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From: Sullivan, Jacob J <SullivanJJ@state.gov>
Sent: Tuesday, June 5, 2012 2:58 AM
To: H
Subject: Taif Accord/Lebanon

A basic primer:

The Taif Accord

The Taif Accord, signed in October 1989, was the compromise that ended the Lebanese Civil War. The precipitating event for the accord was a fear among the Arab states, led by Saudi Arabia, that the proxy battle between Iraq and Syria in Lebanon would lead to escalating regional conflict and the break-up of the Lebanese state. The Arab States formed a Tripartite Committee composed of Algeria, Morocco, and Saudi Arabia. Under their auspices, the surviving legislators of the last elected Lebanese National Assembly (from 1972) met in At Ta'if, Saudi Arabia to discuss national reconciliation on the basis of a document that had largely been prepared by the Tripartite Committee, after much consultation with Syria. The US and USSR both supported the negotiations, and a UNSC declaration supported the agreement.

Taif essentially maintained the sectarian organization of Lebanese politics established in the National Pact of 1943, but shifted structural power away from the Maronite Christians and toward the Muslims, reflecting new demographic and power realities. This was accomplished by reducing the prerogatives of the traditionally Maronite President and transferring executive power to a Council of Ministers made up of equal numbers of Muslims and Christians and led by a Sunni Prime Minister. It also reduced Christian representation in the National Assembly to parity with Muslims and called for the disarmament of all militias, the strengthening of the Lebanese security services, and the withdrawal of Israeli forces.

This sectarian compromise was necessary to end years of violence and it affirmed decisively the Arab identity of Lebanon, the unity of country, and its democratic political system. But by institutionalizing the previously informal sectarian organization of the Lebanese state, the accord also ensured that Lebanon would not develop a strong central government and a stable political system capable of asserting control over the country's diverse sects.

Experts have pointed to several conditions that allowed the Taif Accord to (mostly) end the violence:

- It modified and updated the existing political system rather than uprooting it wholesale.
- It expressed a sense of stalemate and fatigue after 14 years of violence and 150,000 deaths.
- It was the end of a long negotiation that had stopped and started since 1985, with many of the major elements clear for a long time.
- It chose to validate the Syrian military presence in Lebanon to provide stability and allow for the Lebanese Armed Forces to re-coalesce.
- It profited from a favorable international environment in which all of the major outside actors, for distinct reasons saw an advantage in ending the violence and affirming the Syrian military presence.