Mubarak, as archbishop of Beirut, was the second highest-ranking Maronite cleric in Lebanon. But the Maronite church's authority was attenuating and Mubarak, as Arida often made clear, represented only himself when openly supporting Zionism.

As for the Young Phoenicians, Corm was certainly Lebanon's most acclaimed Francophone poet, so he wielded a kind of "soft power." But his literary labors appealed only to a small audience of Francophile aesthetes, and his political ideas, despite his eminence, found little currency in the general public. The Young Phoenicians exercised

nothing like the political influence that the Fabian Society once did in Britain. And it never became more than a small politico-cultural club of pro-Zionist *beaux-esprits*.

The Jewish Agency's Maronite Friends: Pro-Zionist Spokesmen without a Voice

Said Akl, the incomparable Maronite poet and, latterly, a champion of Lebanese-Israeli ties, opens his poem "Do Not Show Your Love" with a line that could well have served as the credo of many pro-Zionist Maronites: "Do not show your love, simply relish the veiled passion that lures the lover."²⁵⁷ Without a doubt, the most salient theme threading through the two decades of official Zionist-Maronite intercourse was the Maronites' insistence on privacy. Whether it was testimonies before commissions of inquiry, friendship treaties, or even protestations of support, the Maronites with few exceptions would not be so venturesome as to go public. As radioactive as the Zionists were, the Maronites' reticence to take public action in support of the *Yishuv* was certainly understandable--witness Mubarak's fall from grace. But for the Zionists, publicity was a *sine qua non* without which a partnership with the Maronites offered them little benefit. After all, the main rationale for the Zionists' pursuit of an alliance with the Maronites had been to prove that not everyone in region opposed the *Yishuv*.

The discussions over German-Jewish refugees settling in Lebanon in the early thirties brought the first occasion when the Maronites recoiled from publicity. Thereafter, the Zionists' Maronite friends reprised this retreat regularly. They refused to sign the 1936 treaty, or testify before the Peel Commission, or take any measures against al-Husseini, or petition the French to enforce their ostensible ban against him, or disclose

²⁵⁷ Said Akl, "Do Not Show Your Love," in *Modern Arabic Poetry: An Anthology*, ed. Salma Khadra Jayyusi (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 57.

(let alone activate) the 1946 treaty. True, Edde and Arida had met *in camera* with rapporteurs on the Anglo-American Commission and UNSCOP, but their testimonies were not public and hence not as important as Mubarak's. Indeed, except for Mubarak's consistent public pro-Zionist pronouncements and his fateful letter to UNSCOP, the Zionists tangible gains from their relationship with the Maronites were few and underwhelming. Besides Edde's and Arida's *sotto voce* testimonies to the two commissions, Lebanon, under Edde's presidency, participated in the 1936 Levant fair, and it refrained from condemning the Peel Commission's findings--making it the only "Arab" government not to do so. Hardly was this commensurate with the almost twenty years of funding, political contacts, and diplomatic support the Zionists had provided the Maronites.

But the pro-Zionist Maronites' fear of publicity is less a commentary on them than on the wages of open support for the Zionists in the Middle East. Given what befell Mubarak for his letter to UNSCOP, overt action on behalf of the Zionists in a region that regards it as treason will always be prohibitive for all but the most intrepid pro-Zionists. Two later ostentatiously pro-Zionist Maronites, Etienne Sakr, the leader of the pro-Israel Guardians of the Cedars militia, and Antoine Lahad, the former commander of Israel's proxy force, the South Lebanese Army, were themselves subjected to veritable *autos-da-fe* for their collaboration with Israel. So in view of publicity's perils, it might have been illegitimate to question the integrity of the Zionists' more reticent friends, but it would have been wise to question the utility of an alliance with them.

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