

Baker feeds Lebanese to Syrian butchers

by Jeffrey Steinberg

The Bush administration's newest ally in the Mideast, Syrian dictator and narco-terrorist sponsor Hafez al-Assad, has launched the "final solution" to the Lebanon crisis by beginning to starve and massacre the Christian population of East Beirut. The Syrian escalation came within a week of U.S. Secretary of State James Baker III's visit to the Syrian capital Damascus, in which he reportedly forged deep ties with Syria and gave Washington's blessing to the elimination of Lebanon's legitimate Prime Minister, Gen. Michel Aoun.

On Sept. 27, the Syrian-backed puppet regime of President Elias Hrawi announced that a full-scale military siege of East Beirut's "liberated zone" would commence immediately. Units of the military force under the direction of Gen. Emil Lahoud, reportedly bolstered by members of the Lebanese Forces of Dr. Samir Geagea, set up blockades of all roads leading into the 100 square mile area of East Beirut surrounding the presidential palace, headquarters of General Aoun.

The Oct. 1 massacre

On Oct. 1, General Lahoud's troops began firing on a peaceful demonstration of 15,000 East Beirut residents—most of them Christians—protesting the siege and showing their solidarity with General Aoun's defense of Lebanon's independence and sovereignty. Some 25 demonstrators were murdered, and another 85 were wounded before the massacre ended. According to Lebanese sources, the 15,000 demonstrators were one of several groups demonstrating in both East and West Beirut in protest over Syria's de facto annexation of the country. Reportedly, tens of thousands of Sunni Muslims in West Beirut intended to link up with the Christians demonstrating across the Green Line in the "liberated zone" of the divided city. Had the two groups joined together, it would have represented a significant step toward rallying nationwide support for the Aoun resistance.

According to the sources, dissident members of the Lebanese Forces, operating against the orders of Dr. Geagea, carried out the massacre of the demonstrators.

The next day, hundreds of thousands of East Beirut citizens held a candlelight vigil at the site of the massacre, a bridge crossing the Dead River. A half-million people were expected to turn out for the funeral for the martyrs on Oct. 3. The Oct. 1 slaughter was virtually blacked out of the U.S. press. The scant news accounts attempted to downplay the

role of the Syrian government in the massacre, portraying it as merely another outbreak of fighting among rival Christian groups. And in fact, since the Baker trip to Damascus, a systematic effort has been made to distance the Assad regime from events in Lebanon, a maneuver taken in response to warnings from the French government among others that the nations of Europe would not "condone passively" actions by Washington and Damascus to move militarily against East Beirut.

To further the charade of an "independent" Lebanese government puppet "President" Hrawi, who was anointed at the Taif, Saudi Arabia meeting early this year, announced in mid-September that he was abrogating the Lebanese Constitution of 1941 and constituting a "second republic."

It was in the name of this second republic that Hrawi announced the siege of East Beirut on Sept. 27.

American and Mideast intelligence sources canvassed by *EIR* all agree that the Bush administration has given Hafez al-Assad a green light to complete the absorption of Lebanon into "Greater Syria."

Reportedly, the Bush administration has obtained permission from the Assad regime to use Syrian air space to carry out air attacks against Iraq. According to one source, the use of the Syrian air corridor was necessitated by the presence of sophisticated Soviet-manned electronic countermeasure (ECM) batteries inside Iraq. The U.S. reportedly does not wish to conduct bombing raids through areas secured by the Soviet equipment.

According to a prominent Arab journalist, the Baker-Assad deal involved a broader understanding of how the Mideast would be carved up among Syria, Israel, Iran, and Saudi Arabia following a full-scale war against Saddam Hussein. Syria would absorb Lebanon and parts of Iraq, Israel would permanently annex the West Bank and Gaza, and the Golan Heights on the Israeli-Syrian border would become a demilitarized zone. Both Lebanon and the Hashemite regime in Jordan would cease to exist under the new Anglo-American-drawn "lines in the sand."

According to Lebanese-American sources close to General Aoun, the people of East Beirut have rallied in support of the general, and plan to take immediate steps to break the blockade of the liberated zone. Reportedly, the Aoun loyalists plan to march on the checkpoint at the Addwar Crossroad and overrun the military barriers.

Such a direct confrontation will accomplish several things. It will place the necessary international spotlight on the unfolding events in Lebanon. It will force Assad's hand at a point when he is encountering mounting domestic opposition for his slavish assistance to the Bush administration. Will Assad put his personal stamp on a massacre in Lebanon by sending Syrian forces directly into the fray? Or will he step back and attempt to play a balancing game between the growing clout of General Aoun and his own puppet in the Taif group?