

New Bombardment Of Lebanon Shatters Fragile Truce

The three-day old truce signed by Tripartite Committee members Syria, Lebanon and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) collapsed July 28 under joint Israeli-Lebanese fascist bombardments against the villages of Nabatieh, Tibnit and Saida in southern Lebanon. According to Wafa, the Palestinian news agency, three have died from this latest round of Israeli-backed attacks against the Palestinians.

LEBANON

According to the terms of the fragile truce signed in Chautra, Lebanon on July 25, all PLO and fascist armed forces will be withdrawn from southern Lebanon. The PLO has also agreed to partially disarm the Palestinian camps in the region and to officially support the government of Lebanon's President Elias Sarkis. Any attempt to torpedo this accord is designed to maintain the Lebanese powderkeg on a short fuse and thus set the stage for a massive Israeli-Christian mop-up against the Palestinian resistance movement.

Tripartite Diplomacy

The decision to consolidate a peace-keeping force in southern Lebanon was preceded by extremely heavy fighting between two warring factions of Palestinians, the pro-Syrian Saiqa and Iraqi-backed Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) which resulted in twelve deaths. After an emergency 10-hour meeting called by PLO leader Yasser Arafat in which Saiqa was held fully responsible for the bloodshed, Abou Iyad, number two man of the PLO was immediately dispatched to Damascus for top-level discussions with Saiqa's controller, Syrian President Hafez Assad. Iyad's trip coincided with a not-so-subtle statement issued by Iraqi President Al-Bakr attacking "submissive Arab regimes." Under this joint PLO-Iraqi pressure, jittery Assad agreed to put a moratorium on all Saiqa-provoked in-fighting in the Palestinian movement. Immediately following this Syrian-PLO rapprochement, Syrian Foreign Minister Khaddam was sent to Lebanon to meet with his counterpart Butros with the intention of integrating Lebanon into this newly-formed axis.

According to a July 10 article in London's *Sunday Observer*, internal pressures and the growing isolation of the Syrian regime in the moderate Arab world has forced Assad to turn eastward to Iraq and the Soviet Union for support. It is also rumored that Assad is vehemently opposed to Egyptian President Sadat's role as

spokesman for a Carter-Begin Pax Americana. This about-face in Syrian policy is supported by Abed Robbo, information minister of the PLO, who reported that a process of encirclement was taking place: "Under the pressure of Saudi Arabia, King Hussein is letting go his long-time ally, Syria, in order to get closer to Egypt. The contradictions between the two parties, born of the Lebanese war, have cooled down. The Syrians have realized that since the accession of Israeli Prime Minister Begin to power, the Palestinians are not the only impediment to peace."

A Strong Lebanon

A complete turnabout has taken place in Palestinian policy toward Lebanon. The PLO has agreed that only a strong Lebanon and a strong Lebanese army can assure peace in this troubled spot and thus extricate the Palestinian resistance from this potential grave. According to the French daily *Le Monde*, all Palestinian factions, including the hardline Rejection Front agree with Arafat on this point. The prevailing policy in the country is that the recently formed Tripartite Committee will give the shaky Lebanese government of President Elias Sarkis the "required backup" to consolidate a unified Parliament and reconstitute a functioning Lebanese army. Rightist Christian leader Pierre Gemayel, head of the Lebanese Front may soon join the government, thus isolating the Lebanese Christian faction of Israeli agent Camille Chamoun. A strong Lebanese army could then clean up the Chamounist bandit networks in southern Lebanon under the Tripartite sanction against all armed activity in the area, thus relieving Syria from the pressure of having to cross the "red line," an area which the Israelis have designated as off limits to any Syrian troops. The crossing of this so-called red line would trigger a massive Israeli retaliation against the Syrian state.

A recent article in the *Christian Science Monitor* reports the reconstitution of the Lebanese army is looked forward to, especially by those forces who fought on the leftist side in the civil war and who are currently fighting alongside Palestinians in south Lebanon. Captain Amin Qassem, who commands a 1,000-man unit in the south, said that his men are anxious to rejoin the official army under Brigadier General Khoury, but warned that Lebanon cannot form an army without his units. "Without us," he said, "it would be just a Christian army." The Captain said that the new army must disarm all the private militias — right and left — but must leave the Palestinians free to operate in southern Lebanon. It will also mean the end of Israeli-Chamounist butchery of the Palestinian resistance in the area.