

Lebanese Christians appeal to end Syrian occupation

by Middle East Insider

Over the last ten days of March, the Syrian expeditionary forces in Lebanon under the command of General Kanaan and Gen. Ali Hamoud have covered Christian East Beirut with a deluge of artillery fire. Direct reports from Beirut indicate that on average over 5,000 shells are falling per day on East Beirut shot from Syrian Army artillery positions on the mountain heights surrounding Beirut and the airport area controlled by Syrian forces. Contrary to the propaganda being circulated by the Syrian intelligence services, the pro-Syrian Amal, Druze, and Baath Party militias have withdrawn from the immediate combat areas, which have been entirely taken over by Syrian Army Special Forces. According to Lebanese Army sources, the total number of Syrian troops involved or ready to be deployed in the war at this time nears 20,000 men. Total Syrian forces number over 25,000.

Though the firepower of the Lebanese Army, the legal Army of Lebanon, does not match that of the Soviet-supplied and -trained Syrian forces, the defense of East Beirut has been strong and Christian lines are stable. Hundreds of civilians, however, have been killed or wounded in less than a week, and electricity plants, petroleum refineries, and energy grids have been targeted by Syrian artillery forces. For the moment Syria's military aim seems to be to cripple the overall defense capability of the Christian government and its army through the destruction of its vital economic infrastructure, the interdiction of its ports, and the terrorization of the population, parts of which have been forced to flee. Yet it cannot be excluded that, facing stiff resistance, the Syrian forces will be ordered by Damascus into an overall offensive whose cost in human lives would be enormous: The war is ongoing among regular forces in a small urban area of extremely high population density.

Syria's military offensive was in preparation for over one month against the government of Prime Minister Michel

Aoun, the regular Lebanese Army and the Lebanese Christian Militia Forces of Samir Geaga. The reasons for this are simple: the appointment of General Aoun as prime minister in October by President Amin Gemayel, whose mandate was coming to an end, was a setback to Syria's decade-long strategy in Lebanon. Following the assassination of President Beshir Gemayel in 1982 by Syrian intelligence, the Assad regime had hoped that the permanent intercommunal strife it had helped to provoke in Lebanon would lead the exhausted Lebanese and a world community tired of Lebanon's unending civil war, to grant them overlordship over the country, fulfilling Assad's idea for the creation of a "Greater Syria."

The Assad regime never recognized Lebanese sovereignty as a result of this doctrine. Yet Lebanon was, and to some extent remains, a unique nation in the Arab Orient which, until the civil war in 1975, was one of the few prosperous and stable, ethnically and religiously mixed nations in the Orient. Aoun's appointment merely added to the setbacks of the Syrian regime since the end of the Iran-Iraq war, notably a rapidly deteriorating economic situation and significant isolation in the Arab world. The Syrians thus had some of their Lebanese allies contest Aoun's appointment, leading to the nomination of a Muslim prime minister, Selim el Hoss. This led to a stalemate and over the past months an intensification of terrorism against civilians in East Beirut. The Syrian offensive was being planned. In response, Aoun, a Lebanese nationalist, recently challenged Syrian hegemony in Lebanon by calling for a "national liberation war against Syria," and he has the support of all Christian factions in spite of very real rivalries subsisting in the Christian camp. Full-scale war has now broken out.

On March 29 the commander of the elite 8th Brigade of the Lebanese Army, in a statement delivered to the weekly *Middle East Insider*, called on the international community

to act to restore Lebanese sovereignty: "Since 1976 [first Syrian intervention in Lebanon mandated by the Arab League], the Syrians have tried to fool the entire world on their real intentions . . . they have tried in particular to make the free world believe that the war in Lebanon is a war between Christians and Muslims, that their presence was to secure peace and protect the Christians of Lebanon. . . . In 1987, to push through the implementation of their plan, the Syrians deployed elite troops, their special forces, in the Lebanese capital, claiming yet again that their aim was to restore order, to free the American and Western hostages from the hands of the fundamentalists, to end international terrorism originating in Lebanon, and to put a stop to the narcotics contraband. . . . But in reality for more than ten years now the Syrian Army has been acting as an occupation army. The hostages are used as a means of blackmail. International terrorism is still exported from Lebanon under their patronage: Abu Nidal, Ahmed Jibril, and the Hezbollah; the narcotics traffic is sponsored by the Syrians. Poppy is cultivated in the Bekaa valley under Syrian control, heroin is synthesized in laboratories in areas under their control and is exported through various illegal ports which they dominate. . . . It is very important that the free world become conscious of these truths which have long been camouflaged by disinformation published in the media. . . . It is disgusting that world public opinion is mobilized in a universal outcry against the hunt of baby seals and whale hunting, yet accepts the hunt of the Lebanese people by the Syrian Army. . . . I present the Lebanese problem to world public opinion and the world's conscience so that the truth can be said . . . and so that world opinion act to end the occupation of Lebanese soil by Syrian troops."

Though the United States, France, and the Vatican have all recently reaffirmed their support for Lebanese sovereignty, a March 20 statement by newly confirmed Deputy Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger reveals quite another policy: "If Syrian troops withdrew from Lebanon the situation would be worse, not better." Eagleburger's statement undoubtedly reflects not only the State Department's years-long policy toward Syria, but more specifically, the policies set down by Secretary of State Henry Kissinger in 1975. In his memoirs, Kissinger reflects the Syrian tilt of U.S. policy at that time when describing President Assad as a "political genius" and the Metternich of the Mideast. At the outbreak of the civil war then-U.S. Ambassador to Beirut Brown suggested to the Christians that Christian presence in the Islamic Arab world was a historical aberration. In one of the most unbelievable contemporary gestures of U.S. diplomacy, Washington then suggested that 500,000 Green Cards would be given to Lebanese Christians willing to leave their homeland of many centuries for Canada, the United States, and other parts of the world.

The outbreak of war in Lebanon in late March will test whether, as Colonel Kallas demands, the international community acts to save Lebanese sovereignty.

Soviet-Iran terror pact casts its net

by Jeffrey Steinberg

On March 29, the Saudi imam of Brussels, Belgium, Abdullah Al Ahdal, and his Tunisian deputy, Imam Salim Bahri, were both assassinated at their mosque in Brussels. The killings were immediately linked by Belgian police officials to a recent interview given by Bahri, in which he took a "moderate" stand in opposition to Ayatollah Khomeini's death sentence against *The Satanic Verses* author Salman Rushdie. This marks the first publicly reported instance of an assassination linked to the Khomeini call for Rushdie's execution.

Behind this incident, as well as a number of other terrorist acts—including four bombings in the United States since mid-February—stands an alliance between an ever more radicalized Khomeini-centered Islamic fundamentalist movement and Soviet bloc intelligence services. The alliance is a revival of the Communist-Islamic fundamentalist pact which emerged at the Baku Conference on the "revolutionary peoples of the East" in 1921.

That alliance was publicly celebrated during Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze's trip to Teheran in February, in which he embraced the Islamic revolution at exactly the point that Western governments across the board were denouncing Khomeini for his call to arms against Rushdie. Due to the rampant "Gorbymania" among Western politicians and news media, there has been an appalling silence to date on the fact of the newly hardened Soviet-Iranian terror pact. In fact, evidence of the alliance, and the identification of at least one key player in it, is known to Western intelligence services, whose silence seems to indicate a deep level of commitment to the superpower New Yalta balance-of-power game—even at the cost of a new wave of Soviet-sponsored terrorism.

The key role of Mohtashemi

Arab sources have identified Iran's Interior Minister Ali Akbar Mohtashemi as a pivotal figure in the terror upsurge that began on Dec. 21, 1988, with the bombing of Pan American Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland, killing 270 people. A long-time crony of Khomeini, Mohtashemi is known to be the member of Iran's inner council with the deepest ties to Soviet intelligence. From 1980-83, Mohtashemi was Iran's ambassador in Damascus, during which time he arranged for the training of Pasdaran (Revolutionary Guards) terrorists in