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Revisiting the Issue of the "Orthodox Factor" in the Critical Year of the Lebanese Civil War

Abstract

The article examines the year 1978 as an important stage of the Lebanese Civil War, and the author offers his assessment of the positions of Orthodox figures on the basis of documentary evidence collected by him and information cited by other researchers. Despite the obvious pragmatic orientation and the one-sided nature of the information contained in these documents, they are nevertheless quite useful for addressing the question posed in the title. The participation of Orthodox figures at various levels of Lebanese politics (including the highest) provides grounds for an affirmative answer to the question of the existence of an "Orthodox factor" in politics. However, this factor does not appear unified or cohesive: the Orthodox — like all the other communities — did not act from a single position or as a united front. Lebanese Orthodox Christians were an organic part of Lebanese society, and their political positions were diverse. They were not an exception in terms of the diversity of ideological orientations, ranging from extremely "right-wing" nationalist views to "left-wing" ones

(Syrianism, Pan-Arabism, internationalism). They demonstrated a high degree of ideological solidarity, while the confessional solidarity was far from being their primary concern. In defending their rights, the Orthodox did not single out their community among others either as the worthiest or the most vulnerable; this was not a narrowly confessional vision of priorities but rather one that fit into a broader civic understanding of the good of the country, while preserving the integrity of its society and territory. The affiliation of Lebanese Orthodox Christians with various parties and their adherence to a wide spectrum of ideologies reveal their similarity in this respect to representatives of other Lebanese confessions. This also applies to the question of external influences, especially Syrian influence, which was the most sensitive issue at that time. A methodological question is also raised concerning the legitimacy of using the term "political confessionalism" as a scholarly concept in relation to the Lebanese events of those years, when ideology still largely dominated the public consciousness of Arabs.

Keywords:
The Lebanese Orthodox; Lebanese Civil War; Orthodox activism in Lebanon; political confessionalism

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Introduction

The impetus for turning to this topic was the visibly growing relevance of nationalism amid the intensified involvement of various external forces in ongoing conflicts. As it happened, the author came into possession of documentary materials concerning the participation, in one form or another, of Orthodox figures in Lebanon in the events of the Civil War, specifically in 1978. These documents consist of declassified confidential reports sent by U.S. Department of State residents in Beirut concerning the current situation, and they touch upon the positions of a number of Orthodox politicians and clergy, as well as their reactions to the turbulent events unfolding at that time[1].

1978 can be considered a key year in the Lebanese Civil War in terms of the final crystallization of the opposing camps. This took place against the backdrop of the direct involvement of international organizations in the armed conflict, both regional (for example, the League of Arab States) and global (the UN). Their peacekeeping mission consisted not only in separating the warring parties but also in enforcing the withdrawal of Israeli occupation forces from the country. This extremely complex context previously made it impossible to pose in a focused manner the question of clarifying the political positions of the Orthodox, or their activism more generally, during that period. The documents cited in the article, despite their bias, nevertheless shed some light on this issue.

A Fundamental Turning Point in the Lebanese Civil War

The first stage of the Lebanese Civil War was the so-called "Palestinian" stage (April 1975 — August 1976), and it is characteristic that in historiography up

[1] The documents cited were collected by the author over several years through a subscription-based access to the American Digital National Security Archive, which is no longer operational (https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.usr.shpl.ru/dnsa).

to the 1990s it was most often identified as a separate "War in Lebanon of 1975–1976". Professor of sociology at the Lebanese University Ahmad Beydoun, who remained in Lebanon throughout the entire turbulent period, insisted on defining the "two-year war" of 1975–1976 as the first phase of a long Lebanese tragedy[2]. Some historians rightly use the term "foreign war" for these events, emphasizing the external factor as paramount.

In essence, this was a bloody confrontation between certain Lebanese party militias and Palestinian armed formations on Lebanese territory, primarily on an ideological basis. Alongside the leftist ideas, it was fueled by the pathos of the struggle of all Arabs for Palestinian rights. As a result, an important trigger for the escalation of the situation in Lebanon was the weak response to Israeli raids on the large Palestinian camp in Nabatiyya and the border village of Kfar Shuba in early 1975, which provoked Palestinian outrage[3]. Palestinian activism, in turn, encountered a nervous reaction from Lebanese militiamen setting out to curb the militants who had "run amok" in their homeland. The well-known events of the spring of 1975 quickly escalated into an internal conflict and spread to many Lebanese regions, including the capital.

Further deterioration of the situation required military intervention, first by Syria in June 1976 (initially to protect two Maronite villages), and then, in October 1976, by other Arab countries. The Arab Security Force, created by a decision of a summit meeting (attended by the leaders of Lebanon, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Kuwait, and Yasser Arafat representing Palestine) in Riyadh on October 17, were renamed the Arab Deterrent Force (ADF), with the Lebanese president designated as their commander. Already on October 25–26, at the Cairo extraordinary summit of heads of state, the budget of the ADF was established, with Saudi Arabia and Kuwait becoming its main donors[4]. The ADF was deployed

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2 *Beydoun A.* Le Liban: itinéraires dans une guerre incivile. Paris: Karthala; Amman: Cermoc, 1993 (Collection "Hommes et Sociétés"). P. 82. See also: *Timofeev I.V.* Among Gray Walls and Hot Dust... A Chronicle of the Lebanese Tragedy. Moscow: Molodaya Gvardiya, 1984, 127 pp.

3 *Chamie J.* The Lebanese Civil War: An Investigation Into the Causes // World Affairs. Vol. 139. No. 3. Winter 1976/77. P. 175–176.

4 *Alieva S.* The Palestinian Resistance Movement and the Arab States (1964–1976). Special Bulletin, 1986, no. 4, Institute of Oriental Studies of the USSR Academy of Sciences; ed. by V.I. Nosenko. Moscow: Nauka, 1986, p. 153.

primarily in the Beqaa Valley with headquarters in Chtaura, and bases in the Rayak area near Zahle, in Hermel, and in Baalbek. Their backbone consisted of Syrian troops — about 25,000 out of a total force of 30,000. By 1979, when the mandate of the ADF was extended, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Sudan, and Libya had withdrawn their contingents altogether.

The end of the first stage of the Civil War was marked by its transformation into a broad intra-Lebanese confrontation. After the tragic events of the first two years, a critical stage of acute internal civil conflict began, accompanied by expanded participation of numerous external forces. At the beginning of 1978, the uncompromising stance of the Phalangists (the Kataeb Regulatory Forces) and the "right-wing liberals" (the Numur-al-Ahrar of the NLP) led to a sharp escalation of the situation. Supporters of Gemayel and Chamoun appeared ready to go all the way, even to the point of separating Christian regions of Lebanon into an independent state.

At the same time, Palestinian militants intensified their attacks on the occupied Palestinian lands from southern Lebanese territory. As an expected result, in March an Israeli military operation began on Lebanese territory, and from March to June 1978, Israeli forces maintained a presence in Lebanon.

Against this background, President Elias Sarkis, elected in 1976 after Suleiman Frangieh, attempted to resign. He struggled to maintain a hopeless balance between the warring forces operating on the country's territory and in the neighborhoods of the capital: not only Lebanese militias from different parties, but also Palestinian fighters not always subordinate to the PLO leadership, Syrian units within the ADF, and UN "blue helmets" attempting to enforce Resolution No. 425 and ensure the withdrawal of Israeli occupying forces from southern Lebanon.

Much in that turbulent environment depended on ideology, which determined the essential nature of the war. After the initial stage of the Lebanese civil confrontation (directly linked to the presence of Palestinian armed groups in the country and therefore known as the "Palestinian" stage) the period of intensified intra-Lebanese struggle began. This struggle unfolded between supporters of what were conventionally termed "left-wing" and "right-wing" ideas. The Lebanese left included adherents of such diverse ideological currents as communism, Nasserism

(Arab socialism), Ba'athism (with its Arab nationalism, or Arabism), and Syrianism.

Paradoxically, the designation "left-wing" for these Arabs did not imply internationalism, nor reliance on the poorest strata of the population (still less on the working class). In essence, and even in terms of self-identification, they were nationalists (qawmiyyūn), but Arab nationalists (or "Syrian" nationalists, in the broadest interpretation of this historical concept). Importantly, the leftist character of these movements (with the exception of communism, which was the least widespread among Arabs) was manifested not in their internationalism but in their emphasis on social justice. It was precisely this idea that brought leftist currents close to the corresponding Muslim doctrine, embedded in Islamic Revelation and in the hadiths. Both presupposed a general orientation toward social regulation and redistribution of social assistance; both condemned ostentatious luxury and extreme poverty as social evils. Hence the practically unified camp of leftists and Muslims, which opposed proponents of other views — those who accepted both horizontal social competition along Western lines and systems of patronage (patron–client relations) in vertical social relations.

Such a model, sometimes coupled with claims of a special, "Phoenician" origin, was adhered to by the so-called Lebanese right. These were nationalists far removed from Arabism. Their traditionalism stemmed from a conservative belief in the historical rootedness and effectiveness of a kind of pyramidal system of social relations. The head of a local clan, endowed with virtually unlimited authority and the powers of a leader (qaʾid, usually with a clearly confessional, typically Uniate, coloration), provided tangible social support, but only within his own clientele. He served as a political representative — usually of his party — at the state level and was counted among the important figures of the confessional community, yet in the full sense he was a guarantor only for those living under the patronage of his family. Party militias (milīshiyāt) were recruited from such supporters and fellow villagers. The obligatory attachment to a specific locus gave this system a resemblance to feudal relations — largely an external one.

As a rule, the leading families of such political forces were Maronite. However, it was by no means necessary that such clans belonged to the

Lebanese "right" that confronted opponents from the "leftist" coalition with their militias. For the year under consideration, the most telling exception was the Maronite Frangieh clan, which definitively broke with the Lebanese Front and joined the opposing camp, paying a high price for this decision (as discussed below).

The division became most clearly pronounced precisely from the beginning of 1978, which appears to have determined a fundamental change in the nature of the Lebanese Civil War. Even amid multilateral external intervention (the Syrian contingent; Saudi, Emirati, Sudanese, and other units within the Arab Deterrent Forces; and, of course, Palestinian groups subordinated to the PLO to very different degrees), the conflict in Lebanon had by then become a purely internal one. This makes the question of the participants at this stage (and the positions of the groups involved) particularly important.

In the commonly accepted simplified scheme of the Lebanese conflict, one sometimes speaks not merely of a "right-wing Christian" camp opposing Muslim groups of a leftist orientation, but specifically of the "Maronite" party militias. Meanwhile, many questions remain regarding the participation of other Christian communities, and above all the Orthodox. After all, their share in Lebanese society was significant. It is known that Orthodox Christians at that time made up about one-tenth of the total Lebanese population. Precise data were provided by the Lebanese-American scholar Joseph Chamie for 1956: 149,000 Orthodox out of a total Lebanese population of 1,408,000, that is, more than 10 percent[5].

But was there a unified Orthodox position in the Lebanese conflict? Did an "Orthodox factor" exist in that civil confrontation? Some previously unpublished documents from that era make it possible to contribute to answering these questions, and this is what the article is devoted to. The somewhat one-sided nature of the documents (primarily declassified reports from Lebanon to the U.S. Department of State) is due to the collection available to the author, which finally deserves to be introduced into the corpus of sources.

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5 *Chamie J.* The Lebanese... P. 174.

Палестинские боевики в Ливане
Из открытых источников

The Orthodox in the Lebanese ideological mosaic

Just as it is impossible to characterize, in general terms, the political positions of, for example, Sunni Muslims or Maronite Christians at that time, it is equally impossible to generalize the position of Lebanese Orthodox Christians as a whole. Perhaps the diversity of their ideological preferences was even greater, since historically they were more diffusely distributed across Lebanese territory: from the far south to the north, from the coast to the Beqaa Valley. In addition to their main area of residence — the agrarian Lebanese *qaḍāʾ* of Koura with its center in Amioun — they lived in large numbers in cities throughout the country: in the capital, Tripoli, Sidon, Zahle, and others. The loyalty of Orthodox believers to a local strongman, a qaʾid, was not practiced to anything approaching the degree characteristic of the Maronites. Orthodox Christians found themselves in very different political camps and parties; their choices were more individual in nature and less dictated by social environment or circumstances.

It is well known, in particular, that individuals from an Orthodox background participated in the leadership of such political organizations as the Arab Socialist Baʿath Party, the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP), and the Lebanese Communist Party (LCP) even during their formative periods. Later as well, Orthodox Christians continued to be among their leaders. Thus, from 1974 the SSNP was headed by the Or-

thodox Abdullah Saadeh, and at the 1984 elections to the Party's Supreme Council, Orthodox figures such as Daoud Baz, Hafiz Sayegh, Massad Hajjal, Wasim Saadeh, and Marwan Fares were elected, alongside representatives of other religious communities[6]. In the LCP in the second half of the 1970s, militantly inclined communists who embarked on the path of armed struggle rose to leadership positions. Among the party's top leadership were activists of various confessions, including the Orthodox Georges Hawi and Khalil ad-Dibs[7].

In 1975, the United League of Popular Committees (*Tajammuʿ rawābiṭ al-lijān al-shaʿbiyya*) was established, a "leftist" organization that, ideologically, advocated Arabism, the secularization of the state, and the abolition of confessionalism, and in foreign policy supported broad contacts with Syria and Iraq, while actively backing the Palestinian struggle against Zionism. Among its founders were Sunnis as well, but representatives of the Orthodox community even predominated; these included Maʿan Bashur, Khalil Barakat, Habib Zughaib, and Bishara Murhidj[8].

As for the Orthodox Patriarch Elias IV Mouawwad (1914–1979), head of the Patriarchate of Antioch from September 1970, he maintained good relations with the Russian Orthodox Church, visiting the Soviet Union in January 1972 and October 1974. For his ardent international support of the Palestinian cause in the mid-1970s, he earned the nickname "the Patriarch of the Arabs"[9]. The American resident in Beirut reported an interesting fact in June 1977:

"A source familiar with this period [events from the mid- to late 1960s] informed an embassy officer that Elias, who was then the bishop of Aleppo, was one of the pro-Western bishops who played a leading role in opposing this group with the support of his friend Hafez al-Assad, then foreign minister. As a result, the overwhelming majority of church bishops today have become pro-Eastern. Patriarch Elias sympathizes with both pan-Syrian and Arab national aspirations and is critical of Lebanese

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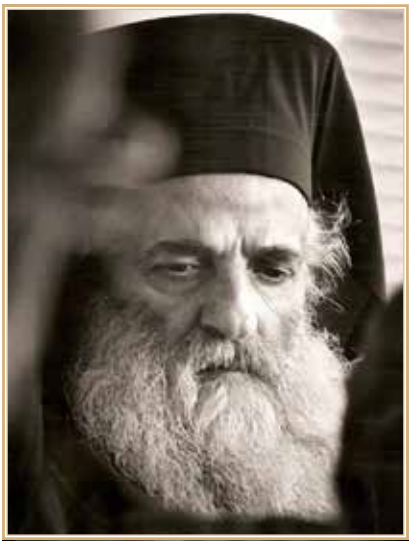
6 *Rowayheb M.G.* Lebanese Militias: A New Perspective // Middle Eastern Studies. Vol. 4. No. 2. Mar. 2006. P. 308–309.

7 Ibid. P. 306.

8 Ibid. P. 313.

9 *Abi Jaber D.* "Elijah IV", *Orthodox Encyclopedia*. URL: https://www.pravenc.ru/text/389377.html?ysclid=llewjkrpio308305208 (accessed 21 June 2025).



Илия IV
Из открытых источников

Christians who advocate separation. He maintains regular contacts with the Syrian Nationalist Party"[10] (back translation from Russian — *Editor*).

Orthodox figures, as individuals wielding considerable influence, also attracted the attention of Western residents. In the second year of the war, a report to the U.S. Department of State dated August 12, 1976 listed four "key Lebanese figures" from the Orthodox milieu and provided brief characterizations of them: Ghassan Tueni (from Beit Mary, publisher, minister of labor and social affairs, tourism, industry, and oil, close to Orthodox Archbishop Salibi); Elias Salibi (archbishop from Achrafieh); Dr. Charles Malik (from Rabieh, leading expert of the Kaslik-based expert group, a think tank); Dr. Abdullah Rassi (from Kfour, MP from Akkar, son-in-law of Frangieh, member of the parliamentary Committee on International Affairs)[11]. What might their designation as "key" figures have meant? At the very least, it is evident that they represented significant channels of influence and, in that capacity, could be useful, from the American point of view, for steering the situation in a direction favorable to them.

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[10] US Department of State. Key Lebanese Personalities. 1977. June 2. Telegram (cable). Confidential (Declassified/Released 4.05.2006).

[11] US Department of State. Biographic Data on Greek Orthodox Patriarch. 1976. August 12. Telegram (cable). Confidential (Declassified/Released 22.05.2009).

Гавриил Салиби
Из открытых источников

Ghassan Gebran Tueni (1926–2012) was at that time a highly influential journalist and politician, which alone could explain American interest in him. He took over the reins of the newspaper *An-Nahar* from his father and remained its editor-in-chief and publisher from 1947 almost continuously until his death. An MP from the age of twenty-five, by the time of the document cited he had already held such high state posts as deputy prime minister and head of several ministries, eventually becoming an adviser to the president of Lebanon[12]. He was married to Nadia Hamadeh, from a well-known Druze family of Baakline. Nadia's father was a writer and diplomat, and her brother Marwan Hamadeh was a prominent journalist and later a minister.

His Eminence Elias Salibi (1881–1977), an Orthodox hierarch and Metropolitan of Beirut since 1936, initially maintained a very balanced position with regard to external influences. In particular, he had had extensive and varied contacts with the Russian Orthodox Church in the past and had visited Russia on several occasions. In keeping with the tradition of Lebanese Orthodox hierarchs, Metropolitan Salibi of Beirut maintained good relations not only with other Christian con-

[12] *Ghassan T.* American University of Beirut, Honorary Doctorates. URL: https://www.aub.edu.lb/doctorates/recipients/Pages/tueni-profile.aspx (accessed 15.07.2025).

Шарль Малик
Из открытых источников

fessions but also with Muslims of various denominations. However, in the mid-1960s an opposition emerged within the Orthodox episcopate of the Church of Antioch that broadly reflected the global ideological confrontation of that time. Metropolitan Salibi effectively became the driving force of a pro-Western group of hierarchs and opposed the "left-wing" camp. The opinion of this experienced Lebanese figure, who was initiated into many political subtleties and, moreover, was well disposed toward the Americans, could not but be significant for assessing the situation on the ground. In October 1977, however, he passed away, leaving as locum tenens — according to an old Byzantine tradition — his nephew, Bishop Gabriel Salibi.

It is therefore unsurprising that among the figures listed was such a prominent "right-wing" activist as Charles Malik (1906–1987), a co-founder of the Lebanese Front. This politician was a fierce anti-communist who, by the time of the civil war, had amassed an enormous political résumé, having served as Lebanon's ambassador to the United States, Venezuela, and Cuba; as Lebanon's representative at the Bandung Conference and at the United Nations; as president of the 13th session of the UN General Assembly; and as Lebanon's minister of education (1955) and minister of foreign affairs (1956–1958). He believed that "the Orthodox must determine their place and that their interests are directly connected with the interests of Christians as a whole,

and above all with those of the Maronite Christians"[13] (back translation from Russian — *Editor*).

In Lebanese politics he was regarded as a supporter of Maronite activism; he was the right-hand man of President Camille Chamoun during the 1958 crisis and an ally of the leadership of the Kataeb Party. At the time relevant to our discussion, he was one of three co-authors (the other two being the Maronites Fouad Afram al-Boustani and Father Boulos an-Naaman) of the Party's program of action following a conference held in January 1977 in the locality of Sayyidat al-Bir. It is telling that the core ideas of this program (or declaration) have remained unchanged among the Maronites to this day and have found expression in the reform project outlined in Hikmat Amal Abu-Zayd's 2021 book, which has been translated and published in Russia[14]. The main points of the 1977 program were the preservation of Lebanon's sovereignty and the protection of its independence, but above all it was the idea that the state required a fundamental reform. Any future political formula for Lebanon, it argued, should assume the country's pluralistic character, either through decentralization or through federalization. It was especially emphasized that the socio-political rights of Christians in the course of future political reform should not be less than those of non-Christians. In Lebanon's conditions, this was to be achieved by granting each "confessional group" autonomy in managing its culture, education, finances, and social affairs[15].

In Charles Malik's case (entirely in keeping with his credentials as a doctor of philosophy and a theologian), political approaches were framed by philosophical reflections. Here is one example of his ideas, which at one time attracted the interest of American intelligence agencies:

"Our freedom of thought, conscience, and decision is absolutely sacred. Through this freedom we participate in the eternal act of creation. Take this freedom away from a person, and he will immediately cease to

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[13] Extract from talk by Dr. Charles Malik, Minister of Lebanon in the United States: Concerning Communism: The Menace and the challenge. Confidential / CIA RDP80-01065A000100170042-3 (Declassified/Released 16.08.2001).

[14] *Abu-Zeid H.A.* Institutional Revolution in Lebanon. Moscow: Institute of Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences, 2022.

[15] Ibid. C. 312.

Бойцы Катаиб
Из открытых источников

be human. [...] It is not the human person who exists for society and the state — on the contrary, society and the state exist for the sake of the human person. There is nothing futile in history, and we cannot begin everything anew. There exists a genuine positive tradition accumulated over the course of four millennia. This tradition of truth and being is the most precious thing in the world"[16] (back translation from Russian — *Editor*).

The fighting wing of the Lebanese Front, the Lebanese Forces, was also far from being composed exclusively of Maronites. At the moment of the creation of the LF, this alliance of "right-wing Christian" militias was headed by an Orthodox Christian, William Hawi (1908–1976), who at that time led the militia of the Kataeb Party. He was born into the family of a Lebanese emigrant in New York, but the family re-emigrated to Beirut two years later. Hawi was close to the ideas of Lebanese nationalism, and already in the early years of the Kataeb's existence, he became one of its commanders. By the period of the civil war, he was a figure with vast experience in leading the struggle for the "purity" of Lebanon. He was shot by a sniper during the fighting for the Tel al-Za'atar camp in Beirut on July 13, 1976, and was succeeded as head of the Lebanese Forces by the notorious Maronite leader Bachir Gemayel, who managed to place under his rigid control a whole array of different "right-wing" militias.

[16] Extract from talk by Dr. Charles Malik...

As for the scholar and politician Abdullah Rassi (1929–1994), who worked as a physician in Saudi Arabia in the 1960s, his high political career began with the election of his father-in-law, Suleiman Frangieh, as president of Lebanon in 1972[17]. Dr. Rassi was elected to parliament and remained a deputy for twenty-two years, until his death. In the 1980s he served as minister of the interior in the cabinet of Rashid Karami and even survived an assassination attempt that cost the prime minister his life.

There were other figures in high politics representing the Orthodox community. One of them was Fouad Boutros (1917–2016), a lawyer by training, a graduate of Saint Joseph Jesuit University in Beirut, who headed a number of ministries under Fouad Chehab and who, under President Sarkis, re-entered the government as minister of foreign affairs and deputy prime minister.

Another influential politician, Michel Murr (1931–2021), was a highly successful businessman who began his political career with his election to parliament as early as 1960. He graduated from the same Beirut university (as Fouad Boutros) and later earned a law degree at Paris II. In the 1960s he founded a successful construction company and continued his business in Beirut. The unfinished high-rise he built in West Beirut (the "Murr Tower") constantly appeared in reports of urban fighting during the first stage of the Lebanese Civil War. He sympathized with the Syrian Social Nationalist Party and later supported the Kataeb, initially opposing the "pro-Syrian" wing led by Karim Pakradouni, and later siding with the Lebanese Forces commander Elie Hobeika, who was linked to the Syrians. During the period under consideration, the Americans characterized him, like Boutros, in one of their reports as a "supporter [of President] Sarkis"[18]. He served several times as minister of telecommunications. Through his daughter Myrna, he became related by marriage to the Tueni family (she married the legendary journalist Gebran Tueni). In the parliamentary elections before the war, Michel Murr narrowly lost to his rival for the "Orthodox" quota, and at that time one of the five deputies

[17] In 1966, Abdullah Rassi married Sonia Frangieh.

[18] US Department of State. Capsule Biographies of the Members of the New Lebanese Cabinet. 1979. July 25. Telegram (cable). Confidential (Declassified/Released 20.03.2014).

Пьер Жмайель
Из открытых источников

from the Metn district was Albert Moukheiber (from the Maronites in Metn, Amine Gemayel was also elected)[19].

Albert Moukheiber (1912–2002) first became a deputy as early as 1957 and later held posts as minister, deputy prime minister, and deputy speaker of parliament. He was regarded as a supporter of Camille Chamoun and his National Liberal Party. In the 1972 elections, Moukheiber was helped to victory by politicians from another Maronite family, the Lahouds.

Another important figure mentioned in the cited documents was Michel Maalouli (Ma'luli) (1931–2004), a member of parliament since 1972. He was a prominent Lebanese political figure; his memoirs, *Events and Situations* (Eng.: *Events and Opinions)*, were published relatively recently[20]. In April 1978, he was a member of the parliamentary group known as the "Committee of Thirteen," which produced a profound programmatic declaration.

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[19] Elections 1972 and the Amendments (Replacements/Appointments) of 1991. The Thirteenth Parliament, Mount Lebanon Province / Liban-Vote.com. URL: http://libanvote.com/lebanese9296/election1972/Mountl/EL%20-%20METN.html (accessed 11.10.2006).

[20] *Maalouli M.* Ahdas wa Mawakif (Events and Situations). Nofal, 2017. (In Arabic)

Was there Orthodox activism?

Thus, 1978 began with an intensification of activity by the Lebanese Front and with efforts to consolidate the ranks of the Lebanese Forces — the alliance of "right-wing Christian" militias. Their tactical successes in the capital's districts against the "leftists" led to the necessity of intervention by the Arab Deterrent Forces (ADF), in which the Syrians played the leading role. Direct armed clashes in February 1978 in fact took place between the Lebanese Forces (primarily the militias of the Kataeb and the National Liberal Party) and the Syrian contingent. Fighting spread into the neighborhoods of East Beirut, which were conventionally considered "Christian", yet the ferocity of the Lebanese Forces did not diminish.

In turn, Palestinian units became more active in the south; their actions were in no way coordinated with the ADF and threatened to provoke a military response from Israel. This is precisely what occurred. The pretext for the Israeli invasion of Lebanon was a provocative attack by Fatah militants on Israeli civilian buses on March 11. This audacious Palestinian commando operation, involving hostage-taking, resulted in the deaths of many dozens of people. The terrorist attack was linked to Egypt's movement toward concluding peace with Israel: already on November 19, 1977, President Anwar Sadat had traveled to Jerusalem for this purpose, and the PLO may well have sought to inflame the situation in order to derail the negotiation process and prevent any agreements.

When, on March 14, the Israeli army launched its invasion of southern Lebanon (known as Operation Litani) the ADF, and above all the Syrians, were faced with the necessity of responding directly. A report from the American resident dated March 17, 1978 stated:

"...The Palestinians have placed Syria in an extremely difficult position... The Palestinians justify themselves by saying that the world needed to be reminded of the PLO's role in any peace negotiations. Opinions differ as to what should be done now"[21]. The same report cites the view of a certain Orthodox Bishop Gibran: he "meets periodically with Assad's security adviser General Al-Khuli and believes that the best and fastest solution is

[21] US Department of State. Syrians Irritated with PLO, 1978. March 17. Telegram (cable). Confidential (Declassified/Released 20.03.2014).

the deployment of UN peacekeeping forces in the south. He believes that the Lebanese army cannot be prepared quickly enough to ensure a prompt withdrawal of the Israelis..."[22] (back translation from Russian — *Editor*).

At that time, the Syrians were not drawn into a war with Israel. On March 19, UN Security Council Resolution 425 was adopted, calling for an end to aggression, the withdrawal of Israeli troops from Lebanon, and the deployment of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) in the south of the country. Apparently, this was a solution desirable for the Syrians in their delicate position, a solution whose essence had been articulated by the Orthodox bishop several days before its adoption. On March 22, Israel formally announced the end of Operation Litani, but withdrew the bulk of its forces only in June.

In the spring of 1978, Orthodox activity in high politics was especially evident during discussions over the composition of a new cabinet following the resignation of Salim Al-Huss's government on April 19. Two projects were discussed: a large government (cabinet) of twenty-four ministers (sixteen ministers with portfolios and eight ministers of state), which would also include young politicians not drawn from among members of parliament, and a small cabinet of only six members (proposed by Camille Chamoun), representing the main confessions. Both projects envisaged the mandatory participation of the Orthodox Fouad Boutros, at least as minister of foreign affairs. In the first project — the large cabinet — the candidacy of Michel Murr was also proposed. His candidacy as a member of the government was also put forward by the chairman of the Higher Islamic Council, the Sunni politician Shafik Wazzan, who believed that the future cabinet should be composed not of Lebanese political heavyweights, but of younger politicians of the next generation, for example, and Amine Gemayel, and of those connected with leading militias but not part of their leadership, for example, M. Murr, who enjoyed authority among the Phalangists[23].

Moreover, the American resident cited the opinion of Shafik Wazzan that the dismissal of the government by Salim Al-Huss "was caused by

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[22] Ibid.

[23] US Department of State. Aftermath of Government Resignation, Part Two. 1978. April 21. Telegram (cable). Confidential (Declassified/Released 20.03.2014).

a series of disagreements with Foreign Minister Fouad Boutros, the last of which concerned Ain el-Rammaneh: Boutros advocated using state funds to compensate for damage caused by the clashes in Ain el-Rammaneh, but Hoss opposed such expenditure"[24]. It was also reported that F. Boutros was very reluctant for Huss's government to resign due to the "risk of a politically disjointed cabinet as a consequence"[25] (back translation from Russian — *Editor*) (Huss's previous government had been formed back in 1976 as a "technocratic" cabinet).

In order to fill the vacuum of executive power under the conditions of the Israeli occupation, a parliamentary committee of 13 deputies representing various confessional groups was formed the day after the government's resignation, on April 20, and by April 23 it adopted a resolution on the current situation. The discussions were difficult, and the main disagreements concerned the formulation of the position regarding Palestinian actions and the disarmament of militias. One member of the "Committee of Thirteen" was the Orthodox Christian Michel Maalouli alongside politicians such as Parliament Speaker Kamel Asaad, former Prime Minister Saeb Salam, Maronite "Sheikh" Pierre Gemayel, and others. Importantly, the committee also included Sunni and Shiite deputies, and they supported consensus formulations concerning not only, of course, the "withdrawal of Israeli troops from all Lebanese territory", but also the cessation of Palestinian and any other armed actions throughout Lebanon, and the prohibition of any armed presence except for the forces of the legitimate Lebanese authorities, and the application of Lebanese decrees and laws to all Lebanese citizens and all persons on Lebanese territory without exception"[26].

The next important episode of 1978 was the so-called "Ehden massacre", the killing on June 13 of Suleiman Frangieh's son Tony and his family. This was a horrific manifestation of enmity within the Lebanese Front, primarily between the Maronite clan militias of the Kataeb and Marada. The immediate cause of the incident was the refusal of the Phalangists to limit their presence in the northern Lebanese territory of the Frangieh

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid.

[26] US Department of State. The Committee of Thirteen. 1978. April 24. Telegram (cable). Confidential (Declassified/Released 20.03.2014).

clan in the Zgharta district and the killing of the local Kataeb commander by the Marada militants. It is believed that the Kataeb's hostility toward the Frangieh clan arose from the latter's rapprochement with the Syrians and its intention to leave the Lebanese Front. However, some also saw Israeli interest in such a high-profile event as a way to delay the program of reforming the Lebanese army and redeploying it to southern Lebanon (generally in line with the declaration of the "Committee of Thirteen") instead of relying on the puppet South Lebanon Army (SLA). At that time, the American resident reported that this was intended to divert the attention of the Lebanese government and Syria, to prevent the deployment of the Lebanese army to the south. This would allow the Israelis to continue controlling the security zone through their trusted proxies, the Maronite militias [SLA][27].

This was the opinion of senior representatives of Syrian intelligence, Muhammad Khuli and Muhammad Nassif, as reported by a Lebanese bishop residing in Damascus, apparently the aforementioned Bishop Gibran. His personal views are also presented, including on the position of the Orthodox community, which tended to support the pro-Syrian Frangieh clan and the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP), which was regaining strength. The resident reported:

"According to him, practically all major northern politicians rely on traditional supporters rather than parties. They are outraged by the Kataeb, who masquerade as a modern party but are seen by them as no more than a means of strengthening the Gemayel family. It has always been known that the Kataeb wanted to dominate Lebanon, and they will all lose if the Kataeb manage to extend their influence further north. Thus, the Frangieh could count on the support of the majority of Orthodox Christians in the neighboring Koura region, including the well-known al-Ghosn family and the Syrian Social Nationalist Party [SSNP], which was restoring its positions there with the help of the Syrians. The bishop also believes that Father Charbel Kassis[28] owes his primary loyalty to

[27] US Department of State. Syrian Support for Frangieh, 1978. June 21. Telegram (cable). Confidential (Declassified/Released 20.03.2014).

[28] A highly influential figure, a general of the Lebanese Maronite Order, one of the leaders of the Maronite League, believed to have provided assistance to the Tanzim militia, which was part of the Lebanese Forces.

the Frangieh. Under these circumstances, it is entirely possible that the Frangieh will turn to Palestine for help and receive it. Traditional Muslim rivals in Tripoli and Akkar have joined forces with the Frangieh to block the Kataeb"[29] (back translation from Russian — *Editor*).

Bishop Gibran also predicted that acts of revenge by the Marada were inevitable, and that the sooner they occurred, the easier it would be for the country. The Syrians, despite their genuine anger, were expected not to intervene directly, but to support the Frangieh covertly[30].

Another example of the diversity of political leanings among Lebanese Orthodox Christians was the deputy from Aley, Mounir Abou Fadel, a supporter of the PSP and political ally of the young Druze leader Walid Jumblatt, as well as his press secretary, the deputy from the Chouf district, Bahij Taqieddin. Thanks to Abou Fadel's involvement and peacemaking, a meeting took place to resolve relations between the residents of Chouf and Aley:

"According to Abou Fadel himself, topics that were not made public included the removal of PSP militias from certain areas of Chouf, and Walid Jumblatt, in turn, committed to restrain his followers from squatting near Christian homes in the Aley area. Abou Fadel even hopes that a future meeting might bring him and Walid Jumblatt together with Camille Chamoun and Pierre Gemayel"[31] (back translation from Russian — *Editor*).

In a report dated July 10, Deputy Abou Fadel was mentioned among three individuals (the other two being former Prime Ministers Abdallah Yafi and Rashid Solh) who appealed to President Sarkis not to resign[32].

Another Orthodox figure, deputy and former minister Albert Moukheiber, expressed concern (apparently as a supporter of Chamoun) about the overly harsh actions of the Lebanese Forces toward the population of East Beirut and even suggested deploying army units to rein in the overzealous militias. The LF leadership responded at the time that

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29 Ibid.

30 Ibid.

31 US Department of State. Lebanese Situation: June 30. 1978. Telegram (cable). Confidential (Declassified/Released 20.03.2014).

32 US Department of State. Lebanese Situation: July 10, 1978. Telegram (cable). Confidential (Declassified/Released 20.03.2014).

Женщины-бойцы ливанской христианской милиции
Из открытых источников

"any militiaman who commits illegal actions will be dismissed"[33]. Clearly, Moukheiber understood that the actions of LF fighters were undermining trust in the Lebanese Front and alarming Christians who did not belong to the Maronite community.

In August, he expressed concern about the possibility of Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon, fearing that a "massacre of Christians by Christians" might begin: Frangieh supporters were eager for revenge, and after the Syrians left, their attacks (according to him) could target not only the homeland of the Gemayels in Bikfaya but also Achrafieh (East Beirut), where the Kataeb and Al-Nimur militias terrorized residents and looted homes. He estimated that support for this alliance among the population had fallen from 20% in the fall of 1977 to 5% by August 1978[34].

When the Syrians continued shelling the Christian neighborhoods of East Beirut in an effort to drive out the Kataeb and Al-Nimur militias (the Phalangists of the Gemayels and the Ahrar of Chamoun), Orthodox Christian figures again acted as peacemakers. In particular, Syrian

[33] US Department of State. Lebanese Situation: July 25, 1978. Telegram (cable). Confidential (Declassified/Released 20.03.2014).

[34] US Department of State. Conversation with Albert Moukheiber, 1978. August 21. Telegram (cable). Confidential (Declassified/Released 20.03.2014).

President Hafez Assad held meetings with F. Boutros as a representative of the Orthodox community (with Jumblatt representing the Druze and Asaad representing the Shiites), as well as with Orthodox Patriarch Elias IV Mouawwad[35], to discuss the fate of Christians in these areas. Soon, the Orthodox deputy Michel Maalouli visited Damascus as part of a delegation of deputies from the Beqaa Valley, a coalition orchestrated by the Syrians against the militant clans of the Gemayels and Chamouns, which, in addition to socialists, Nasserists, and others, was supposed to include the progressive Druze and the "Syrianists" (SSNP) with a Christian majority in their ranks[36].

Meanwhile, the situation in East Beirut, the stronghold of the Lebanese Forces, worsened. Important information was provided to the Americans by Orthodox Bishop Gabriel Salibi, who was acting as locum tenens of the Metropolitan of Beirut following the death of Metropolitan Elias Salibi. In September, he cited the following figures: of approximately 6,000 Orthodox families living in Achrafieh, 2,500 had left, while 3,500 remained. "Those who left mostly went to the mountains, where they had homes or relatives. Very few of them (a few hundred) lived in monasteries or schools. Of the 15–16,000 Maronites, probably 80% left the area"[37] (back translation from Russian — *Editor*).

Bishop Gabriel further reported, as conveyed by the resident, that "the situation of the Orthodox community is becoming increasingly difficult due to economic stagnation and worsening security. People from respectable families, who previously lived under comfortable conditions, came and asked for money for bread. The Orthodox Church currently has very little income, but significant expenditures, particularly associated with the Orthodox hospital, which has a monthly deficit of 300–400,000 Lebanese pounds. They were spending their savings to maintain the budget, but soon had to cut on hospital staff. <...> He told

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35 US Department of State. Assad's Dilemma, 1978. July 14. Telegram (cable). Confidential (Declassified/Released 20.03.2014).

36 US Department of State. Assad's Dilemma, 1978. July 14. Telegram (cable). Confidential (Declassified/Released 20.03.2014).

37 US Department of State. Situation in Lebanon: Conversation with Greek Orthodox Bishop Ghofril Saleeby, 1978. Sept. 12. Telegram (cable). Confidential (Declassified/Released 20.03.2014).

Gemayel and Chamoun that their tactics threaten the survival of the Orthodox community, but they ignored this. Pierre Gemayel explained that the Maronites were fighting for the salvation of Lebanon. He apparently did not care about what would happen to the Orthodox. Salibi said that the Orthodox do not want to fight, like many Maronites. <...> He said, unfortunately, that other Arabs do not distinguish Maronites from other Lebanese Christians. Lebanon today survives on remittances sent by Lebanese Christians working in the Persian Gulf and Saudi Arabia, many of whom are Orthodox. He feared that as the situation worsens, Arab governments might decide to expel all Lebanese Christians — both Orthodox and Maronites"[38] (back translation from Russian — *Editor*).

All the episodes mentioned involving Orthodox figures demonstrate, first, the extraordinary diversity of their political leanings, and second, their constructive approach to coexistence of all confessional communities — especially, of course, the Orthodox — within a single, indivisible Lebanon. They were characterized by comparatively high civic activity, but not activism in the sense of pursuing political gains for their community at any cost.

Conclusions

The information drawn from documentary sources allows several conclusions regarding the position of the Lebanese Orthodox in the pivotal year of 1978 during the Civil War.

First, it is clear that the participation of Orthodox figures at various, including the highest, levels of Lebanese politics confirms the existence of an "Orthodox factor" in the country. However, it was not unified: like other communities, the Orthodox did not act from a single position or as a single front.

Second, the defense of their rights by Orthodox Christians did not mean positioning their community as the most deserving or the most vulnerable; this was not a narrowly confessional view of priorities, but

[38] Ibid.

was mainly aligned with a civic understanding of the common good for the country while preserving the integrity of its society and territory.

Third, the fact that the Lebanese Orthodox were involved in a wide range of parties and adhered to a spectrum of ideologies shows a similarity with members of other Lebanese confessions. This applies both to foreign influence and particularly to the Syrian factor, which was the most sensitive at the time. Just as some Maronite or Druze figures in the Beqaa Valley or Sunni Muslims cooperated with the Syrians while others did not, among the Orthodox there were those who sympathized with the "pro-Western Christian" camp and opposed the Syrians, and those who deemed Syrian involvement in Lebanon as part of the MFO (Multinational Force in Lebanon) mission expedient.

These conclusions also call into question the effectiveness of the oft-cited concept of "political confessionalism" in Lebanon. In 1978, intra-community contradictions and even clashes became particularly acute. A wave of killings and revenge retaliations was triggered by a split among Maronites after the Marada's maneuver; Lebanese Sunnis often stood on opposing sides; within a few years, a deep rift in inter-Shiite relations would also appear. Thus, if political confessionalism is understood as the actions of political representatives and community leaders from unified positions (primarily in the interests of their communities), the numerous examples demonstrate the absence of such unity, even to the point of intra-community conflict over ideological reasons. Lebanese Orthodox were no exception in terms of ideological diversity, ranging from extremely "right-wing", nationalist positions to "leftist" (Syrianist, pan-Arab, internationalist) views.

Perhaps consulting declassified documents and studying them in detail will continue to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the somewhat formulaic concept of "political confessionalism". For Lebanon today, this is particularly relevant: there is a growing demand to move away from a clan-based political structure toward democratization of governance within Lebanese society. Similarly, the entire Arab East is undergoing, before our eyes, a broad restructuring of traditional societies.

Conflict of interests

The author declares no relevant conflict of interests.

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