

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

Quite often it seems, the Lebanese and non-Lebanese who follow with concern—either professionally or as a hobby—the country's affairs 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 the 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 demonstrates that 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



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 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 experienced during the summer of 2013 certainly smacks of *Iraqization*. But that hint of *Iraqization* did not disappear after the bombings in Dahiyeh and Tripoli, even though the incidents there 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. Examples of that impact are made apparent by the fact that the Dahiyeh bombing is being investigated by military intelligence, while the Tripoli incident is being reviewed by the Information Branch (Intelligence) of the Internal Security Forces.

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.

Another example of Lebanese *Iraqization* can be found in the marginalization—ultimately fatal compared to emigration or killing unarmed citizens—of the Lebanese Christians. Today, Lebanon's Christians are discovering (again too late) that there is almost nowhere they can 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." Owing to a relatively common platform and a unified language, Lebanon has now become the crossroads for 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....

It would be better 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*.