

Editorial

The struggle against the US-Israeli plans will continue

President Amin Gemayel has decided to unilaterally abrogate the May 17th agreement which was signed between Lebanon and 'Israel' in the aftermath of the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon. It has also been announced that a conference will be held in Switzerland to discuss the deep differences separating the regime-Phalangist camp from the National Salvation Front-Amal camp.

These developments raise questions on the future of Lebanon: Will there be a reconciliation? Will the civil war stop? What will be the US and Israeli reaction to Gemayel's step?

Why the change?

Since the US-Israeli invasion of Lebanon, the fascists, led by the Phalangists, have been counting on the possibility of completely controlling Lebanon. This means, of course, the total destruction of the Lebanese nationalist forces, and ousting the Syrian and PLO forces from Lebanon. These calculations remain in the Baabda Presidential Palace, but now in a more discrete manner, after the Lebanese nationalist forces scored important victories in the past two months.

The immediate byproduct of the nationalist forces' gaining full control of West Beirut was the division of the Lebanese Army, which both the regime and the US had considered to be an unbreakably unified institution. Also, strategic positions of the army and the fascists in the mountains were taken by the nationalist forces, pushing the army and Phalangist units to withdraw and head southwards. The nationalist forces' offensive continued to the perimeter of the fascist-controlled areas and Souq al Gharb, where the US had drawn a red line. At this point, a dramatic change took place: Amin Gemayel decided to cancel the May 17th agreement. To this purpose, a visit to Damascus was arranged.

The background for Gemayel's decision and visit is complicated and can be summarized as follows:

(a) Gemayel's army suffered several blows, the most serious being the split in its ranks.

(b) The US administration came under strong internal pressure against the presence of the Marines in Beirut. This, and the fact that losses in their ranks increased, forced Reagan to pull the Marines out, thus depriving the Lebanese regime of a major supportive factor.

(c) Phalangist Sami Maroun had visited 'Israel', together with Wadi Haddad, Gemayel's national security advisor, in order to ask for help. The answer was negative.

(d) In the meantime, Jean Obeid, Gemayel's advisor on political affairs, was discussing with the Syrian Foreign Minister, Khaddam, the possibility of a reconciliation between Damascus and Baabda.

Gemayel realized that there was no way to save his presidency other than to cancel the agreement, in order to pave the way for reconciliation with the nationalist forces.

In Damascus, Gemayel discussed in detail with Syrian President Assad the necessary conditions for cancelling the May 17th agreement. According to informed sources, these conditions were: (a) the basis for the reconciliation conference in Switzerland, (b) what guarantees Lebanon can give 'Israel', (c) Syrian-Lebanese relations.

The Damascus summit was a serious change in the course charted by the intense fighting in Lebanon, but will this meeting prepare for a solution in Lebanon?

What next for Lebanon?

The internal contradictions in Lebanon are too complicated to be solved quickly. Moreover, the Lebanese crisis cannot be isolated from the Middle East conflict.

The tripartite alliance (Syria, the PLO and the Lebanese nationalist forces) has been fighting the US-Israeli plans in Lebanon, which the US wanted to make into the bridge for Camp David to the Eastern Front. In the wake of the recent battles, this plan has collapsed, yet the US is not at a dead end, for the Reagan Administration is betting on the Egyptian-Jordanian lever to push its plans into the Eastern Front. In this context, the talks between Arafat and King Hussein are regarded as extremely important.

Syria, and the PLO forces that oppose Arafat's political line, realize that the battle is still open in Lebanon. South Lebanon is still occupied by the Israelis, who take their own measures to protect their "borders". Moreover, the Lebanese nationalist forces cannot be sure of the extent to which Gemayel is ready to compromise in the Switzerland conference. Thus, Lebanon will remain a battlefield in the foreseeable future. The resistance to the Israeli occupation will continue in the South. The struggle of the Lebanese nationalist forces for their rights will continue. Above all, Syria, the PLO and the Lebanese nationalist and progressive forces will continue to struggle against the US-Israeli plans for the Middle East.

Marines beat a retreat to the warships

