



Just before lunch I called at the law offices of Dr. Chibli Mallat, a prominent jurist whom I had met in Geneva, when he was on a visit to the United Nations. We share a common friend, Edward Mortimer, a senior aide to the UN Director General, Kofi Annan. Before leaving for Beirut I had arranged to meet Mallat on my first day for lunch. **His cabinet, to use the French word for a law office, was refreshingly old world. The doors and paneling were made of heavy dark-stained wood, and the floors, at least in memory, were a mixture of tile and faded marble. I have no recollection of air conditioning, but the thick walls of the older building provided cool air. When I walked into the office, I sensed that Mallat was revising either a legal brief or a chapter from a forthcoming book. He took a break from his manuscript, and we talked as a secretary set in front of us a small tray with Turkish coffee. I might well have been calling in Lebanon around 1908, when Lebanon became a leading center of Ottoman dissent. A man in his mid-forties, Mallat has about him the air of a Young Turk, someone who believes that only a more democratic Lebanon and**

**Middle East can end the cycles of domestic and international violence that have turned the region into a medieval cauldron.** Toward that end he is a candidate for the Lebanese presidency, but as we spoke he expressed frustration that no date for an election had been scheduled. Worse, the issue of the current president's term of office— extended, probably illegally, by parliamentary fiat— has become the flint that sparked much of the recent violence that has engulfed Lebanon, including, in part, the recent war with Israel. As Mallat explained, under the National Pact that has governed the nascent state of Lebanon since independence in 1943, a power-sharing

arrangement gives the presidency and the key security positions to Maronite Christians while the prime minister is Sunni, and the speaker of the parliament is a Shiite. In September 2004, under pressure from Syria, parliament extended President Emile Lahoud's term in office. It did so after senior officials in Syria had physically threatened Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, who resigned from his office rather than acquiesce to the presidential extension. Probably as a result of his opposition to Syrian interference in Lebanon, Hariri was assassinated in February 2005. A UN report

concluded that his opposition to Lahoud's extended term in office had set in motion the plot to kill him. Rather than reinforce Syria's stranglehold on Lebanese politics and economics, the Hariri assassination subsequently provoked more than a million Lebanese demonstrators to go into the streets of downtown Beirut, and those rallies, plus a UN resolution, became the catalyst that forced Syria to withdraw its occupation forces from Lebanon. Nevertheless, they left behind President Lahoud as "their man," and also counted on Hezbollah to do the bidding for Damascus in hot and cold wars with Israel. Mallat is not the heir to a warlord family, the usual path to the Lebanese presidency. His grandfather, of the same name, was well known and admired throughout the Arab world as "the poet of the cedars." His father, Wajhdi Mallat, is a respected lawyer and served as the president of the Lebanese Constitutional Council. Mallat defies many stereotypes associated with Middle Eastern politicians, most of whom, to quote the Beatles, find happiness in a warm gun. He speaks fluent English, French, and Arabic. Over the years he has taught international law, in the United Kingdom, at the University of London, and in the United States at Yale and Princeton universities. His many books are available in Arabic and in English. On paper, however, he looks less like a Lebanese academic who has achieved success in the West and more like someone who should have a chance to bridge some of the violent chasms of Middle Eastern politics. While in London, in the 1990s, he published, with Cambridge University Press, *The Renewal of Islamic Law: Muhammad Baqer as-Sadr, Najaf, and the Shi'i International*, an early study in English of shari'a and the revolution brought about in Iran when Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini proselytized about the legal canons of an Islamic state. For almost two decades Mallat supported and encouraged both the Iraqi opposition to Saddam Hussein and enfranchisement of the Shiite majority in southern Iraq. On another front, believing that the law is mightier than the sword, he brought criminal charges in Belgium against the subsequent Israeli Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon, for his complicity in the 1983 massacres that killed several thousand Palestinians—many civilians—in the refugee camps of Sabra and Chatilla. Maronite Christians, in Lebanon anyway, are rarely experts in Islamic law. Nor do they often, if ever, represent Palestinians in legal cases

involving a senior Israeli politician. But it's hard to run for president in a country where elections are in a state of suspended animation. During our conversation, we spent a lot of time talking about Syria's influence in Lebanon. When we spoke, Syria had withdrawn from Lebanon, but the long arms of its security apparatus were apparent in the Hariri killing and in the subsequent assassination of Samir Kassir, a journalist, politician, and friend of Mallat's, who had spoken openly about the malevolence of Syria's Lebanese occupation. My notes taken during the meeting, however, are sketchy. It was only later, when I read the transcript of an interview Mallat had given the BBC, that I recaptured the same points that he had made when we spoke. For example, on the term-of-office extension given to President Lahoud, he said: "It's the first time in the history of our country, nay in the history of any country that you have president of a foreign country [Syria] putting pressure and threats on your sitting prime minister in order to force a constitutional amendment. It's quite an extraordinary set of circumstances all of which are not only bizarre but had tragic consequences including the killing of our prime minister." He went on to make the point

that Syria could only oppose its weakened position in Lebanon through violence. "They have to blow up parliament, blow up the candidates, that's the only choice. They cannot stop it." Asked if he feared for his life, he said: "Well not only my life, I think a lot of candidates will be in that position." Mallat raised the wild card element that Hezbollah posed in Lebanese politics. Despite the country's image as the domain of factional opposition, it surprised me to learn that Lebanon has few political parties. In fact, according to Mallat, Hezbollah has the largest block of representatives in parliament, with 14 out of 128 seats. Lebanon's fault lines are drawn along religious rather than party lines. Mallat spoke with foreboding tones when he described Hezbollah as both a state within a state, and as

the only national body that had refused to disarm after the Lebanese civil wars. Paradoxically, Hezbollah had not been an active participant in the domestic violence that swept Lebanon from 1976 to 1990. But rather than give up their weapons, as the other private armies had done at the end of the fighting, Hezbollah had become a freelance militia that saw a future in manning the ramparts of south Lebanon against Israel. Nor did Mallat think that the Lebanese Army

was in a position to disarm Hezbollah, which numbered, he guessed, about 15,000 guerrillas. Prior to the Hezbollah-Israeli war, in which the entire state of Lebanon suffered most of the collateral damage, Mallat believed that it might have been possible to integrate into Lebanese politics the positive elements of Hezbollah—those which ran schools and clinics, and distributed bread and drinking water—and give the militia fewer reasons to stand at arms. He told the BBC: “Hezbollah has two faces. There is a revolutionary dimension of Hezbollah, and there is a national Lebanese dimension. What I want to offer Hezbollah is for this Lebanese dimension to prevail over on the other one because it is much more fruitful for them and for us.” He elaborated: “Well, I have something better to offer them than carrying arms that cannot be used against Israel at this stage because the fight against Israel through the blue line is totally illegal under international law. I am offering Hezbollah two things that are much more interesting for them than what Lahoud or any other contender can offer them. I am offering them, first, a higher ground for the fight against Israel because I do think that we have a lot of problems with Israel, but that these problems must be solved in a nonviolent way and that we can win the fight against Israel, in that manner, far better than with weapons that we can’t use. And the second thing that I want to offer Hezbollah is to remove the terrorist label that they have internationally by going to the U.S. government in particular and saying, ‘Look we are into a new stage and these people are our people and you cannot call them terrorists.’” But Hezbollah chose to make common cause with Syria and Iran, themselves implausible allies, than with the ideas that Mallat had on offer in his campaign. Mallat spent some of the years during the previous civil wars outside Lebanon. He studied at the University of California at Berkeley and the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London. As he wrote in his book, *The Middle East into the 21st Century*: “The Middle East has been cruel to my generation. Most of my high-school friends in Beirut are scattered throughout the world, where they have well succeeded, but they are also lost to the country and the region.” Admirably, his own optimism never wavered: “As the war was raging in my native Lebanon, I had, like so many other compatriots, spent long moments networking and discussing ways out of the impasse.” No doubt the violence of Israel’s response to Hezbollah’s cross-border raids stunned him and made him fear for his family. But within a few days of the attacks, he had petitioned the UN Security Council for a new resolution, “insisting that Lebanon take full charge of its territory.” He wrote further: “Until a lasting ceasefire is at hand, the Israeli government should resist three temptations: the reoccupation of any part of Lebanon, the equation of Hizbullah with the Qa’eda and a policy of assassination which is by nature irreversible, and the punishment of the whole of Lebanon for an action that a small faction has brought upon a largely reluctant population and government. For my part, I have never taken comfort in the killing of Israelis.” To the *New York Times* he wrote: “A robust international force can help the Lebanese government assert its exclusive sovereignty over its territory against any possible Syrian, Iranian or Lebanese encroachment.” I later asked him in an e-mail what might be the cornerstones of Middle East peace, and he wrote back: “freedom of movement, centrality of individual rights, federal arrangements. It needs a lot of political work and education, but the trend goes now in the opposite direction.” Then he concluded more ominously: “On the medium run, however, as things continue not to work, people will be looking for new avenues.” Without, seemingly, tiring of my naïveté, Mallat took me to lunch, first parking his car in the garage of St. Joseph’s College of Law, where he is a professor of law. The American University of Beirut may be better known, among Americans anyway, than St. Joseph’s University, which dates to 1875. (The first Jesuits came to the area of Mount Lebanon in the 1640s, and the Maronite Christians claim an early affinity with the Church of Rome, dating to the fifth century ad.) But in all likelihood, St. Joseph’s has graduated more prominent alumni, in large part because its law school was the only one in Lebanon from 1913 until the early 1960s.

Matthew Mills Stevenson (2009-12-26). Remembering the Twentieth Century Limited (Kindle Locations 3646-3651). Odysseus Books. Kindle Edition.

Matthew Mills Stevenson (2009-12-26). Remembering the Twentieth Century Limited (Kindle Locations 3638-3646). Odysseus Books. Kindle Edition.

Matthew Mills Stevenson (2009-12-26). Remembering the Twentieth Century Limited (Kindle Locations 3629-3638). Odysseus Books. Kindle Edition.

Matthew Mills Stevenson (2009-12-26). Remembering the Twentieth Century Limited (Kindle Locations 3620-3629). Odysseus Books. Kindle Edition.

Matthew Mills Stevenson (2009-12-26). Remembering the Twentieth Century Limited (Kindle Locations 3612-3620). Odysseus Books. Kindle Edition.

Matthew Mills Stevenson (2009-12-26). Remembering the Twentieth Century Limited (Kindle Locations 3603-3612). Odysseus Books. Kindle Edition.

Matthew Mills Stevenson (2009-12-26). Remembering the Twentieth Century Limited (Kindle Locations 3595-3603). Odysseus Books. Kindle Edition.

Matthew Mills Stevenson (2009-12-26). Remembering the Twentieth Century Limited (Kindle Locations 3586-3595). Odysseus Books. Kindle Edition.

Matthew Mills Stevenson (2009-12-26). Remembering the Twentieth Century Limited (Kindle Locations 3578-3586). Odysseus Books. Kindle Edition.

Matthew Mills Stevenson (2009-12-26). Remembering the Twentieth Century Limited (Kindle Locations 3570-3578). Odysseus Books. Kindle Edition.