

The Iron Fist

The Israeli flight to their «security zone» in South Lebanon was covered by the «iron fist». From mid-February until late April when they left Sour, hardly a day passed without a southern village being besieged. The most typical days witnessed multiple attacks on civilians, dozens indiscriminately shot and up to one hundred arrested, while homes were blown up. In early March, Jebal Amal hospital in Sour, itself raided several times with patients snatched from surgery or donating blood, reported that 80% of its cases were a result of the Zionist «iron fist» policy. In March alone, the Zionist occupiers murdered at least 120 southerners, including 11 killed by a bomb they planted in Maarakeh's mosque. This is in addition to the victims of four Israeli air strikes on Western Lebanon in the same period, and almost 100 civilians killed by car bombs planted by Zionist and CIA agents in West Beirut.

This brutality did not stunt the Lebanese National Resistance however. Anti-occupation operations averaged five daily throughout the first two phases of the withdrawal. Most typical was the response of a South Lebanese woman while mourning her brother: «They killed my brother because he was in the resistance, but I am going to replace him. I have hands, legs and the heart of a hundred men.» Since the withdrawal decision, about 30 Israelis have been killed in South Lebanon according to their own counts, while the Lebanese National Resistance Front estimated casualties to be much higher. One reason for the difference in figures was that the Israelis did their best to overlook the operations carried out by young Lebanese who had consciously prepared to give their lives for the sake of dealing a major blow to the occupiers. In April there were five attacks of this kind with explosive-laden cars ramming Israeli convoys or posts. What the enemy forces most wanted to black out was that these were not motivated by religious «fanaticism». Two of the martyred resistors were women, and all belonged either to the Lebanese Communist Party or the Syrian Social Nationalist Party, both well known for their secular ideas.

The «iron fist» is now concentrated in the southernmost area where the Israelis have openly spoken of creating a «balance of fear» to keep anyone from aiding the resistance. A proof of this «balance» came on May 9th, when Israeli radio announced that the South Lebanese Army, which was halved by desertions early in 1985, had suddenly swelled to 2,000 again. This 'miracle' is the fruit of an enforced conscription campaign, part of the Israeli plan to «cleanse» this area. To the same end, dozens of families were forcibly evicted from southernmost villages around Bint Jbail in February. In further admission that it will never tame Lebanese patriots, the Israeli army has finally replaced the so-called Good Fence to 'Israel' with a 12x12 foot ditch cutting across most of the Lebanon-Palestine border.

Geagea-new Israeli invasion

The other prong of the Israeli plan for their «security zone» was Samir Geagea's crusade for Christian privilege, cantonization and alignment with the Zionist state*. Geagea's «revolt» began after a meeting between Lebanese leaders and Syrian Vice-President Khaddam, where it was decided to abolish or amend many of the Wazzan government's decrees of 1982-83, which gave greater power to the Maronites in the Lebanese Army and administration. It was also decided to open the coastal road linking Beirut to the North; this meant closure of the Lebanese Forces' illegal checkpoint at Barbara, where they extract huge revenues in the form of tolls. The deeper cause of the «revolt» was the impending Israeli withdrawal. In its wake, the most militantly pro-Israeli fascists feared losing the last of their gains from the 1982 invasion, gains as were never achieved by their own struggle despite much bloodshed.

Geagea's take-over of the Lebanese Forces command, and of the Phalangist areas in the North and East Beirut, was a quick, bloodless coup. The Lebanese Forces' real aggression was directed against nationalist Saida, explicitly the Muslim population and Palestinians of Ain al Hilweh and Mia

Mia refugee camps. On March 19, the Lebanese Forces gave Muslims in the neighborhoods east of Saida two hours to leave their homes. Those who were slow in doing this were beaten and forcibly evicted as 20,000 streamed towards Saida's center. Then began a month of merciless bombardment, which forced 25,000 Palestinians to flee the camps for Saida, and later forced many more from Saida towards Beirut. This was the first wave of refugees from the new Zionist invasion, though they have received less publicity than the subsequent Christian exodus engineered by Geagea in accordance with Israeli plans.

The local nationalist forces, Palestinians in the camps, and parts of the Lebanese Army stationed in Saida after the Israeli withdrawal, fought the Geagea invasion, but had insufficient equipment to fully protect the masses from the fascist artillery. Meanwhile the government stood by as though paralyzed. It is telling that President Amin Gemayel and his army failed to confront the revolt supposedly aimed against themselves. Actually the Phalangist Party and President Gemayel can reap the benefits of these events in a variety of ways. As the nationalist forces press for democratic reform, and Syria supports these demands, Amin Gemayel can point to the «revolt», warning that such violence can reoccur if Christian privileges are infringed upon. More importantly, the Geagea crusade serves to aggravate sectarian strife, diverting from the profound political radicalization which the majority of southerners have undergone in their heroic resistance to the Israeli occupation.

After failing to accomplish anything for the Lebanese except murdering over 110 people and making thousands of Christians and Muslims homeless, Geagea was replaced as commander of the Lebanese Forces by Eli Hobeika. Substituting one butcher for another (Hobeika led the Sabra-Shatila massacre), is intended as a trap for the nationalist forces. Hobeika's first declaration termed the Syrian role in Lebanon «essential» and called for Lebanese dialogue, signaling that now that the