

In the West Rene Mouawad is not a household name, but in Lebanon he is an iconic symbol of independence and freedom. His love for Lebanon cost him his life.

President Mouawad was killed on Independence Day, Wednesday 22nd November 1989, when a massive bomb exploded as his motorcade drove through West Beirut, writes Nehad Ismail.

Today marks the 26th anniversary of the murder of a man who served as President for 17 days only. The killing came after the concluding of a milestone agreement under the auspices of Saudi Arabia with the backing of the Arab League. Mr. Mouawad had been elected on Nov. 5 at a special session of Parliament held in an area under the control of Syrian troops. The meeting was held to ratify an agreement to shift some of the power held by Christians to Muslims. The Taif Agreement was reached to provide "the basis for the ending of the civil war and the return to political normalcy in Lebanon."

At the time of Mouawad's killing fingers pointed towards Hezbollah and the Syrian regime who were opposed to the Taif Agreement. However, the Lebanese have long

President Rene Moauwad learned to suspect whomever might benefit from a violent act – which this time appeared to be the hard-line Christian forces loyal to General Aoun.

Less than 24 hours before his death, President Mouawad had given his first – and, it would turn out, only – official address to the Lebanese, calling on them to "come together, rejoice, reunite and rebuild the country.'

But General Aoun delivered his own speech on the eve of independence celebrations, attacking Mr. Mouawad as "a tool for the occupation forces" of Syria this despite the irony that Michel Aoun himself is a strong ally of Hezbollah and Tehran and may have said this in order to deflect accusations of Syrian involvement. He is an unrepentant apologist for the Assad regime. Aoun is loathed by most Maronite Christians and most Sunni Muslims in Lebanon. Despite the shenanigans of Aoun, most Lebanese believe the ultimate responsibility for the assassination still lies with Hezbollah and the Syrian regime.

Mouawad's assassination was not the first or the last. Bashir Gemayel who was elected in 1982, while most of Lebanon was under Israeli occupation, had been assassinated before he could be sworn in. At the time most Lebanese accused the Syrian regime of orchestrating the murder.

On 27th December 2013 Mohamad Chatah, a fierce critic of Assad, was killed along with at least 4 others. Chatah, a Sunni Muslim, opposed to Hezbollah's political and military role in Lebanon, was on his way to attend a meeting when the explosion occurred. An hour before he was killed, Chatah tweeted messages slamming the Lebanese Shiite movement Hezbollah.

Syria has a long history of meddling in Lebanese affairs. Bashar al Assad the now beleaguered President of Syria has threatened on several occasions to spread mayhem and chaos into neighbouring Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey. Lebanon is considered the easiest target. Hezbollah which is the effective ruler of Lebanon is the Syrian regime's loyal agent. So it is easy for Syria, in collaboration with Hezbollah, to orchestrate assassinations and unrest.

The killing of Wissam al-Hassan, the security chief in Lebanon in October 2012 was just another victim of a Syrian campaign to eliminating opponents.

Typical of the media coverage at the time was the Arab News/AFP report dated 21st October 2012 which ran a headline stating "Syria behind Lebanon Blast". The list of victims of alleged Syrian assassinations in recent years included Rafiq al-Hariri, former prime minister who was assassinated in a massive bombing in Beirut on 14 February 2005. More than a dozen Lebanese politicians and journalists were liquidated by Syrian agents including Samir Kassir a journalist killed on 2nd June 2005. George Hawi, a former Communist Party leader and anti-Syrian politician, was killed by a bomb planted under his car on 21st June 2005. The list of victims of Syrian assassination campaign included Gibran Tueni, a prominent anti-Syrian newspaper editor and politician, killed by a car bomb in December 2005. Pierre Gemayel, the industry minister and a prominent Christian politician, was shot dead by gunmen in a Beirut suburb in November 2006. Captain Wissam Eid a senior police intelligence officer was killed by car bomb, along with a bodyguard and at least four others in Hazmieh, a Christian neighbourhood on the edge of Beirut in January 2008. The common link between the victims was that all of them were opposed to the Syrian regime.

The list of victims is too long to include all victims due to space limitations.

Many observers in the Middle East, believe that the Syrian regime will continue its campaign of assassinations in Lebanon to destabilize the country. It has tried but so far failed to destabilize Jordan and Turkey.

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