

Fighting Partition

With two rival governments claiming legitimacy after the expiration of Amin Gemayel's term as president, Lebanon faces partition. Although major violence has not broken out so far, the continuing power struggle between the two governments -and the visions for Lebanon connected to each - could still ignite a new round of fighting.

Two plans exist for resolving the current crisis in Lebanon. First is the plan of Michael Aoun, head of the military government, and Samir Geagea, head of the Lebanese Forces militias. This plan, which coincides with the Israeli plan for Lebanon, aims at dividing the country in the name of decentralization and pluralism, but actually to ensure the privileges of the reactionary Maronite bourgeoisie. US policy has tended to support this plan, despite stated aims to the contrary.

Second is the plan of the Lebanese National Movement, supported by Syria, for electing a new president qualified to preside over a degree of reform in the sectarian system. Syria and the Lebanese National Movement regard the government of Prime Minister Salim Hoss as the legitimate government until such a plan can be enacted.

In this situation, there was an initiative by the Arab League to convene an Arab summit on Lebanon, to be attended by the conflicting parties in order to settle their differences. To promote this initiative, Arab League Secretary General Shadli Klibi toured the Arab countries, afterwards concluding that the Arab leaders were more inclined to hold a ministerial meeting

rather than a full-scale summit on the grounds that this was more practical, since a summit would confine itself to issuing statements without implementation. However, as of this writing in mid-December, a ministerial meeting has not been held. In reality, differences between certain Arab regimes are further aggravating the Lebanese crisis. The most obvious example is the financial and military support given by the Iraqi regime to Geagea's Lebanese Forces as part of the former's efforts to weaken Syria's role in Lebanon and the region.

STATE INSTITUTIONS PARALYZED

Following the obstruction of the presidential elections on August 18th and again on September 23rd, all three constitutional institutions have been impaired: the presidency, the government and the parliament itself. The term of House Speaker Hussein Husseini ended on October 18th. His post was the last remaining position in the Lebanese constitutional government. Accordingly, he called for the convention of parliament to renew his term or elect a successor, but only 26 deputies of the 39 needed for a quorum showed up. The same mechanism by which the Lebanese Forces had blocked the presidential elections was again employed. Deputies residing in East Beirut boycotted the session, saying the place was unsafe; actually they had been pressured by the Geagea-Aoun alliance not to attend, in order to prevent the renewal of Husseini's term and thus put the parliament out of function.

This dashed hopes that the parliament could play a unifying role in the situation of pending partition. Instead, the legislative body followed the ex-

ecutive branch into partition, raising new complications. With the blockage of the parliament, it became impossible to elect a new president or to pass any legislation; affairs of state came to a halt.

Added to this, the Lebanese Army was de facto split again from the time that its commander-in-chief, Aoun, accepted being appointed as the head of the unconstitutional military government. Aoun's illegal and provocative steps (described later in this article) led Adel Osseiran, the defense minister (in the Hoss government) to replace Aoun by appointing Sami Al Khatib as army commander. The existence of two armies, each connected with one of the rival governments, increases the possibilities of a military showdown.

THE AOUN-GEAGEA ALLIANCE

Attempting to consolidate his power, Aoun replaced three leading army officers: the chief of military intelligence, the presidential guard and the General Director of the Public Security Department. He also removed three Maronite officers loyal to the former president, Amin Gemayel, in an attempt to consolidate his own power. He furthermore made new appointments in the foreign and education ministries, confirming his intention to purge all but his own people from the state institutions.

The appointment that caused the most controversy was that of the General Director of the Public Security Department, since the Hoss government had already appointed an acting general director. Aoun also replaced the officers working in this department, who reside in West Beirut. It is this department which issues passports, so toying with it infringes upon all Lebanese. Faced with Aoun's blatant manipulation, the Hoss government informed all foreign embassies in Beirut not to process visa applications dated after September 23rd. Thus, a passport turmoil has been created in Lebanon, whereby no passports can be issued or renewed before a solution to the crisis is found.

Aoun topped his provocative partitionist moves by announcing the establishment of new headquarters for the Defense Ministry in East Beirut,

Israeli raid near Sidon, November 1988

