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## America—the innocent

THE American public remains rather shallow and naive in its understanding of events in the Middle East. This is a basic reality that should never be forgotten in considering how the United States government deals with the region along with the difficulties of attempting to influence American policies through appeals to public opinion.

As a consequence of this ongoing naivete, the American government—usually in tandem, especially in recent years, with the Jewish lobby—continues to be able to pursue Israeli-oriented policies partly designed to keep the Arab world divided and off balance. Another consequence is that the same forces are able to manipulate the press and public opinion so as to be able to pursue these policies without much public opposition.

Witness the most recent historic event in the region—the assassination of Lebanese President Rene Muawad.

Though a major event in the Middle East, it was pretty much a one-day story here, one fit in between events in El-Salvador and Eastern Europe at that. But this much is understandable. After all, for most Americans, Lebanon remains but one more far away country torn by unexplainable violence. And those who think about it all remember how a lot of American Marines got killed a few years ago, then our Embassy bombed, and then Ronald Reagan pretty much through up his hands and got us out.

But the point that needs further emphasis and explanation is that the Muawad assassination story was reported here almost devoid of history.

Oh yes, American newspapers did manage to put in graphically interesting boxes a chronological sequence of events reminding readers that the civil war has been going on for a long time now as well as of other important dates and figures, including the assassination of another President just a few years ago.

But when it came to geo-strategic analysis, to an attempt to understand the major political and clandestine forces at work in the region and thus, in theory at least, who might have been behind this latest dastardly deed, Americans remain the innocents they have always been and the American media is of little consequence in changing that situation.

In private conversations among experts here the name of the regional party occupying parts of Lebanon, the name of the party with the greatest interest in sabotaging the Arab League-sponsored Lebanese re-

conciliation which Muawad symbolised, could often be heard.

Memories of Abu Jihad, of the geo-strategic gamble of June 1982, of the bombings of Baghdad and Tunis; and even memories going back to the Mossad days, and further yet to the truly terrorist days, of this parties current Prime Minister do permeate quiet discussions here among experts.

One long-time American observer, and a former Arab minister told me, when I queried him about the possibility of Israel's involvement.

"Yes, very definitely, I just talked: several people in Lebanon who said Aoun could not take this risk and doesn't have the machinery to go so against the Syrians alone. So he needs a larger kind of intelligence apparatus to do it. And of course, also, we have to ask who benefits the most. A journalist friend of mine who has just lived in Lebanon for eight years told me 'It is impossible for me to believe that Aoun would do it alone without the Israelis'."

Yet on American television, and in American papers, none of these experts who would discuss Muawad's assassination in such terms has been heard from. Throughout the American media one could not find even a suggestion of the possible complicity of Israel in upending this latest attempt by Arab leaders to find some way out of Lebanon's misery.

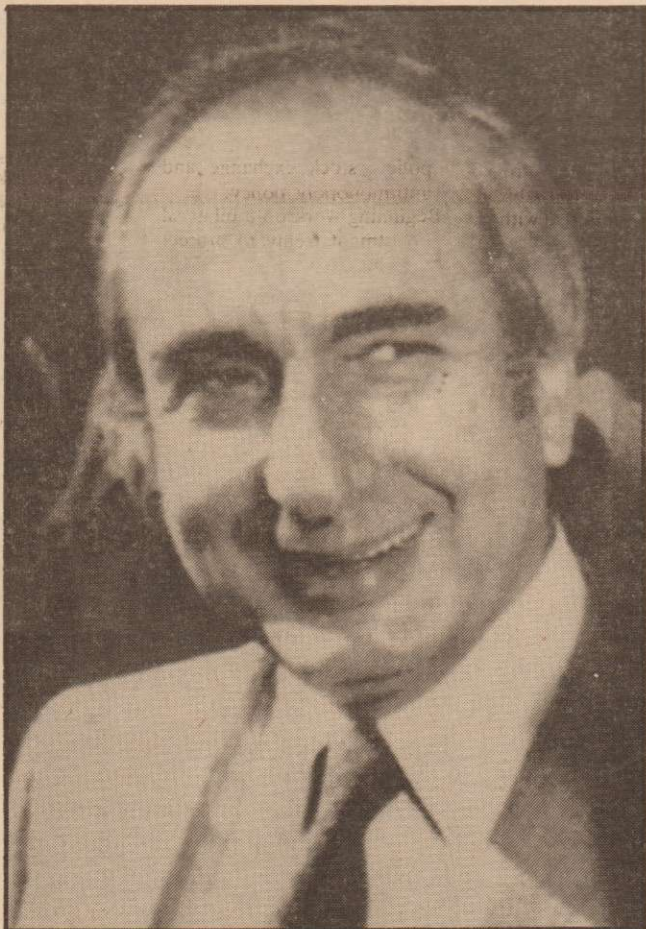
And even when an Arab commentator is interviewed, the ones specifically chosen are of the Fouad Ajami type, that is they know the price of being invited back again and stay clear of discussing the possible Israeli-connection.

The explanation for this overall situation is multifaceted; but it all begins with the basic American innocence when dealing with the Middle East. Of course there is also the considerable pressure and manipulation constantly coming from the extensive Jewish/Israeli lobby. But there is also a cowardice in much of the press itself, and this is coupled with a laziness and a shallowness which taken all together means that the press here very much reflects the general innocence of the society when matters Middle Eastern are under discussion.

Furthermore, it should also be said, nearly all of the groups associated with the Arab-American community, as well as most of the government representatives, remain woefully inadequate in both sophistication and organisation to push only behind-the-scenes.

One does not have to be a scholar to quickly pull-together past events that would, in any objective discussion, put Israel at or near the top of any list of suspicion. Just recall, in historical order,

UN negotiator Count Bernadotte's assassination.

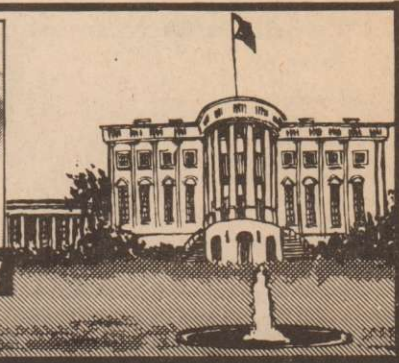


Rene Muawad

## From



Mark A. Bruzonsky



## Washington

The Levon Affair (Israeli agents planting bombs in Egypt to sabotage US-Egyptian relations).

The attack on the *USS Liberty*.

Israel's setting up of the Sabra and Shatilla massacres.

The Shinbet scandal (leading to the resignation a few years ago of many Shinbet officials and the pardon from charges of murder and cover-up by Israeli President Hertzog of key persons).

The Pollard Affair, The Columbian drug cartel scandal.

And for those who still doubt the possibility, even the likelihood, of Israeli involvement in the Muawad assassination I would remind them of what was a similar event nearly a decade ago now on January 22, 1979.

That was when, using a simi-

hevelled, shabbily dressed, Penelope (as she was known to the neighbours) would emerge on the street with plates full of food for stray cats; her apartment was also said to be full of her beloved felines. Her second passion was painting. She would stand for hours by her windows, and paint the picturesque Beirut skyline—this her excuse for constantly monitoring the movement of cars around the neighbourhood.

Chambers had been watching for months as various cars travelled through her neighbourhood to Fatah headquarters not far away. Furthermore, using binoculars, she had determined which car usually carried Hassan Salamah who rode in a bullet-proof Chevrolet station-wagon, squeezed between two heavily-armed body-guards, and followed by a Land Rover full of

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larly remote-controlled bomb which was detonated, it seems, in a very similar way to the bomb that killed Muawad, clandestine Israeli agents killed Yasser Arafat's protegee, Ali Hassan Salamah.

Salamah, it has been widely written, was the PLO's man responsible, under Arafat's guidance, for Black September and especially for what history records as the Munich massacre. Like a son to Arafat, some even thought he was being groomed as a potential successor to the Old Man himself. He was also famous for his marriage to Miss Universe, Georgina Risk.

After at least five failed attempts, Salamah was finally blown up by a remote control-detonated device as he drove on the streets of West Beirut on his way to join Arafat. The scene then was very much similar to that of a few days ago containing the torn-apart body of Rene Muawad. And the need done by a 30-year-old woman, an Israeli spy using the name Erika Marie Chambers, who posed as a deranged, eccentric and had moved to Ras Beirut three months earlier travelling on a British passport and after a four-year stay in Germany.

As reported by investigative Israeli journalists in a book published by William Morrow Company in 1983, "Always dis-

other body-guards.

Married about a year before Salamah had fallen into a routine in his travel plans, mostly because of his new family-life. It was a routine that was his undoing.

Chambers detonated a rented Volkswagon full of explosives and parked on the street just as Salamah passed by. Like Muawad's car, the wrecked Chevrolet was hurled through the air by the explosion and crashed nearby with flames immediately turning it into a gigantic torch.

Arafat cried when he heard the news; and in a few days some fifty thousand Palestinians turned out for Salamah's funeral.

In the chaos that is Lebanon today it's unlikely that any definitive evidence will turn up to pin-point the assassins of Rene Muawad. And with today's more complicated political situation its also unlikely those who have done it will share their exploits with journalists for some time to come.

Nevertheless it's most unfortunate that here in the US, the American press lacks both the understanding and the courage to discuss such historic events in an objective and historically-aware manner, and that the American public demands little more than what it gets.