

attackers to back away. On December 10th and 11th, Shatila lived an uneasy peace, which was occasionally disrupted by sniping, shelling and machine gun fire. Heavy fighting then erupted and continued for the next two weeks, until the date of writing this article. Heavy, destructive shelling targeted Shatila and its besieged residents. It was clear that Amal and the Lebanese Army 1st and 6th Brigades were making intensive efforts to enforce Shatila's surrender. Reports from Beirut confirmed that Amal's leader, Nabih Berri, had issued an order to the army and his gangs to bring down Shatila, regardless of developments in Maghdousheh, where efforts were underway for a ceasefire. The order termed the operation to bring down Shatila 'Operation Al Fajr' (Dawn -sic).

BURJ AL BARAJNEH

Although the aggression against Shatila was the fiercest, Burj Al Barajneh camp did not escape the wrath of Amal's gangs. The camp had been under siege for over two months, with daily shelling, sniping and destruction. With the intensification of aggression against Shatila, Burj Al Barajneh also came under heavier fire.

The first ten days of December, Burj Al Barajneh lived through a savage daily routine of artillery and rocket shelling, sniping, machine gunning, intrusion attempts, concentration of attacking troops, etc. On November 29th, a chemical bomb was thrown into the camp, causing dryness and stinging of the throat, vomiting and diarrhea among the people present near the site of the explosion. On December 6th,

during a funeral for a martyr, a fighter was killed by a sniper's bullet, and the funeral procession and cemetery were shelled. A message sent out by the Popular Committee of Burj Al Barajneh reported that 1,065 houses had been destroyed, and there were hundreds of martyrs and wounded since the siege was imposed.

For the following two weeks, as in the case of Shatila, Burj Al Barajneh faced escalating aggression: heavy artillery, rocket and mortar shelling, heavy machine gunning and several intrusion attempts which were faced with fierce resistance, forcing Amal to withdraw.

MAGHDOUSHEH

In the first week of December, there was intense fighting in Maghdousheh

Broken Ceasefires and War of Attrition

Throughout the recurring camp war, the majority of Palestinian forces have stood ready for a ceasefire agreement to end the fighting on reasonable grounds. Their top political priority has been guaranteeing Palestinian armed presence in Lebanon in a way to enable defense of the refugee camps and continuation of the struggle against Zionist occupation, while preserving good Palestinian - Lebanese relations on the political, military and mass levels. The Amal movement, in contrast, has repeatedly displayed unwillingness to make peace among brothers.

Despite Amal's unwillingness, a ceasefire accord was reached in the second week of December, mainly as the result of two developments. One was the persistent efforts of Iran, Libya and other nationalist forces to end the dirty war. Two was the inability of Amal and its external backers to achieve their goals quickly on the battlefield, as they had expected. These dreams were thwarted by Palestinian unity in the field, and heroic defense of the Palestinians' camps and rights. The agreement contained the following points:

1. A ceasefire in Beirut and the South.
2. Palestinian withdrawal from Maghdousheh, to be replaced by Lebanese nationalist and Islamic forces.
3. From the moment the Palestinian forces begin withdrawing, Amal lifts the siege from all the camps; relief supplies enter Rashidiya camp, and the wounded are evacuated.
4. As the ceasefire goes into effect, detainees will be released and refugees return to their homes.

These points constituted the first stage. Upon its completion, the second stage would begin with a meeting between the leaderships of Amal, the Palestinians, and the Lebanese nationalist forces, under Syrian auspices, to

discuss an overall political solution for the conflict.

The agreement was positive because it did not include terms fulfilling the condition set by Amal and its backers, for disarmament of the Palestinian fighters and camps. Moreover, it included no clause for having certain Palestinian factions control others. Amal and its backers had worked for such a development in order to incite inter-Palestinian fighting, so they could more easily achieve their goal, instead of facing united Palestinian defense lines.

This agreement was guaranteed by Libya and Iran, in contrast to the Damascus agreement of 1985, that was guaranteed by Syria. It soon became apparent, however, that Amal and its backers had no intention of abiding by its terms. Rather Amal signed the agreement to relieve the political and military pressure on itself, to save face and buy time.

The Iranians in particular exerted great efforts to make the agreement a success. Their mediator, Issa Tabatabai, went to stay in Rashidiya starting December 10th, saying he would remain until the crisis was settled. Such efforts greatly angered Amal as they served to expose its failure to abide by the accord it had signed. Accordingly, the Amal leader in the Tyre area, Daoud Daoud, called for Tatabai's removal, claiming ridiculously that he was «an agent of Arafat.» (It is well known that the Iranian government has always opposed Arafat's policy of wagering on US solutions.) Daoud's remark exposed only Amal which continues to claim that it is fighting Arafat, while in practice fighting the Palestinians as such.

Throughout December, the same points for a ceasefire were agreed upon

numerous times by the Palestinians, but never implemented due to Amal's repeated violations and sabotage. Finally, slightly different terms were worked out towards the end of the same month. The essence was the same, with Palestinian withdrawal from Maghdousheh made simultaneous with lifting the siege on the camps. The forces of the Lebanese nationalist movement were assigned a greater role, replacing the Palestinian forces in Maghdousheh, and securing the coastal road from Beirut through Sidon and south to Tyre. A delegation from the PFLP and DFLP went from Damascus to the Sidon area, to make sure that all Palestinian forces, including those of Arafat still in Maghdousheh, would implement the agreement. Yet by the time this was accomplished, a statement by Nabih Berri made it clear that neither Amal nor its backers considered that they had committed themselves to the new terms. Amal also rejected the participation of some Lebanese nationalist organizations, especially the Popular Liberation Army of Mustafa Saad in Sidon, in the joint force that was to implement the ceasefire in Maghdousheh. At the same time, the murder of a Libyan diplomat in Lebanon showed the extent to which Amal will go to sabotage any mediation attempts that might be to the interest of the Palestinian revolution and the nationalist cause.

Having failed to achieve their aims, Amal and its backers are not giving up, because they judge a strong Palestinian revolutionary presence to run contrary to their distorted dreams of bolstering their own power in a new sectarian redistribution of power in Lebanon. To this end, they are willing to turn the camp war into a war of attrition, hoping vainly to wear out the Palestinians over time, regardless of the damage this will inflict on the common Arab struggle against Zionism and imperialism.