

Middle East Report by Robert Dreyfuss

How Sharon intends to cash in

The Israeli proconsul and the Falangist warlord are looking to a drug and banking bonanza.

In the eyes of Israeli Defense Minister Ariel Sharon, the invasion of Lebanon which began June 6 is intended to accomplish far more than to drive the Palestine Liberation Organization out of Lebanon. Sharon's bid for a prolonged Israeli occupation of Lebanon is calculated to reshape Lebanese politics, and above all to install Lebanon's most powerful feudal warlord, 34-year-old Bashir Gemayel, as President.

Sharon and Gemayel are known to have met secretly months before Israel's invasion to plan how to dismember Lebanon's central government into tribal cantons over which Gemayel would hold sway. The last obstacle would be removed to making Lebanon into a lawless state in which Sharon's mafia associates inside and outside of Israel and Gemayel would divvy up the revenue from the illegal drug and contraband smuggled through Lebanon, and control the highly lucrative banking system of Lebanon.

Since 1978, when Israel made its first invasion of southern Lebanon and installed its mercenary, Falangist Col. Saad Haddad, opium and hashish cultivation in the southern Lebanon no-man's-land has flourished. Similarly, in the Syrian-occupied Bekaa Valley, record crops of opium and hashish are found, along with new heroin refineries.

According to an Israeli source, Sharon has also cultivated close ties with the Syrian and Khomeini-

linked Shiite Muslims of southern Lebanon. The Shiites are a conduit for heroin, hashish, and opium export from Pakistan and Iran, as well as Syrian-controlled drugs from the Bekaa. Through Sharon, Israel is said to have taken a large cut of the handsome profits from drug exports: the unspoken financial benefit of Israel's occupation of Lebanon. So close are Sharon's relations with elements of Lebanon's Shiites that he has worked out a scheme to make them the overlords of a southern Lebanese canton whose capital would be the port city of Tyre.

Sharon is not acting out of mere greed, but in association with a powerful mafia of Israelis associated with mobster Meyer Lansky and U.S.-based Meshulam Riklis, the chief of the Rapid-American import-export empire. It is this mafia and its assets within Israeli intelligence who have drawn up elaborate schemes to make the Lebanese Swiss-style banking system an adjunct of Israel, in order to facilitate the massive dirty-money transactions associated with the multibillion-dollar smuggling business in Lebanon.

Since Israel's invasion of south Lebanon, the two major ports south of Beirut, Sidon and Tyre, have been taken over by Israel, leaving only the so-called free port of Jounieh, north of Beirut, functioning. Jounieh is controlled by the Falange.

According to a very influential Lebanese political leader, since the 1976 civil war the Gemayel clan has consolidated unprecedented control in Lebanon over hot-money transactions and the illegal drug and contraband flow through Jounieh. The Gemayel-controlled Falangists are reported to charge a tithe for all exports from Jounieh. Moreover, they now control the casinos, once government-owned, which are a fulcrum of loan-sharking and other forms of organized crime.

Last year, during investigations conducted by the Italian government on the connection between illegal drug and gun trafficking and Italian terrorism, Lebanon was named as the prime transshipment and production site. In fact, both Lebanon and Syria are transshipment points for a massive increase in drug exports from the so-called Golden Crescent—Pakistan, Iran, and Afghanistan. U.S. drug experts estimate that up to 70 percent of all heroin imports to the U.S. now either originate in the Golden Crescent or are shipped through it.

One key point for such shipments is the Persian Gulf emirate of Dubai. In recent months the ancient gold-smuggling center in Dubai, which dried up after the Iranian revolution, has suddenly come back to life. *Far East Economic Review* reported April 16 that the gold bullion stamped "Almighty God" is used to facilitate the purchase of raw opium from Pakistan. The revival of the Dubai gold market coincided with a warming in Iran-Dubai and Iran-Pakistan economic relations earlier this year, about the same time that Saad Haddad made his first offer to aid Iran in its war with Iraq.