

## From New Jdeideh to Zalka... Over Nahr el-Mot Terrorism, Federalism or a Petty Theft? A Theoretical Approach

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*“The blast, which could be heard several kilometers away, occurred outside a hotel and shopping center in the mainly Christian area of the city. It is the sixth terrorist attack in less than 6 months to target a commercial /touristic center in the Christian areas north of Beirut.”*

The BBC, August 23, 2005.

Who is behind it all and why?

1. The Lebanese reaction: Six explosions in less than 6 months from New Jdaideh to Baushrieh, to Kaslik, to Broummana, to Monot, to Zalka... The series goes on with a striking difference: In the early explosions after March 14<sup>th</sup>, 2005, the self-proclaimed “heroes” of March 14<sup>th</sup> rushed to the scenes to denounce the attacks and emphasize the need to get rid of the Lebanese-Syrian security apparatus, and stressed the importance of “**living together**” – Christians and Moslems – in Lebanon. Even Bahia Hariri went to New Jdeideh, despite her grief over the loss of her brother; we saw Ghinwa Jalloul, Atef Majdalani, Walid Eido... we saw Marwan Hamadé and his nephew Tueini Jr.; we also saw Mme. Solange and Sheikh Pierre Jr. and of course the “suitors” of Kornet Shahwan. Everybody wore the red scarf then; before there was blue, green, yellow and orange. Believe it or not, many of us felt comforted by their visits to the bombed sites.

Alas! That was before the elections.

Now that Metn, Keserwan and Jbeil did not vote as originally planned, none of the above politicians bothered to show-up and express support or at least try to comfort with words the devastated citizens in their newest tragedy. On the contrary, many can be heard saying to themselves: “They deserve it” (Khayy... byestahlo). They did not sow the seeds we gave them; they shall reap the consequences of their misbehavior...

As a Lebanese I had to volunteer that emotional burst, otherwise I would not be true to my origins. That’s all fine; but proper reaction or no, we still do not know who the culprits are or why they are doing it. So allow me to speculate using my “logic” reared in Beirut and pruned by living abroad and some foreign interactions.

2. Occam’s Razor: In its simplest form, Occam's Razor states that one should make no more assumptions than needed in seeking an explanation: when multiple explanations are available for a phenomenon, the simplest version is the best. For example, a charred tree on the ground could be caused by a landing alien spaceship or a lightning strike. According to Occam's Razor, the lightning strike is the preferred explanation as it requires the fewest assumptions.

Applying this principle to the series of explosions that rocked East and North Beirut (excluding the ones that killed Hariri, Hawi and Kasir and attempted to kill Murr), the most plausible suspect becomes a private security agency (the Agency) in search of business in Lebanon. The targets are commercial centers with a level of collective income that enables them to pay their way into a 21<sup>st</sup> century private security system equipped with 24 hours / 7 days monitoring using

high-tech cameras and on site guards. This phenomenon of purchasing security is no stranger to Lebanon. During the war and throughout the Syrian occupation, security in Lebanon always came at a price: the Lebanese in various regions paid the local militia a monthly fee or bribed a Syrian officer in exchange for security guarantees. Now most militias and the Syrian officer are gone. Actually they were replaced by popping private security agencies many of them owned by former militia men or affiliated with politicians and men of power who worked as security middle men during the war.

Any proof of that? Of course not! Otherwise we would not be speculating. But this hypothesis is the one requiring the least assumptions and therefore is the best. It is for the Interior Minister and what remain of the public security agencies in Lebanon to explore it (unless they are in on it, pushing for a privatization of security among other sectors).

Ah! But why North and East Beirut only? Why not the commercial center in Downtown Beirut? Why not the Southern suburb? It could be that the commercial center in Downtown Beirut is already highly secured with cameras and watchful eyes provided by the Agency or other similar agencies. As for the Southern suburb, there may be nothing to protect there; no commerce, no wealth, no tourism; plus it may be unsafe for the Agency (unless it belonged to Amal or Hezbollah) to operate there: someone may steal its cameras or highjack the guards!

3. Conspiracy theories: Of course Occam's Razor in its reductionist simplistic approach does not quench the thirst of conspiracy theorists in Lebanon. Therefore we need to get into more complex analyses of these explosions and develop some really conspiratorial theories:

*Theory 1*: Everybody's favorite is Syria and the Lebanese Security apparatus. I am surprised the rhetoric in that direction is not even more ratchet nowadays than it was in March and April and May. No need to elaborate; almost all of you know the jingle.

But that's not where the juice is. The best conspiracy theory would be one that ties the explosions to the delicate sectarian balance in Lebanon to the arms of Hezbollah to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, to the situation in Iraq all the way to the cause of Islamic fundamentalism and the war on terrorism. Can we do that? Of course!

*Theory 2*: Muslim fundamentalists, probably related to Al-Qaeda, are behind the attack. That would explain in part why the targets are in the Christian areas only; they are relatively liberal and strange to the teaching of conservative Islam. That may be true of Monot in Ashrafieh! But this does not make much sense in the industrial zone in Baushrieh and other commercial centers largely closed at night. Just for the sake of the argument, what would be the goal of the fundamentalists in these areas? Maybe simple terror to extract some political decision! After all Walid Jumblatt warned the Christians if they do not abide by politics as he likes them, they may have to deal with radical fundamentalists. Although plausible, it sounds a bit far fetched.

*Theory 3*: The target is to force a redistribution of wealth from the Christian areas into other areas of Lebanon. Despite 30 years of war and occupation and despite fifteen years of oppression and dispossession (1990 – 2005) aimed at areas east of the demarcation line (Oh yes! The demarcation line: fajjeh we waki3iyyeh), the attacked areas are thriving and bustling with life and tourism, so much that many other areas for example in the Shouf, Aley and the Southern Suburb may be feeling left out. These attacks are obviously targeting wealth and trade in these

areas and not the people. It may scare away a few tourists and it may also scare away some capital into more secure and less vulnerable areas. Who stands to benefit? Follow the money.

*Theory 4:* Force the Christians to seek international protection, in the absence of a centralized national security system to protect them, more like they did when they were threatened by Arafat in 1975. This time however it won't be Syria or any other Arab nation, for all Lebanese had had their fair share of Syrian security and Arab protection. It will be an international force mandated by the UN Security Council and authorized to collect arms from all armed groups and individuals outside the Lebanese army including Hezbollah and the Palestinian militants. That would be an ideal solution, given the lack of maturity among Lebanese politicians to run their country, from implementing UNSC resolution 1559, to appointing constitutional judges, to replacing the security officers that have resigned to securing the streets for the people. But who in the world cares really about Lebanon or the Christians therein? If the USA or France really desired that outcome, they would not need sporadic bombs pretexts to reach it, would they?

*Theory 5:* Force the Christians to organize their own local security systems “Moukawameh style” to resist against a real enemy: sporadic terrorism in their streets. If Hezbollah (the Iranian-backed Shiite movement), under the guise of “Resistance” to an enemy who has not attacked in 5 years and may never attack again, can claim the lack of readiness of the Lebanese Army in order to keep its arms, then why can't the Christians (Aounists or Geageaists or Pakradounists – I doubt if the Gemayels still have any pull among Christians) make a similar claim, especially that they are regularly under attack and the central government cannot seem to agree on who is in charge of security. So let the Christians have their own security system, their arms, their organized resistance against terror, their own militia and let's start by calling it “Civil Security Forces” (Kiwa el-Amn el-Madani) and with time it can evolve into the Army of Free Lebanon (AFL - Jaysh Lubnan El-Hurr). This theory feeds into two corollary theories: *six* and *seven*.

*Theory 6:* A corollary of theory five. Since the Sunnis, effectively in charge of Lebanon since March 14<sup>th</sup>, 2005, have remained unable or unwilling to implement UNSC 1559 and disarm Hezbollah and the Palestinians, it is time to recruit somebody else to do it: the Christians. These guys love a good fight. But instead of asking them to disarm Hezbollah and the Palestinians and encouraging them to build a modern and peaceful country with their fellow citizens (which they can't do), give those arms and let the suckers on both sides fight each other again until their fighting power is drained and there won't be any need to disarm anybody. Brilliant idea!

*Theory 7:* A corollary of theory five. Arming the Christians and allowing the Shiites to retain their arms, is a prelude to establishing a federal system of government in Lebanon that goes beyond politics and government and resembles what is being built in Iraq – instead of “Faylak Badr”, Hezbollah; instead of “Faylak Omar”, the Palestinian militants (historically the armed wing of Sunni political groups in Lebanon); and instead of the Peshmerga we'll have the AFL! This would have taken care of many problems in Lebanon including that of nationalizing the Palestinian refugees. This also ties well into the theory of wealth redistribution (theory 3 above) and perhaps provides the best outcome for a pluralistic country in which “*living together*” among different sectarian groups may have become politically impossible. So as long as we can't agree on a secular formula for this country, let's try to shift our focus from “*together*” to “*living*”, and go after “*living in peace*” with our neighbor. May be that formula will work.

Of course, these are only theories and it will take time to prove or disprove any of them.