

Israel that Syria will be bogged down deeper and deeper in the Lebanese mud» (AP, August 17th). Levran went on to threaten that a Syrian victory in Lebanon could force Israel to rethink its present «non-intervention» policy. The same day, Israeli Prime Minister Shamir declared, «There are red lines. The red line is the safety of Israel.» Concurrent Israeli statements made it clear that a build-up of Syrian forces in Lebanon was considered a threat even if they did not move into South Lebanon, previously considered the «red line.» This is because they could be accompanied by Syrian missiles which might interfere with Israeli air surveillance of Lebanon. Israel prefers the present state of tension, so that it has a free hand in continuing its bombing of the Palestinian and Lebanese National Resistance forces. Thus, it is not the Syrians but the Zionist state which is the major force in the destabilization of Lebanon, as seen in years of aggression and attempts to prevent national reconciliation by arming and promoting the Lebanese isolationists, in East Beirut and the South. The internal Lebanese differences have been aggravated by the Israeli interference and occupation. An occupied country is by definition a divided country.

The kidnapping of Sheikh Obeid by Israeli commandos in late July was one more attempt to keep the Lebanese crisis boiling, by reviving the issue of the hostages just as the Arab League committee announced that it had reached a deadlock. The US and Israel took this as a pretext for building up their military forces off the Lebanese coast, to threaten the nationalist forces and divert international attention away from what is going on in Palestine's West Bank and Gaza Strip. In the words of the Israeli defense minister, Yitzhak Rabin, «We should remember that bringing Sheikh Obeid to Israel brought the subject, at least from a media standpoint, to international attention» (AP, August 23rd). «We have one good bargaining card,» said Rafael Eitan, former army chief of staff, referring to the kidnapping of Obeid. «If one card is not enough, we have to go in one night and bring back a few more cards, and again the next night....



New refugees

Lebanon is a box full of cards» (AP, August 8th).

It is clear that the US administration has given Israel a free hand in Lebanon. In this sense, it is the chief conspirator in the Lebanese tragedy, for all the direct Israeli aggression on Lebanon has been funded and equipped by the US, in line with its interests in sponsoring attacks on the Palestinian revolution, the Lebanese nationalist forces and Syria, in order to maintain its geostrategic positions in the Middle East.

KEY TO SOLUTION

After 15 years of war, it is clear that no single political force or community in Lebanon is able to gain the upper hand. At the same time, no external force has been able to impose its hegemony. General Aoun's delusions about a final showdown have only brought more dead and wounded, and more fragmentation and dangers to the Lebanese people. Aoun's «war of liberation» is nothing of the kind; the liberation war is that being waged in the

South against the Israeli occupiers and their proxies, not Aoun's war which is directed against the Lebanese people. Each new round of sectarian fighting has deepened divisions, making national reconciliation and reunifying Lebanon all the more difficult. If the smoke does settle in Lebanon, it will only lead to the tragic realization that the savage warfare of the past months was for nought.

As of this writing, the Arab League three-state committee has resumed its efforts with a meeting of foreign ministers in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, on September 13th. It is very important that this committee has been reactivated, but its initiative must be more clearly articulated and intensive if results are to be achieved. Certainly, the members of this committee should listen to the view of all parties to the conflict, but they should also evaluate which positions are correct and which are wrong.

Lebanon's dismemberment is not the result of what Aoun calls the «Syrian occupation.» It is the result of the Israeli occupation and the breakdown of the Lebanese system itself due to the unworkable confessional system. So the key to the solution must begin with enforcing Israeli withdrawal while enacting a democratic reform of the Lebanese political system.

But does the Arab committee have the ability to exert joint pressure on Israel to force it to withdraw permanently from Lebanon? Clearly, it does not if for no other reason than that this question is closely connected to the Arab-Israeli conflict as a whole, and its core, the Palestinian issue. It is difficult to imagine peace in Lebanon, or Palestine, until there is an end to Israeli aggression. Until then, Lebanon remains on the brink of disaster.

