



can be no military solution to Lebanon's political problems, the nationalists were forced to resort to the military option; in the process, they surpassed the «red lines» that have existed between the isolationists and nationalist forces for a number of years. «No red lines any more, we shall undertake any action we deem appropriate at any place, any time and by any means,» said Walid Jumblatt (AP, August 16th). It was the first time since the current confrontation began in March that ground forces moved against each other, having previously been firing from stationary positions.

WAR BY PROXY

Since the cease-fire in the Gulf War a year ago, Iraq has put its energies into its old fight with Syria, choosing Lebanon as the theater of confrontation by arming Aoun. Thus, Iraq seeks to punish Syria for supporting Iran in the Gulf War, without itself paying the price of this harassment. Also the unresolved hostilities between Iraq and Iran spill over into the conflict in Lebanon.

The Casablanca Summit tried to defuse the Syrian-Iraqi feud, but failed. All they could do for Lebanon was to set up a committee of the heads of state of Saudi Arabia, Morocco and Algeria, who dispatched their foreign ministers on a round of diplomacy. The three foreign ministers shuttled between Damascus and Baghdad, seeking to bring the two Arab rivals to pressure their respective Lebanese allies to abide by a truce. They tried to achieve a compromise between the two sides to scale

down the Lebanese conflict, but they made no progress.

INTERNATIONALIZATION

Although Aoun enjoys the support of virtually all the imperialist countries, it was notably France which sent its armada to the Mediterranean, at a time when it had become obvious that Aoun's forces were in a difficult position. Aoun himself openly stated: «I would like a French military intervention» (AP, August 18th).

France tried to present its threat of military intervention under a humanitarian guise. The minister for the French speaking world, Alain Decaux, said, «Everyone feels the Lebanese question as a tragedy but France feels it in its heart. Across the centuries, France has been the protector of the Christian community. There is no reason why our country should not continue in that role forever» (*The Guardian*, August 16th). «There is no question of military intervention... France does not believe in a military solution,» said the French ambassador to Lebanon, Rene Ala (*The Guardian*, August 22nd).

However, the French statements didn't dispell fears that the fleet was sent close to Lebanon's shores for a covert political purpose. Sending warships to the Mediterranean was an attempt by the French government to influence the outcome of the Lebanese conflict in favor of Aoun's forces, by internationalizing the situation. It appears that France is attempting to revive its past colonial role in the area.

Aware of these aims, the Lebanese

Nationalist Front declared that it had «decided to deal with any French presence off our shores as a military target» (*International Herald Tribune*, August 24th). Amal leader, Nabih Berri, one of the members of this front, said that he would give orders to open fire on any French naval vessels that approached the Lebanese coast.

Another aim of sending the French fleet was to sabotage the Arab League efforts to resolve the Lebanese crisis. This was confirmed by diplomatic moves which centered around a three-step «peace plan» disclosed by the French foreign minister, Roland Dumas. This plan reflected the French government's bias towards Aoun's forces by laying all the blame for the crisis on Syria. It could thus only serve to widen the internal differences in Lebanon.

The Soviet Union was the first nation to mark its distance from the French position, pointedly denying that the dispatch of the French warships had been discussed in Moscow during the visit of the French envoy. Moreover, the Soviet Union has engaged in active diplomacy aimed to consolidate the ceasefire declared by the UN Security Council in mid-August. This was an embarrassment to France, and raised hopes that it might yet be possible to achieve a cease-fire as a first step to ending the war. Dr. Salim Hoss, head of the legitimate government in Lebanon, said, «No one but the Soviet Union can do anything at this stage» (*The Guardian*, August 26th). The Soviet Union has expressed support to the Arab League Committee, encouraging it to resume its efforts.

FACTS BEHIND THE IMPASSE

In addition to the French attempt at intervention, Israel and the US are the two parties that have done most to block a solution to the Lebanese crisis along the lines pursued by the Arab three-state committee. The continuation of the crisis serves the interests of Israel which wants to keep Lebanon weak and divided, in order to enforce its own hegemony. Moreover, as stated by retired Israeli Brigadier General Aharon Levran, «It is a blessing for