

and thus encourage the return of foreign diplomatic missions that left West Beirut from mid-1985 after a series of attacks and kidnappings.

Despite these measures and Lebanese, Arab and international support, the Hrawi government has not moved towards ending Aoun's control of the presidential palace and East Beirut, even though Hrawi has stated that «the day of judgement... will be very soon» (*Guardian*, December 1st). Thus, the Lebanese government still stands at an impasse. As the legitimate government slides from an offensive to a defensive position, it actually reveals its own weakness. Despite Hrawi's declaration of intending to «use everything to stop the partition», it seems that the Taif agreement will remain merely a plan (AP, January 24th).

Some of the problems faced by Hrawi's government are connected to the state's political, social and economic structure - the corrupt, unjust, sectarian system that has yet to

be reformed. Other problems are connected to the continuing positions of the right-wing forces, chiefly General Aoun's partition plan, but also Samir Geagea's federation scheme, and their insistence on maintaining sectarian privileges. Still other problems are connected to the regional situation, first and foremost, the continued Israeli occupation of the «security zone» in South Lebanon and the presence of Antoine Lahd's proxy South Lebanese Army there. Thus, Hrawi's anticipated quick operation to normalize the situation in Beirut has yet to materialize. The legitimate Lebanese government has been unable to use force to end Aoun's partitionist position, because it has waited for concrete international support for such a move, and this has not been forthcoming.

France and the Vatican bear part of the responsibility for the continuation of the crisis, for their line has been to deny the government the right of using

every means possible to restore Lebanon's unity. Despite proclaimed support, in practice they take a hostile position towards the Lebanese government and the Arab solution to the crisis. The statement of the papal nuncio to Lebanon, Pablo Puente, made clear the Vatican's role of protecting the rightists in East Beirut. He said that he will work for a «sincere and loyal dialogue among all parties, taking into account above all those in a weak position, who fear for their future and that of the country» (*Al Safir*, January 8th). The French government's attempts to have the Taif accord amended have the same objective. Both aim at imposing Aoun as a negotiator, which would lead to recognizing two governments in Lebanon and the maintenance of sectarian privileges. Added to this is the US position which, despite the State Department's call for Aoun to step down, has not changed essentially. This is best illustrated in the continued support to Israel and US failure to concretely back any settlement in which it is not a main broker.

Behind the current crisis, Israeli interference looms as the most formidable challenge to Lebanon's unity, with its ongoing occupation in South Lebanon and support to the pro-partition rightist forces. Continuing air strikes, such as the two raids on South Lebanon in January, leave no doubt as to the aggressive Israeli aims of keeping Lebanon in chaos and division. An end to Aoun's statelet would be a blow to the Israeli plans. As stated by Eliahu Ben Elissar, head of the Knesset Security and Foreign Affairs Committee, «Defeating Aoun doesn't serve the interests of Israel or the free world» (*Al Safir*, December 2nd).

In view of these obstacles, the legitimate Lebanese authorities have been unable to restore Lebanon's unity and stability. Current events show that there will be no peace without a radical political solution to end factionalism. Otherwise, there can only be temporary truces that feed into new wars.

East Beirut

