

Predictably the Lebanese fascist forces launched their counter campaign after implementation of the Syrian-sponsored security plan in West Beirut and the formation of the National Unity Front. First came a series of initiatives for inter-Maronite reconciliation, accompanied by steady escalation of the fighting between East and West Beirut. Then in mid-August, the heaviest fighting in over a year engulfed the capital and surrounding hills, punctuated by murderous car bombs on both sides of Beirut's 'green line' and in Tripoli. When we attribute the new outbreak of violence to the fascist forces, we mean all factions of their ranks: Lebanon's President Amin Gemayel and his Phalangist Party, the Lebanese Front, the Lebanese Forces militias, etc.

To this day, internal Lebanese developments can only be gaged on the backdrop of the Israeli policy for Lebanon. Though the bulk of Israeli troops have been withdrawn without achieving their stated goals, the Zionist state has not relinquished its intentions to keep Lebanon divided and end its era as the focus of militant Palestinian-Lebanese national struggle. The fascist forces' moves are geared to make the best of this situation, given the fact that they failed to dominate Lebanon even with massive Israeli help. Instead, the role of the Lebanese nationalist forces, backed by Syria, was asserted.

Those who have relied on their Maroniteness to guarantee their privileges obviously feel threatened by the regrouping of the nationalist forces to end political confessionalism. The clearest evidence of this was the July 31st meeting in Ehden, where former Lebanese President Suleiman Franjieh reconciled his differences with the Lebanese Forces, now headed by Elias Hobeika. This ended the feud which began in 1978, when a unit of the Lebanese Forces led by Samir Geagea raided Ehden and slaughtered Franjieh's son and a number of his followers. Franjieh blamed Bashir Gemayel, then commander of the Lebanese Forces, and withdrew from the Lebanese Front. Since Hobeika's replacing Geagea as Lebanese Forces commander was a purely cosmetic change, the reconciliation has other causes. Both Franjieh and the Lebanese Forces see the need to close the «Christian», especially Maro-

nite, ranks in the present situation. Both have reservations about Amin Gemayel's ability to lead the «Christians» through this crisis; they thus moved to strengthen their own hand, by presenting a new pivot for «Christian» unity.

Fascists incite violence

As for those who instigated the August violence, we must start with Amin Gemayel who needs a situation whereby he can pose as the common denominator between the opposing sides. To this end, he made tactical overtures to the nationalist side as in his response to the National Unity Front. At a press conference in Damascus on August 8th, Gemayel said that he supported the NUF's demands for more power, and took the opportunity to blame the Lebanese civil war on the Palestinians. Threatened by the Ehden reconciliation, Gemayel also needs to strengthen his hand within the Christian community, especially as the calls for his resignation are now coming from Franjieh and the Lebanese Forces, as well as from nationalist leaders. Gemayel needs to show that the danger comes from outside East Beirut. Thus, he moved the Lebanese Army in East Beirut to incite East-West fighting. By having the part of the army that is loyal to him actively involved in the fighting, Gemayel hoped to strengthen his own hand and give that part of the army a greater political role. Not surprisingly, after the Syrian-arranged ceasefire of August 22nd, Gemayel announced his intent to act as arbitrator of national dialogue..

Despite tactical differences, the Lebanese Forces share Amin Gemayel's need to unite the «Christian» side to face the «outside» enemy. There are many indications that at least some of the recent explosions in the fascist controlled areas were the result of infighting. The palace of former Communications Minister Michel Murr was destroyed by a bomb a few days after he mediated the Ehden reconciliation. A week later a car bomb exploded in Saad al Boushrieh, northeast of Beirut, an area controlled by Hobeika's Lebanese Forces. It cannot be ruled out that the Phalangists had a hand in these explosions, hitting at the new reconciliation in the Maronite ranks in hopes of preserving their own dominance. Informed

sources say that Camille Chamoun, veteran politician of the Lebanese Front, was active in initiating the East-West fighting in order to avert inter-Christian fighting. The danger was clearly there, as also seen in the mid-August fighting in Zahle in Eastern Lebanon, between Phalangists and the Lebanese Forces.

Keeping Lebanon «in line»

Keeping the kettle of seemingly sectarian fighting boiling not only serves to buy time for saving Christian privileges. It diverts from other issues, chiefly that 'Israel' still occupies a portion of Lebanon, and the Jezzine crisis, where Lahd's SLA remains entrenched, harassing the neighboring southern villages. This is obviously in line with Zionist intents which have been further underlined by almost weekly bombing raids on eastern Lebanon; the Israeli message is clear: Keep us in mind when you are trying to arrive at a solution for the Lebanese crisis.

In late August, three former Lebanese presidents, Franjieh, Charles Helou and Camille Chamoun, met. Afterwards Chamoun told reporters that they had agreed on refusal to abolish political confessionalism (i.e. Maronite dominance), especially concerning the presidency, the cabinet, the parliament and top army posts. The most the Maronite elite is ready to concede is having 50-50 Christian-Moslem representation in the parliament. This is relatively meaningless since power has always rested with the top posts which are reserved for Christians and usually Maronites. It is also meaningless in principle, for the solution to the Lebanese crisis lies not in quibbling about individual points, but in the creation of a democratic constitution that would revamp the whole political structure.

The proposals put forth by the Maronite elite collide directly with the National Unity Front's position. This further underlines the deadlock for attempts at national reconciliation, as does the renewed outbreaks of fighting in the Beirut and mountain areas. The Lebanese crisis has reached a stage too complicated to be solved by various «plans» or partial proposals. This is even more so due to the recurring clashes and disorder in nationalist-controlled West Beirut.

