

## Deeb, Marius. Syria's Terrorist War on Lebanon and the Peace Process. New York: Palgrave, 2003.

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## **Book Reviews**

**Deeb, Marius.** *Syria's Terrorist War on Lebanon and the Peace Process*. New York: Palgrave, 2003.

The Syrian occupation of Lebanon was no doubt one of Hafiz al-Asad's main, not to say only, achievements during his long years in power. It is true that the desire to take over Lebanon did not rise during the Asad's period. After all, all Syrian governments since this country became independent and even since it was established as a political entity in the 1920s, were committed to the idea of taking over Lebanon or even the abolishment of its existence or its annexation to Syria. Nevertheless, it was Asad who was able to achieve what no other Syrian leader could achieve until that time.

Asad's achievement was due to two main processes. The first was the consolidation of the regime of Asad in Syria in the early 1970s and later on the establishment and strengthening of the Syrian state. This enabled Asad to raise his head over Syrian internal problems and to try and promote Syria's regional interests, and even to acquire a position of regional influence. The second was the weakening, until it collapsed, of the Lebanese social and political system as a result of internal developments in Lebanon at that time.

This process of Lebanon turning into a puppet of Syria is the focus of this enlightening and important book written by Marius Deeb. This book succeeds in telling us and portraying for us a full picture of this process and addresses the main developments as well as the main actors who took part in this process. Any one who reads the book feels that this is serious research written by an authority who has intimate knowledge of what happened in Lebanon at that time.

The name of the book, *Syria's Terrorist War On Lebanon*, implies the central tactic Asad used for taking over Lebanon. Asad was known as someone who preferred to use the tactics of the indirect approach and as someone who became a master in using this approach. Indeed, instead of exposing himself in a direct confrontation with his enemies and rivals, Asad preferred always to act, and not only on the Lebanese front, in an indirect way and through a third party, usually through supporters or Syrian clients (such as Palestinian and Lebanese organizations or factions). Syria's intervention in Lebanon started with the entrance of Syrian forces into Lebanon in June 1976; however, after this approach did not lead to any achievements, but on the contrary resulted in Syria sinking into the Lebanese swamp, Asad came back to the indirect approach.

What was this approach? It consisted mainly of terrorist actions and political assassinations. One must admit, however, that other Lebanese elements made use of these tactics and turned it into a way of life in their efforts to promote their interests. One example is Bashir Jumayyil who paved his way to the top of the Maronite community in the early 1980s in a violent way: the brutal killing of Toni Faranjiyya and other members

of his family, or Jumayyil's struggle with the "Free Tigers," the faction of *Kamil Sham'un*.

The interesting question, of course, is whether the terrorism used by Syria against its enemies in Lebanon is the one that brought Syria its achievements in Lebanon or whether other factors contributed to this. For example, the threat that the growing Shi'ite community now poses to the position of the Sunnis and the Maronites in Lebanon clearly pushed important and significant elements within Lebanese society into Syrian hands. The ability of Syria to maneuver between the different Lebanese factions, in contradistinction to Israel who relied mainly on the Maronites and more precisely on only one element within this community, should also be mentioned. Moreover one should take into consideration that the Maronites were those who asked the Syrians to intervene in Lebanon in early 1976, and with this they provided legitimacy to the Syrian takeover of Lebanon. The title of the book shows what the author thinks about this question: the terrorism Syria used is the one that brought about its achievements in Lebanon; yet the question remains open and only an historical perspective of years might provide us with more insights. At present, it seems that in many ways the countdown for Syria's withdrawal from Lebanon started with the death of Asad and the rise to power of his son Bashshar. This withdrawal, if it happens, will lead us to look differently upon the process of Syria's takeover of Lebanon. It will also change our views about the Syrian presence in Lebanon, which did not result, as people had assumed, in the slow and gradual annexation of Lebanon to Syria, but to the opposite process of the sharpening of the differences between these two states.

The book is a serious piece of research, comprehensive, fully-rooted in details, and drawing a picture that no one can doubt. This is why it would have been better not to bring into the book arguments or versions that are sometimes unfounded. Bringing them in, one might argue, weakens the main arguments instead of strengthening them. After all, the Asad regime and Asad himself were responsible for many terrorist acts and murders against his enemies and opponents inside and outside Syria. No one doubts this, and even Patrick Seale in his supportive book on Asad, *Asad of Syria, the Struggle for the Middle East*, admits these actions. A good example of this was the crushing of the Islamic revolt in Hamma in February 1982. Against this background one may wonder why there was a need to use such arguments as the contention that Syria was behind the disappearance of Musa Sadr (p. 74), or the argument that Asad was behind the effort to assassinate Shlomo Argov, the Israeli ambassador to London, in order to provoke Israel into invading Lebanon. (p. 71) Such claims do not appear in any other serious research written about the war. Not for example in any of the Israeli research that was written about the war, including those that were written in a supportive mood for the war and trying to justify it.

To sum up, the book is important and significant. It gives a very lively and detailed description of the history of the region. It raises serious questions that can be answered only with the perspective time and future developments will provide us with.

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