

the occupied territories, Palestinian and Lebanese revolutionaries had escalated their armed struggle. By early May, eight attacks had been launched against the Zionist state from South Lebanon, in contrast to ten such attacks in the whole of 1987.

'Israel' was quick to react to the new prospects for the liberation struggle. The first week of May, it launched a major new attack on South Lebanon, sending 2,500 troops, backed by tanks and helicopters out of the 'security zone' to engage in clashes with Lebanese patriots, especially around Maidun. The Israeli troops came within a few miles of Syrian army positions in the southern Bekaa Valley. Obviously, the real intent of the operation was to send a signal to Lebanon and Syria, that 'Israel' would not tolerate an increase in nationalist struggle.

'Israel' escalated its aggression on Lebanon with a double purpose: Hoping to pacify its northern front in order to concentrate its military might on crushing the Palestinian uprising, meanwhile pressuring Lebanon to opt for a president who would not hamper Zionist aims. By late August, 'Israel' had staged fifteen major bombing attacks, most targetting Palestinian presence in the Sidon area, but also hitting Lebanese villages. Pressure was accentuated with the reinforcement of Zionist troop strength in the occupied border zone, and almost daily shelling of Lebanese southern villages by the Israeli army and their allies, the South Lebanese Army.

## SOUTH BEIRUT

Meanwhile, the conflict between the two militias, Amal and Hezbollah, over control of the southern districts of Beirut was resolved. Unable to maintain its positions, Amal evacuated its forces to South Lebanon in an agreement whereby Syrian troops were deployed to maintain order in southern Beirut. This was a further move towards pacification of West Beirut, i.e., removing the militias from the streets, in preparations for the anticipated elections. It was intended as part of the effort to enforce a similar situation in East Beirut, whereby the Lebanese Army would replace the Lebanese Forces' control.

Of course, the part of this plan concerning East Beirut never materialized. Instead, the settlement in the southern districts set a precedent which could be implemented in a different spirit in the Palestinian camps, depriving Palestinians of their right to self-defense and to participate in the liberation struggle. The inter-Palestinian fighting in the Beirut camps provided a golden opportunity to those forces envisioning such moves to end Palestinian revolutionary presence in Lebanon.

## A PALESTINIAN WAR?

The initial fighting between the Fatah Central Committee and Provisional Leadership forces had ended with the expulsion of the latter from the Beirut camps. The other Palestinian organizations, in coordination with their Lebanese nationalist allies, stood against this fighting from the beginning. They formed a follow-up committee to work for a ceasefire and for resolving the conflict through democratic means. The ceasefire arranged by this committee provided for the Fatah Provisional Leadership to return to its offices in the camps. However, this option was not heeded by the Provisional Leadership which began shelling the camps from positions outside. This finally forced the evacuation of Fatah Central Committee loyalists to Ain Al Hilweh camp, near Sidon. On this basis, the Provisional Leadership re-entered Shatila and Burj Al Barajneh camps, but without a shred of popular support for this dirty war. On the contrary, Shatila was left almost totally destroyed, and Burj Al Barajneh heavily damaged, with most residents of both camps having fled the shelling.

The physical damage only tells half the story. Most serious is the political implications of this round of fighting. While the uprising in the occupied territories had opened a new phase for the Palestinian national struggle, new chances for internal unity and for joint Palestinian-Lebanese struggle, this camp war preoccupied the Palestinian revolution, detracting from its efforts to take advantage of the new opportunities. In Call no. 21, the United National Leadership of the Uprising accused the Fatah Provisional Leadership of betraying the Palestinian cause and

stabbing the uprising in the back. Already, the shelling of the camps had been broadly condemned. The PFLP and DFLP issued a joint communique holding the Provisional Leadership responsible for the destruction of Shatila.

Unfortunately, this war did not end with the end of the shelling. The Fatah Provisional Leadership continues to try and impose its hegemony on the camps, including the formation of a joint security force under its own leadership. However, all but two Palestinian organizations have refused to participate in this. The PFLP, DFLP, Palestinian Liberation Front, Popular Struggle Front and Palestinian Communist Party are in agreement that all organizations be allowed to operate in the camps. The Fatah Provisional Leadership, however, has not heeded this consensus. On the contrary, in early August, they attacked four offices of the PFLP in Burj Al Barajneh, evoking a mass demonstration against this act.

Despite these setbacks, the follow-up committee continues to work for the formation of a security force representing all Palestinian nationalist organizations, that could stabilize the situation, ensure the right of all to work among the masses and reconstruct the camps as soon as possible. Finding a democratic inter-Palestinian solution is important not only to salvage the situation in Shatila and Burj Al Barajneh, but to ward off the repetition of this tragic war in Ain Al Hilweh or other camps. It is also necessary to ward off the attempts of antagonistic forces trying once again to attack the camps, as already began happening when Amal resumed harassing Palestinians in the camps of the Tyre area in early August.

Putting a decisive stop to inter-Palestinian fighting is only the first step to rebuilding the Syrian-Palestinian-Lebanese nationalist alliance needed for escalating the battle against the Zionist occupation. It is likewise a prerequisite for the Palestinian revolution to play its role as a main base of Palestinian struggle, to complement the vanguard role currently being played by the Palestinian masses under occupation.