

destined to become the gauleiter in Israel's occupation of the south.

Since the June 6 Israeli invasion under Sharon's orders, the occupying army has begun to carve out an entity in south Lebanon making Israeli-allied Shiites Israel's colonial governors. In early August, the Israeli Tourist Minister announced that south Lebanon will become a tourist and casino center which will benefit Israeli's economy.

Detailed plans drawn up by the Israeli foreign intelligence service, Mossad, *well in advance of this year's invasion*, called for Lebanon's freewheeling Swiss-modeled banking system (an entrepôt since the 1950s for international organized crime), to become Israel's offshore banking center. On cue, the first Israeli government delegations to visit the southern Lebanon ports of Sidon and Tyre after Israeli troops occupied them were led by the Israeli Finance Minister and the governor of the central bank.

Like Tyre and Sidon in the south, the major ports north of Beirut in the Maronite enclave have become prime outlets for illegal drugs and other contraband. As early as 1976 Bashir Gemayel began to cultivate his relationship with Israel, sealing their support for his bid to succeed Elias Sarkis as President of Lebanon. Since then, Israel is reported to have delivered up to \$100 million worth of arms to the Bashir Gemayel-led Falangist militia.

Israeli support was the key to Gemayel's victory over the Maronites during a series of blood feuds in 1979 and 1980 which destroyed the power of the contending Maronite clans led by former President Camille Chamoun and Suleiman Franjeh. Bashir Gemayel is personally responsible for the atrocious murder of Franjeh's son Tony.

Immediately after Gemayel took control of the Maronite enclave he seized the ports previously controlled by his Maronite adversaries. According to an exiled Lebanese banker, the ports and the lucrative casinos in the Maronite capital of Junieh have already netted the Gemayel clan tremendous returns.

A Maronite supporter of Gemayel revealed recently that once the "smoke clears" in Lebanon, it will become the dominant banking center in the Mideast functioning exactly like Switzerland. Despite six years of civil strife and foreign occupation, the central bank still is reported to have several billion dollars in gold in its coffers. And despite the chaos, the decentralized Lebanese banking system has continued to function.

Another piece of the picture is the notorious gold bullion market in Dubai, which is reported to have been resuscitated earlier this year. Besides being the Persian Gulf headquarters of British intelligence, Dubai is ruled by Sheikh Rashid, whose regime is the closest in the Gulf to Ariel Sharon's drug-running Muslim allies Zia and Khomeini, and who is a known funder of the British intelligence-created Muslim Brotherhood. The gold, which originates in Zurich and London, is important because it is a universal currency for opium transshipped through southern Iran.

The Assad Mafia and the Middle East crisis

by Thierry Lalevée, Middle East Editor

The recent Lebanese war was not fought over drugs, but there was definitely a "drug connection" to it which will be the basis for a most cynical, dirty deal in the coming weeks between Syria and Israel. This will most likely be concretized in the shape of a partition of Lebanon between Syria and Israel, as we document above, leaving a token "independent" Lebanon under the rule of some Israeli-controlled puppet à la Bashir Gemayel, who will control a "greater Beirut" whose territory will extend no farther than to Khalde or the Mount Lebanon region.

Underlining this drug aspect of the war was the Israeli army's behavior in Lebanon, acting under the orders of the plenipotentiary representative of the Israeli Mafia, Defense Minister Ariel Sharon. Entering the destroyed cities of Tyre and Sidon, the Israeli Defense Force took two steps; first to load hundreds of trucks with seized Palestinians weapons which, as the Vienna *Kurier* revealed Aug. 21, were sold afterward for hard currency to willing arms dealers who transported them to Iran, then in the midst of its offensive against Iraq. Secondly, dozens of other trucks were loaded with the local hashish crop, evidently not to be burned in Israel, but rather sold through Sharon's American Mafia connections, represented by Meshulem Riklis of the Rapid American Corporation. Hence, a few weeks after the beginning of the war the Paris daily *Le Monde* could quote Israeli officials as saying that "the war has been a good war; we have made a lot of benefits."

But the Israelis cannot be really totally blamed for this state of affairs, as they were merely emulating Israel's supposed "enemy," Hafez al Assad of Syria, who since 1972 has based his regime on creating a "greater Syria" by partitioning Lebanon with Israel, a rationale to include that country in his mafia activities.

Indeed, if Lebanon is partitioned into three spheres of influence—at least—the prime object will be control of drugs, production and trade, and the recycling of dirty money. Israel is expected to retain control over southern Lebanon where "Major" Haddad has for years been using the production of hashish by the local Shiite community to buy the weapons he needed from the Israelis. Syria, on the contrary, will try to retain its control over northern Lebanon and the key city of Baalbeck, the real revolving door of the drug market where, especially in the last few years, the first refineries for the

opium coming from the Golden Crescent were established, from which heroin is then exported to Europe or to the United States.

Then Beirut will be left under Maronite Christian control to become once again an international center for recycling drug money, a kind of Switzerland of the Middle East—less its former territories. Beirut will be once again active as during the heyday of the *Intra-Bank* of Yussuf Beidas and of the Casino du Liban, then owned by French mobster Marcel Franceschi. Franceschi was assassinated last January, but his network is not dead. Also, Gaston Deferre, the French Interior Minister and a “longstanding friend of Israel,” it was said recently, has more than one interest in reestablishing the old connections between Beirut and Marseilles, the entrepôt for the drug trade in France, of which he was Mayor.

The Assad Mafia

The Assad ruling family, in control of Syria since the end of 1970, is probably one of the most powerful Mafias in the entire Middle East, through a family/Alawite network which extends its control over the country via hundreds of so-called security apparatuses called “special units” or “special brigades”; each is under the control of one of Hafez al Assad’s brothers or close cousins. The most famous is doubtless Rifaat al Assad, Hafez’s younger brother, who oversees the entire set of Pretorian guards controlling the country.

Less so far has been said on how these operations are being financed. For example, a recent article in the French daily *France-Soir* pointed out that Rifaat was the head of a car-smuggling ring (the French embassy lost more than 10 in that way) whose headquarters are in the Lebanese city of Britel, significantly close to the city of Baalbeck. But *France Soir* did not mention Britel and Baalbeck’s known drug centers. Working for the Assad Mafia in Baalbeck are primarily two gangs. In charge of the local production of hashish is one Nayef Masri, the “boss,” who until recently dealt directly with a former CIA agent called Ronald Stark. Stark was a member of the “Brotherhood of Eternal Love” cult in Los Angeles, which was implicated in drug-running operations in southern Lebanon and denounced by the Italian police for his participation in the activities of the terrorist Red Brigades. From Baalbeck, Stark had established a route to Italy via Sicily, which was also used to smuggle weapons to the profit of Stark, Masri, and their Syrian “protectors.” The other gang is led by Omar Makkuk and his sister who, in late 1979, were the first to establish opium refineries in the region, which then exported heroin to European nations via Turkey or Cyprus.

Key in that framework is that other city, Tripoli, a Syrian “protectorate” via the local families or through direct Syrian presence working in association with the local boss Ahmed Rahme. Further north, you find the region controlled by former member of Parliament Sabri Hamadi who has, by now, reached international notoriety as a drug runner.

But these are in fact only minor and local aspects of the

Assad Mafia’s activities.

More relevant to our subject is the recent crackdown in Sweden on the so-called Shoemaker ring which is now on trial in Stockholm. The core activity of the ring was smuggling into Sweden of hundreds of millions of dollars worth of heroin over a several-year period. The route went through Beirut and Stockholm, but ended in Los Angeles with a Syrian named Georges Makhlof. An Alawite from southern Turkey, Makhlof, who presumably adopted the name “Georges,” is a relative of Hafez al Assad’s wife Anisa Makhlof! Closing the circle is the fact that Anisa has been for years a leader of the Syrian Social Nationalist Party or “Syrian Popular Party,” which advocates the fascist myth of a “greater Syria.”

The Shoemaker ring

Living in Los Angeles for the past several years, Makhlof was the recipient of the monies sent from Stockholm as the profits on the heroin smuggling, then reinvested in Makhlof’s profitable ventures in Los Angeles. Only when the ring was cracked down on in Stockholm, did the Los Angeles police begin to realize that behind Makhlof’s expanding business was a very dirty mafia. The ongoing court case in Stockholm is bringing to light the direct connection between international drug smuggling and international terrorism in which the Assad Mafia plays a key role.

Makhlof’s partners in Stockholm were Kework Vartanian and Diran Zinazanian, two hard-core members of the Armenian Liberation Army (ASALA), whose release from jail was demanded by the ASALA on Aug. 7 after the aborted attack on Ankara airport. (See page 39.) Ironically, Vartanian and his colleagues had been condemned to jail a few days before, not for their political activities but for the fact that they had been the key organizers of the Shoemaker ring; the money was indeed sent to Makhlof but was also used to finance the ASALA activities throughout Europe. Zanzanian was for example implicated earlier in the murder of a Turkish diplomat in Copenhagen, and was also a close friend of Yeniko Moushian, who was blinded for life after one of his bombs exploded in his Geneva hotel room. But the ring was also ecumenical. The couriers were primarily Druze of the Chaaban family; Palestinian via the Abufacher family; or Lebanese via Nabil Karams, the owner of the Stockholm restaurant in which the financial transactions were held.

Investigations of the “Shoemaker ring” are still underway both in Los Angeles and in Stockholm. The dossier already consists of some 20,000 pages, enough to document in all its details the activities of the Assad Mafia, and its use of drugs to finance international terrorism. Indicative of how sensitive the matter is is the fact that during the trial of the ring, the apartment of Swedish Judge Sigurd Dencker was blown up. A few days of investigations were sufficient to convince the Swedish police to call on Interpol, as the person who had put the bomb had already found refuge in . . . Damascus!