

The Israelis' three brigades seized virtually all southern Lebanon below the Litani River...but failed to destroy the combat potential of the Palestinian commandos, who have regrouped north of the river after retreating from the south.

Israeli military planners originally proposed a much bigger operation designed to sweep all the commandos south of the Litani, perhaps 5,000 men, into an ever-tightening box in which they would be killed or captured, according to these sources.

But the government, wanting to limit the inevitable Israeli casualties, left the box open-ended, so most of the guerrillas escaped across the river with their heavy equipment.

The Israelis' massive use of firepower and other tactics reflected the need to minimize their forces' casualties and avoid domestic political repercussions, military analysts observed, but violated one of the basic rules of anti-guerrilla warfare.

"Six, 8 and 10-hour bombardments like those the Israelis used to saturate an area before they moved in generally only kill civilians," argued an officer with a number of years of varied experience in counterinsurgency warfare, "and they make enemies of the people, the Muslims of southern Lebanon in this case, whose friendship you want to win.

"The guerrillas usually get out without many casualties."

The Palestinian commandos are understood to have lost about 350 dead and about three times that number wounded. By contrast, 1,379 civilians were killed, a preliminary figure that Lebanese government officials believe will probably triple to

about 4,000 when a final count is made....This means the Israelis failed to destroy the commando units as an effective fighting force....

Conversations with both Palestinian commanders and guerrillas in the field also made it clear that the Israeli operation did not destroy their morale.

Their ability to withstand for a week one of the largest operations the Israelis have mounted seems, in fact, to have bolstered their morale, as has the prospect of continuing guerrilla raids on Israeli lines in Lebanon.

Elias Shoufani, a member of the Palestinian National Council, talked of the consequences for Israel of a protracted war of attrition:

For the first time, we are in direct combat with the Israelis across a large front, but soon we will be fighting on our terms....Begin has trapped himself by invading Lebanon. If he stays, he faces a guerrilla war that will give Israel no peace, that will tie down 20,000 soldiers indefinitely and will exact continuing casualties. If he pulls out, then his government could fall.

Israel, writes the *Daily Telegraph*, is now "bogged down" in Lebanon, paralyzed by the continuing supplies coming in from Syria to the PLO. At the same time, the *BBC* is speculating on Israel's ability to sustain a long war economically — the basic argument inside the Israeli high command for getting something started *now* with Syria.

## Syria, Soviets Push International Intervention To Stabilize Mideast

Immediately after Israel's March 15 invasion of southern Lebanon, Syrian President Assad issued a stern denunciation of Israel's violation of Lebanon's sovereignty and called for the world community to exercise its power in halting Israeli aggression. Syria's call for an international offensive to stabilize the Middle East tinderbox contributed to the speedy passage of a UN resolution calling for immediate Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon and the placement of a UN peacekeeping force there. In addition to coordinating this global intervention, Syria is exercising an important stabilizing role within the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) by keeping close tabs on certain British-controlled "rejectionist" elements whose primary aim is to break the fragile ceasefire in southern Lebanon by conducting more terrorist raids inside Israel like the recent "Fatah" attack which Israel used as a pretext for its pre-planned lightning occupation of southern Lebanon.

Syrian restraint in the face of extreme internal pressures to confront Israel head on reflects the powerful

Soviet-Saudi-French axis which is supporting competent elements in Syria and the PLO, and is using its political muscle to pressure the U.S. to terminate Israel's outlaw behavior.

### *Soviets, Syria Stand Firm*

It is clear that Israel intended a confrontation with Syria from the outset of their intervention into Lebanon. That confrontation is still an operational policy in the event that the situation deteriorates further. In an exclusive interview in the March 27 issue of *Newsweek*, Assad revealed that he was cognizant of Israel's intentions. In response to a question as to why Syria did not intervene into Southern Lebanon, Assad said, "That was precisely what Israel wanted us to do. Their plans will not draw us into adventurism. There will be no impetuous reaction." Instead, Syrian activity in defusing the crisis centered around the organization of the Arab "steadfastness front" into full support of the UN intervention. At the March 19 meeting of the "hardline" countries of Algeria, Syria, Libya, and the PLO, Syria

and Algeria blocked together to caution against any hasty confrontation with Israel and argued for compliance with an international solution to the crisis. Simultaneously Syrian Foreign Minister Khaddam sent a letter of support to PLO head Yasser Arafat and officially declared that Syria would offer the Palestinians air support.

The Soviet Union's commitment to Syria and the PLO remains firm. According to *Le Figaro* March 21, Assad received a message from Soviet President Brezhnev assuring the Syrians of "unlimited military support in the event of conflict, but recommended if they refused a military confrontation, to support the resolution in preparation at the UN, if only to limit further damages and to wait for a more auspicious occasion for reprisal! Thus, Assad chose the more diplomatic approach." This totally debunks the recent press speculation that Syria has been exposed as a "paper tiger" as a result of the Lebanon situation and will now bend to the Israelis' plans to force Syria to suppress the Palestinian resistance.

The role of France is also key in the current situation. Besides working feverishly behind the scenes to push for the quick passage of the UN Security Council resolution, France has deployed a contingent of troops to ensure that there are no violations of the Lebanon ceasefire from either side. In addition, the French ambassador to Lebanon met with high-ranking PLO officials two days ago in order to brief them on the need to abide by the ceasefire and to assure them of France's continued support for the Palestinian resistance.

#### *Syria's Internal Pressure*

Assad's ability to maintain his international approach

to a resolution to the Mideast crisis and to maintain Syria's strong relationship with the Soviet Union, is under severe internal attack. On March 18, Assad's relative and the treasurer of the Syrian-Soviet Friendship Association was assassinated in what appears to be another instance of the feud between rival Baath Party factions. This internecine warfare has been going on ever since 1970, when Assad purged the Baath Party in Syria of its "Iraqi" elements and set up his own machine. Prior to this murder, several Syrian officials close to Assad and to the Soviet Union have been assassination targets.

Exclusive information received by *Executive Intelligence Review* indicates that Assad is under heavy internal pressure to make some suicidal show of force in Lebanon at the present time. According to this information, Assad is in danger of a coup within two to three weeks if Israel is still operating in south Lebanon. This coup will be conducted in conjunction with the Iraqis through their two Syrian agents, Sabah Jadid and Nour Atashi. Jadid, who is believed to be living in Beirut or Iraq, and Atashi, who is currently living in Syria, supposedly exert a strong influence on Syrian politics. Both figures were responsible for forming the Al Fatah guerrilla groups as the dominant faction of the PLO. Jadid is credited with having masterminded the March 13 Al Fatah terrorist raid in Israel which resulted in a bus-hijacking and subsequent death of 33 Israelis. According to this source, both Atashi and Jadid were key figures pushing PLO terrorist attacks immediately prior to the 1967 war, and are pushing for the same terrorist activities today.