

could still only be pursued through appeal to the patronage of sectarian feudal leaders, who held the reins of political and economic power. Communities and districts, like individuals, prospered in relation to the strength of their respective leaders within the total power profile. In times of relative stability, networks of co-operation among the leaders of the different sects helped perpetuate the chartered system of inequalities. In crisis periods, the primary cleavage may appear to be purely sectarian, but these same leaders strive equally to maintain their privileged positions within their communities in fear of the consequences of unleashing genuinely popular forces under their control.

By 1958, however, one important substantive change was occurring within Lebanon that did not go unremarked. Where the 1932 population census was supposed to have reflected the existing sectarian balance, those positions a generation later were suspected to be dramatically different. Not only were the Moslems suspected of comprising an absolute majority of the population but the largest minority was almost certainly not the Maronite but rather the Shia community. The reasons adduced for this new situation were the higher birth-rates among the Moslems and the greater tendency of the Christians to emigrate to the Americas. To say that it was "suspected" that the demographic balance had shifted is to say no one, least of all the Maronite and Sunni leaders, wanted to find out what the real situation was by conducting a new census. The question was too explosive politically and, like many other pressing problems, it was thought best put aside and left alone. Nevertheless, the awareness existed that much was at stake — to be won or lost.

Watershed, 1967

The war of June 1967 was a watershed in the recent history of the Arab "confrontation" states with Israel. As in previous conflicts, Lebanon sat on the sidelines. Next to Jordan, Lebanon contained the largest number of Palestinians displaced since 1948 and either living in refugee camps or prospering as integrated members of the national economic life. Following the humiliating defeat of the regular Arab armies by Israel, it was natural that the Palestine Liberation Organization, under new leadership, should attempt to fill the void. The proliferation of commando attacks against Israel after 1967 captured massive popular Arab support. The Israeli response to these raids produced a rising spiral of violence in the

area. Their purpose in raiding Jordan and Lebanon was to drive a wedge between Palestinians and the respective governments, thus isolating and weakening commando bases of support. The proved its merit when King Hussein of Jordan successfully liquidated the commando movement in the bloody civil war of September 1970.

Thereafter, Israel turned its attention to Lebanon. Palestinian training camps in the south of the country (dubbed by the press "Fatahland") came under constant Israeli air attacks, and even ordinary villagers lived under threat of invasion and destruction by armoured patrols. To facilitate these manoeuvres, Israel constructed military roads and armed observation posts inside Lebanese territory. Special missions were carried out in the heart of the country, its capital Beirut. Following the October war of 1973, Palestinian resistance groups mounted increased attacks against Israel, Lebanon as well as from inside the bank of Jordan and Jerusalem. Israel retaliated in kind, but failed to bring about a "Jordanian solution" despite clashes between the Palestinians and the Lebanese army.

Owing to the sectarian political structure of Lebanon and its lack of a unified government, a Jordanian solution was not, in fact, viable. The predominant Shia south was taking a terrible beating from the Israeli attacks and villagers began leaving their homes to march on Beirut to protest to the government's lack of protection. One began to hear government circles some advocating "internationalization" or "neutralization" of Lebanon, while in Maronite quarters some cynically urged that the south go to the devil or, better still, to the Israelis. The Maronite leadership of the army, backed by the President, did not want to be drawn into unequal combat with the Israelis. Direct confrontation with the Palestinians, on the other hand, risked splitting Moslem nationalist movements away from the army. The problem remained how to impose contractual limits upon Palestinian operations without appearing to attempt to eliminate the commandos themselves. The Palestinian leadership, while remembering Jordan's dilemma and, anxious to avoid a decisive showdown, co-operated to defuse the situation.

The Palestinian presence, however, was only a part of the configuration of forces causing tension in Lebanon during the years since 1967. The more fundamental

*Leadership
avoided
touchy issue
of demography*