

The Trap of Comparative Violence: Is "Iraqization" the Least of Lebanon's Evils?

Quite often, it seems that the Lebanese and non-Lebanese who follow with concern the country's affairs—either professionally or as a hobby—forget that terms such as “Cypriotization,” “Balkanization” and “Somalization” were commonly (and in most cases acceptably) used to describe the destination toward which Lebanon was headed in the various stages of its recent history. But the Lebanese conveniently forget that the term “Lebanization” was added to the burgeoning lexicon of conflicts to describe a society that was disintegrating under the ponderous weight of endless wars. Once upon a time in Lebanon, even public utilities were pressed into service as conference centers for the boards that managed those wars! Many Lebanese also want to forget that the term *Lebanization* was often used to describe Iraq's undoing. But today, conditions have come full circle. The term “Iraqization” is now being applied to Lebanon, which, like Iraq, is shuddering under the effects of car bombs placed intentionally to underscore and exacerbate the sectarian nature of this chaos. While several such devices have already been detonated here at home, how many more will we experience in the future?

The promise that Lebanon will endure even more bloodshed, that it is on an accelerated course toward achieving *Iraqization*, means several things. Above all, it means that Lebanon has already passed the *Lebanization* phase. If that assessment proves to be correct—the litmus test for which is that



From a distance, the results of all car bomb explosions look generally the same. Identifying the location of these violent events—Beirut, Damascus, Baghdad or Karachi—demands a close inspection of several features, such as the dominant architectural style, the way people are dressed and the surrounding flora. Overall, the effort reminds us that "comparative violence" cannot rely on comparison alone!

Lebanon has indeed learned to coexist with wanton, armed violence—then *Iraqization*, like the other pejorative labels, describes a country's attempt to explore the unknown. Clearly, that is the least pessimistic way to describe the events Lebanon will likely be facing in the near term as opposed to its ultimate end state. As a concept, *Iraqization*, communicated effectively through myriad ghastly pictures and firsthand accounts, identifies a country locked in the final stages of a conflict of interests and influence, both of which have demonstrably sectarian origins. And make no mistake: the acceleration, the increased frequency of these conflicts (as is the case today) does not mean that the duration of those miserable stages will somehow be shortened.

At first glance, the violence Lebanon has experienced during the summer of 2013 certainly hints at *Iraqization*. Moreover, the clues about *Iraqization* did not stop after the bombings in Dahiyeh and Tripoli—events that captured news headlines the world over. Other harder-to-read examples of Lebanon's *Iraqization* include accounts of how sectarianism has already influenced the State's security and military organizations. Additional illustrations of that impact are made apparent by the fact that the Dahiyeh bombing is being investigated by military intelligence (which, reportedly, enjoys intimate cooperation with Hezbollah) while the Tripoli incident is being reviewed by the Information Branch (Intelligence) of the Internal Security Forces (considered the "State-affiliated" armed branch of the March 14 Alliance).

Along those lines, the relationship between the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) and Sunnite fundamentalist and/or *Takfiri* groups often reaches a boiling point, the predictable

outcome of which is mutual killing. This tense bloodletting has distorted the LAF's once enviable image—for a time, it was the single Lebanese institution able to rise above any crisis, any confession and any sect. Today, large swaths of the Lebanese Sunnite public see the LAF's image as having been permanently disfigured. The attacks focused on LAF soldiers and vehicles that have taken place recently in the north, and the exclusion of its intelligence branch from the investigation into the twin bombings in Tripoli certainly demonstrates the lack of confidence between the LAF and this confessional group.

Another example of Lebanese *Iraqization* can be found in the marginalization—ultimately fatal compared to *emigration*—of the Lebanese Christians. Today, Lebanon's Christians are discovering (again too late) that it is unlikely they will find a place to wait out this raging conflict. Attempts to ally with the Shiite or Sunnite pole will not enable Lebanon's Christians, as a minority bloc, to reclaim their once pivotal role in the country's affairs.

Adding to the notion of Lebanese *Iraqization* is the country's growing "Sunnite tribalism." Lebanon has now become the crossroads for (primarily) Sunni Syrian and Palestinian refugees—at precisely the same time Lebanese Sunnites are striving to air their "grievances." Concrete proof of this can be found in the many cells and groups that were uncovered before they committed the acts of terror that were being planned jointly by Lebanese, Syrians and Palestinians.

Despite the gravity of the preceding indicators of Lebanese *Iraqization*, an even darker one is growing steadily. In his August 2, 2013 *al-Quds Day* speech, Hezbollah's Secretary General did not hesitate to nominate himself as the

exclusive spokesperson for the “Ali Bin Abi Taleb” Shiites, who seem to have declared open war against what Nasrallah called “the *Takfiri* groups.”

If all of these examples can be used so readily as proof of the “progress” Lebanon is making toward achieving *Iraqization*, it seems prudent to add a reminder that the term *Iraqization* is being revised daily. This country, Lebanon, has a long history of suspended wars, enduring grudges and bloody innovations. It is also positioned, sociopolitically and religiopolitically, along a path buffeted by

many different winds—between Syria, Israel and the Mediterranean. As such, the term *Iraqization* will not be used much longer to describe the destination toward which Lebanon is heading with such purposeful strides....

Under these conditions, it would be best for the Lebanese to stop obsessing over the notion of *Iraqization* and stop allowing themselves to be haunted by the experiences through which they are living today. Instead, they should fear the birth of a new version of *Lebanization*.