

leader and I am going to carry on.» Aoun's populist demagogery is clearly only a cover for his savage war to impose his authority, since it is clear he would not be elected as president. More than ever it is clear that what is going on is neither a «war of liberation» or simply a war over the ports; it is Aoun's war, his drive for power and his suicidal, sectarian project.

SHELLING THE ARAB LEAGUE COMMITTEE

The meetings held by the Arab League committee with the various Lebanese parties to the conflict in January and February, made it obvious that the committee would deal with the Lebanese crisis as an internal problem connected to the nature of the political system and the privileges which some sects enjoy. This approach annoyed Aoun and the other sectarian forces, since it means focusing on the need for political reform. For this reason, Aoun chose to escalate the military confrontation and direct it against Syria, just as the Arab League committee should hold its concluding meetings. Aoun aimed to accentuate the question of Syrian withdrawal in order to portray the conflict as stemming from external not internal causes, and thus divert the discussions of political reform into discussions of what he calls «Syrian occupation.» This was confirmed by his statement that the «war of liberation is more urgent than reform...»

By focusing on Syria, Aoun aimed at marginalizing the role of the Lebanese nationalist forces who have been pushing for reform of the sectarian system for more than a decade. Simultaneously, the general aimed to besiege Syria and force it to abandon its opposition to the reactionary forces' sectarian project. On this level, Aoun's war is closely connected to the regional situation, and fits into the US and Israeli plans for isolating Syria in order to break its opposition to Camp David.

At the same time, Aoun's provocation of a new, relentless war provides a cover for all the Lebanese reactionary forces that want to avoid political reform in order to secure the privileges accorded to the Maronite Christians by the prevailing sectarian system. This was apparent in the statement of

Phalangist Party President George Saadeh, who is also a major figure in the Lebanese Front which groups all the Lebanese reactionary parties: «The Front is not opposed to political reforms, but we cannot turn to political reforms at a time when a shower of shells are falling on us...» Thus, Saadeh hopes that the Lebanese will forget that it was his Phalangist Party that unleashed the bloody civil war 14 years ago, to break the power of the Lebanese nationalist forces and their Palestinian allies, in order to ward off democratic popular change.

For these reasons, Aoun is determined to continue his war to the end, because any backing down on his part would defeat his presidential aspirations. Initially, Aoun attained partial success on this level, for the urgency of stopping the fighting replaced the urgency of political reform. Thus, Aoun's shelling of the Lebanese people was also a shelling of the Arab League committee, converting it into a ceasefire committee rather than a body searching for a more lasting solution.

INTERNATIONALIZATION

Since they represent a minority of the Lebanese people, the Lebanese reactionary forces have never been capable of imposing their project in all of Lebanon, as Aoun now tries to do. This was even the case when Israel staged an all-out invasion of Lebanon in 1982, thinking this would bring about a pro-Israeli government. Nonetheless, Aoun began his war based on the assumption that he could rally external support from the imperialist powers for his drive against Syria. It became obvious that he had surpassed the limits of reason in his calculations. When his expectations were not filled, he put himself in the awkward position of castigating his potential allies, even attacking the US for its refusal to become involved in a new adventure in Lebanon. «The US secretary of state says that the US is incapable of doing anything to help Lebanon. This is a plot. America is not incapable, but America is taking part in a conspiracy of silence regarding the destruction of Lebanon by Syria.» So said Aoun in response to US Secretary of State

Baker's remarks: «We make a lot of statements and sometimes it is frustrating to think that is really about all we can do... We have scant influence with the Syrians.»

The US is certainly not involved in any conspiracy to protect Syria as Aoun says. In fact, it is the US that has armed and trained the part of the Lebanese Army which is fighting for Aoun. Aoun himself is the type of leader the US would like to see heading a strong central government which controls all of Lebanon. In this light, one can understand Aoun's tirade as a plea for more aid, rather than a criticism of US policy.

The point is that the US is deeply convinced of the futility of getting directly involved in the Lebanese conflict, especially after the failure of its earlier efforts to bolster Amin Gemayel's presidency in the wake of the Israeli invasion. Moreover, US priorities in the Middle East at present focus on bailing its top ally, Israel, out of the dilemma imposed on it by the Palestinian intifada. The US is not ready to go out on a limb to help lesser allies like Aoun, but prefers to let the Lebanese crisis boil on its own, in hopes that this will sap the energies of Syria, the Palestinian resistance and the Lebanese nationalist forces. In this light, the US prefers to express support to the Arab League efforts. «The US supports the Arab League initiative to bring an early end to the fighting, so that negotiations can begin to resolve the problems at the roots of the Lebanese crisis,» said the US ambassador to Lebanon, John MacCarthy.

The Soviet Union also refused to respond to Aoun's blackmail that if international efforts were not forthcoming, he would destroy Lebanon. The Soviet leader Gorbachev stated, «The Soviet Union will do its best to help the Lebanese people, but the Lebanese crisis has to be viewed from the angle of the Middle East problem.» The Soviet Union's refusal of internationalization is based on awareness that it is difficult to solve the Lebanese crisis in isolation of the Arab-Israeli conflict and its core, the Palestinian cause. Accordingly, the Soviet Union supports the efforts of the Arab League Committee, and thinks ►