

One of my favorite journalists chronicling developments in the Middle East is [Robert Fisk](#) of the [Independent of England](#). Fisk has lived in, and reported from, Beirut for the past 30 years. He witnessed first hand the civil war which wracked the region from 1975 to 1990 and the ensuing Syrian occupation. He writes with a clear yet impassioned style, much like John Burns meets Hunter S. Thompson.

His two latest two columns show a country approaching the very edge of chaos and, ultimately, stepping back from that abyss:

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They were commuter buses, 10 minutes apart, carrying the poor from the mountain town of Bikfaya to the coast, targets of opportunity for someone who wanted to enrage the Christian community of Lebanon less than 24 hours before today's mass demonstrations to mark the second anniversary of Rafik Hariri's murder. Lebanon's killers usually choose the country's politicians, journalists and public figures to destroy but yesterday – in what was obviously intended to be a mass slaughter – they killed a bus driver, a Christian woman and an Egyptian worker. Two bombs packed with metal pellets, hidden under the seats of both buses, by someone who wants a civil war.

All of Lebanon asked itself the same question: was this the attack that was meant to ensure that today's vast protests in Beirut turn violent? For if Beirut passes through the emotions and anger of today's anniversary – the ex-prime minister Hariri was blown up in his motorcade in the city, along with 21 others – without street fighting, then Lebanon may be safe. If it turns into anarchy, then the prospect of civil war looks ever more real. Today, as they say, is the day.

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So the Lebanese survived. The civil war did not begin. The second anniversary of the murder of former prime minister Rafik Hariri was more a festival than a vow of revenge.

Even the coffee stall and crisps concessions were cheerful. Villagers from what journalists like to call the "hardy warrior race" of the Druze – mountain men from the Chouf – and their families stood shoulder to shoulder with Christian Maronite women in the centre of Beirut to honour the man whose murder provoked a UN Security Council resolution that demanded the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon (dutifully adhered to) and the disarming of the Hizbollah militia (dutifully un-adhered to).

Despite the three deaths in Tuesday's bus bombing in the Metn hills, there were no calls for revenge, no ill will, none of the viciousness that those murders were presumably intended to provoke. Many of the young men quite literally danced in the streets to their own music and families sat in Martyrs' Square – site of the hanging of Lebanese patriots by the Turks in 1915 and 1916 – with picnics.

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We should all breathe a sigh of relief that once again Lebanon is back from the brink. More must be done, by the US and others, to ensure that the people of this important cross-roads country are able to return to fashioning a pluralistic society once again.