

Lebanon: War ahead in Middle East?

by Thierry Lalevée

As an imposing armada of U.S., Soviet, and French naval vessels gathers off the coast of Lebanon, frantic negotiations are taking place between Washington, Moscow, and Moscow's favorite Middle Eastern pawn, Syria, aimed not at defending the once flourishing nation of Lebanon, but at wiping it off the face of the map. The main point of contention among these three sides is whether the destruction is to take place by brute force—Syria's preferred method—or through a political dismemberment dictated by the U.S.-Soviet condominium.

The only military force which seems genuinely concerned about Lebanon's survival is France, which sent its naval force led by the aircraft carrier *Maréchal Foch* in order to prevent a total Syrian blockade of the forces of Lebanese President Michel Aoun. On Aug. 23, French President François Mitterrand reiterated that his task force will have a humanitarian benefit to all Lebanese, without distinction of religious and political origins. But even though France has insisted that it would not become militarily engaged, some of the French ships do have the electronic means to jam the guidance system of Syrian artillery.

The concern of Washington and Moscow, on the other hand, is that they remain in control of the way the conflict unfolds. Both have been pressuring Syria not to attempt crossing the "Green Line" dividing East from West Beirut. This was the explicit message of Soviet special envoy Genadi Tarasov on Aug. 23 to Syrian Vice President Abdel Khaddam, and was echoed the same day by the U.S. ambassadors to Beirut and Damascus, John McCarthy and Ed Djeredjian. At the same time, under the pretext of "saving East Beirut," the United States is reported to have contacted both France and the Vatican to urge their acceptance of a "political solution" whose centerpiece would be the removal of Aoun. Sources in Washington say that Djeredjian has assured the Syrians that Washington fully recognizes Syria's "national security rights over Lebanon"—i.e., its right to incorporate it as part of a "Greater Syria."

The presence of the U.S. Sixth Fleet led by the *USS Iowa* has the added purpose of bolstering the secret diplomatic negotiations going on between Washington, the Hezbollah, and Iran, following threats of further kidnappings of American nationals in the region.

Meanwhile, Moscow has its own very special interest of beefing up its military presence with its own battleship, the *Kirov*: It will not allow any regional crisis to endanger the Tartus Syrian naval base, which has become one of its largest naval facilities outside of the Soviet Union, on a par with Cam Ranh Bay in Vietnam.

But no one has any illusion that the present relative lull in the fighting, will lead to an immediate political settlement. The Syrian forces have become somewhat more cautious, not because of political pressure, but because of the military defeat they suffered on Aug. 13 at the hands of the Eighth Brigade of Col. Selim Kallas. Syria has used the situation to reinforce its ground and armored units all around General Aoun's enclave, and clearly has the military means to break through Aoun's defenses with a simultaneous attack on several fronts.

But Syrian President Hafez Assad has to take into account that this would create a desperate situation for the remaining population of East Beirut, leaving Aoun no choice but to use his medium-range missiles directly against Damascus and other targets within Syrian territory. This would inevitably lead to harsh Syrian reprisals against East Beirut, at which point all of the main international forces supporting Aoun would be forced to swing into action, from the Israelis to the Iraqis. Israel, unwilling to directly go to war with Syria, might launch some diversionary military actions; while Iraq, which has been mooted the creation of a joint Arab military force with Egypt and Jordan, would certainly intervene on Syria's eastern borders. A new kind of Middle East war would be in the making, and U.S. and Soviet efforts to control events would go down the drain.

Crimes Against Humanity

For a new international Nuremberg Tribunal

by Jean-Marc Varaut

Maître Varaut is an attorney at the Paris Appellate Court, and the commentary which follows was published in the daily Le Quotidien de Paris on Aug. 18, 1989.

Within a few days, perhaps all that will be left of Christian Lebanon will be thoughts of remorse. As the world watches, actions are being carried out which are liable for prosecution as crimes against peace, that is, a war of aggression in vio-