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Author(s): Samih Farsoun

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LEBANON EXPLODES

TOWARD A MARONITE ZION

by Samih Farsoun

In the wake of the 1973 October War, Arab conservative and counterrevolutionary regimes and forces struck an alliance with US imperialism and sought to implement Pax Americana on the region. Apart from the ineffective dissent of radical nationalist states such as Libya and Iraq, the only obstacle to this scheme has been the Palestinian resistance movement and its popular support among Arab masses, including the masses of Lebanon.

Since 1970 the principal base and armed strength of the Palestinian movement has been in Lebanon. Any strike against the movement or an effort to reduce its strength and debilitate its resources, must be made in Lebanon. Internal Lebanese contradictions are an integral part of the situation, and those contradictions have begun to explode into open class warfare. But the pace of these developments has been quickened by factors like the presence of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians and the Israeli policy of aggression against southern Lebanon, factors deriving from the Palestinian-Israeli and Arab-Israeli struggles. In the Middle East the question of national liberation of the Palestinian people and the anti-imperialist struggle of other Arab peoples is the principal issue. Class conflict in Lebanon and the region is invariably overlaid with national issues. What sharpened the contradictions in Lebanon so rapidly, and what detonated the violent civil war in 1975 is the attempt to impose the "peaceful settlement" on the Palestinians and their resistance to it.

There is a historical parallel to this in the Rogers Plan, a political settlement issued by the then US-Secretary of State William Rogers in 1970. This American proposal was accepted by Arab states, notably Egypt, and resisted by the Palestinian movement. The Jordanian army, in the infamous "Black September" of 1970, attacked and nearly liquidated the Palestinian movement whose principal base was then Jordan. Although waged by the loyal troops of a traditionally pro-imperialist regime, this civil war pointed out the emergent contradictions between the mass-based Palestinian movement and the petty bourgeois state-capitalist regimes of the other Arab countries. Egypt and Iraq had troops in Jordan, but they opted to stay on the sidelines, thus facilitating the Jordanian attack. Only Syria intervened half-heartedly, a move which provoked an internal Syrian struggle that brought to power the right faction of the petty bourgeois state capitalist forces in that country.

The 1973 war was in a sense a mechanism of that same class to precipitate an end to the regional impasse and politically intolerable situation of "no peace-no war". Arab leftist critics have characterized that war as one of *tahreek* (diplomatic motion) rather than *tahrer* (liberation). In its aftermath comes the current offensive for the "peaceful settlement," again directed at the Palestinians, but this time principally located in Lebanon.

The Palestinians learned in Jordan one important lesson: never to isolate themselves from the masses and progressive movements of the "host" country, nor to pose as an alterna-

tive to those movements. The Palestinians in Lebanon have powerful local military and political allies. Indeed, they have helped the growth and development of, and provided an initial armed shield for, the Lebanese progressive movement. This fact has raised the hostility of the Lebanese right against the very presence of the Palestinians in Lebanon.

Lebanon, unlike Jordan, has never possessed a strong military or state security apparatus. The attempt of the Lebanese regime to crack down on the Palestinians in May 1973 failed. But one option remained: an armed counterrevolutionary movement operating with the connivance of the state and army might impede if not reverse the growth of the Palestinian-Lebanese progressive alliance. The rise of the rightist movement in Lebanon is linked to class transformations in the country forged in the boom and subsequent bust of the Lebanese economy in the last two decades. Large sectors of the petty bourgeoisie have been devastated by rampant inflation. But the class context of the Lebanese struggle has been overlaid by national issues concerning the presence of the Palestinians and the immediacy of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

The Lebanese civil war has progressed through three fairly distinct phases. The first phase, Phalangists vs. Palestinians, ended by June 1975. A second phase, Phalangists vs. Lebanese progressives, ended this past December. Currently we are witnessing a third phase which is nothing less than a struggle over the physical and political partition of Lebanon, a struggle that is devastating the country and slaughtering its people.

PHALANGISTS VS PALESTINIANS

The Palestinians expected and reacted swiftly to the military attack launched against them in April by the Phalangist *Kataeb* party, the principal rightist party based in the urban and rural Maronite Christian petty bourgeoisie and led by bourgeois and comprador elements. The *Kataeb* slogan then was for the re-establishment of Lebanese (i.e. Maronite) sovereignty over Lebanese territory, a euphemism for the elimination of an armed Palestinian presence in Lebanon. The Phalangists claim they are not against the Palestinians nor their just cause, but that they only want the sovereignty, security and independence of Lebanon. They want to re-establish the "good relations" with the Palestinians which existed prior to 1967 and the rise of the armed resistance movement when the Palestinians were effectively controlled by Lebanese security forces. The privileged Maronites blame their class' and Lebanon's economic troubles on the "lack of security" brought about by the "lawlessness" and "indiscipline" of the armed Palestinian presence and their allies from the "international left". Reminiscent of the Jordanian regime in 1970, the Phalangists distinguish between "honorable" and "dishonorable" Palestinian guerrillas, and stress that they oppose only the latter variety.

The Phalangists and other right-wing groups have played upon century-old social-political parochial loyalties to mobilize large segments of their sects into an armed counterrevolutionary movement. In addition to the large, disciplined, well-trained and armed Phalangist *Kataeb*, these groups include the militia of Camille Chamoun's National Liberal Party (NLP), Lebanese President Suleiman Franjeh's private Zghorta Liberation Army, the militia of the Maronite Order of Monks under the leadership of Abbot Charbel Kassis, and numerous small, secretive and extremist commando and terrorist groups. All these groups are coordinated under the name *At-Tanzeem* (The Organization). This right-wing coalition opposes the Palestinians, who are mostly Muslim and presumed to be a threat to the "Christian" character of Lebanon, and also the pan-Arabist Lebanese progressive movement.

PHASE TWO: RIGHT VS LEFT

The Lebanese patriotic and progressive forces organized into a front in support of the Palestinian movement and class struggle in Lebanon. They quickly entered the first phase of the fighting as the Phalangists widened their counter-attacks. By June most of the Palestinian forces had withdrawn from the fighting and confined their role to providing logistic support and supplies to progressive Lebanese groups. Some of the Palestinian organizations, particularly those in the Rejection Front, continued their direct involvement.

As the right-wing began attacking slums surrounding Beirut's eastern Christian neighborhood popular defense committees sprang up. Much of the fighting in eastern Beirut was conducted by these people's committees whose barricades prevented mobile attacks. The Palestinians supplied and supported these committees. Among the Maronites, similar neighborhood committees sprang up with support and arms provided by the *Kataeb* and militia of the NLP. In addition to neighborhood defense, these people's committees of both left and right organized food supply, health, education and other services. The authority of the state, in the form of police and security forces, virtually disappeared. Beirut and much of the rest of the country were turned into self-contained enclaves and movement from one area to another became very risky.

The patriotic and progressive groups in Lebanon include small Marxist-Leninist groups, the Organization of Communist Action, and the (Soviet-oriented) Communist Party of Lebanon (CPL), which are independent and disciplined. There are also the varied Baathist and Nasserist nationalist organizations, and Syrian nationalists (*Parti populaire syrien*—PPS). One other party is the Socialist Progressive Party of Kamal Jumblatt, which more than others is ethnically based.

They share many ideological positions, most important, support of the Palestinian cause. They are armed and active (there are many other organizations that are not armed). Except for the PPS, they can be characterized as pan-Arabist. They differ on their domestic platforms and the character of the socialism they proclaim. Their social bases with few exceptions are the rural and the urban proletariat, the small peasantry (especially in the south), students and segments of the petit bourgeoisie and the large urban subproletariat. These are predominantly Muslim, Sunni, and Shi'a, but include important Druze and Christian elements. Among the Christians on the left, the Greek Orthodox predominate, followed by the Greek Catholic and some Maronite. The leadership of the CPL is principally Greek Orthodox. The Druze lead the Progressive

Socialist Party in the person of their traditional sectarian leader, Jumblatt.

This second phase of the civil war took the form of Lebanese left against Lebanese right. The Phalangists and their counter-revolutionary allies have steadily attempted to turn it into a religious or sectarian war. They imposed their complete military control over Maronite and some mixed Christian areas and by setting up barricades they effectively isolated these areas from the rest of the country. The other right wing groups attempted to organize and impose such control over other Christian areas, but they have met systematic opposition from progressive Christian elements, especially Greek Orthodox and the PPS. On one occasion in the early fall the private militia of President Franjeh, the Zghorta Liberation Army, attacked the PPS district of Al Khoura near Tripoli and was repulsed. Even in the hometown district of *Kataeb* leader Pierre Gemayel, the party militia has not imposed control on the nearby Christian villages of Dhour Chouweir, the birthplace of the PPS founder.

The counter-revolutionary Maronite militias have not succeeded in imposing control over all the Maronite areas, much less all the Christian areas in the country. Progressive groups of Lebanese Christians and Muslims, in alliance with Palestinians, control the whole of southern Lebanon, where the fighting is against frequent Israeli incursions.

The Lebanese patriotic and progressive groups have joined in a front led by Kamal Jumblatt and have formulated a program of political, economic and social reforms, including: 1) abolition of sectarianism as a basis for political organization and appointments; 2) electoral reform based on proportional representation; 3) reform in the military structure; 4) labor, social and welfare reforms, including an end to arbitrary firing and an increase in the minimum wage; 5) the "Arabism" of Lebanon -- a euphemism for Lebanon's obligation to support anti-Israeli and anti-imperialist struggles; 6) support for the right of a Palestinian armed presence in Lebanon.

These demands contrast sharply with the position of the reactionaries, who demand the removal of the Palestinians from Lebanon and reject Lebanon's "Arabism" and the idea of political change, insisting that the only continuing basis for Lebanon's political order be the National Pact, the 1943 gentleman's pact between Maronite and Sunni leaders at the time of independence to respect the sectarian political-administrative structure organized by the French colonial authorities to the advantage of the Maronite collaborators.

By November the rightist military offensive was unsuccessful and countered by an armed progressive united front with well-articulated demands designed to undercut the basis of traditional Maronite political and economic privileges, and thus of their national political control. Lebanon became divided into armed fiefdoms separated by no-man's-lands, the battlegrounds of a static war accompanied by banditry, kidnapping and murder, and overlaid with sectarian differences. Movement outside such armed and sealed districts was dangerous; economic activity came to a standstill. In Beirut a major no-man's-land known as the "green zone" cuts across the old downtown district splitting the city in two: the western sector in the hands of the patriotic and progressive forces (including the Palestinians) and the eastern sector in the hands of the rightist Maronite forces. Between this eastern district and the Maronite mountain stronghold lies the "belt of misery," slums inhabited by mostly Lebanese Muslims and Palestinians in camps. Supplies of food and other necessities have been reaching these areas via the Palestinian resistance.

IMPASSE: TRANSITION TO PHASE THREE

By early December there was a military and political impasse in the country. The right was not powerful enough, without the organized help of the army, to bring off a military victory over the left and their Palestinian allies. And the left was not strong enough to defeat the right without full Palestinian participation. Such a Lebanese left - Palestinian victory would necessitate a conquest of the Maronite mountain stronghold and would surely involve the Lebanese army. For the Palestinians this would be walking into a Phalangist trap, risking a full-scale religious-based war and inviting Syrian and Israeli armed intervention at a minimum. The Palestinians see such a battle as costly both strategically and ideologically. It would divert their energies and drain away their resources from the task of liberating Palestine, and would work against their proposed democratic secular state solution for Palestine.

At this time there was extensive political activity, including Syrian and French government initiatives, to find a workable political solution. The rightists called for imposition of "law and order" by the army.

This political initiative was violently shaken by one of the most barbaric incidents of the whole conflict. On the night of December 5, four Phalangist militants were killed and mutilated while returning to their mountain homes. The following day, Phalangist militiamen rounded up at random some 200 Lebanese Muslims and slaughtered them. This initiated a counter-slaughter in the mixed sectarian districts under leftist-Muslim control, which was stopped by the quick intervention of the Palestinian Armed Struggle Command and other disciplined leftist groups. This "Black Saturday" massacre prompted a military move by the patriotic forces which culminated in the battle of the luxury seaside hotel district.

PHASE THREE: PARTITION STRUGGLE

The political pivot of this third phase is the threat of partition of Lebanon into Christian and Muslim states. The notion of partition was spelled out in a memorandum from Abbot Charbel Kassis, head of the rightist Lebanese Maronite Order of Monks, to French emissary Couve de Murville. A spontaneous coalition of Christian, Muslim, patriotic, leftist and Palestinian groups came out against the idea. Maronite Patriarch Khreish, notable Raymond Edde, the Greek Orthodox Patriarch and the Greek Catholic Archbishop all sharply denounced the concept. Only the hardline Maronite rightist triumvirate (Gemayel, Chamoun and Kassis), with the support of Franjeh, continued to threaten partition if the "Lebanese format" — i.e., the National Pact — is altered.

The *Kataeb* and other rightist militias have begun implementing partition by attacking Muslim and Palestinian enclaves, terrorizing residents and forcing them to flee. This process of attack, eviction and territorial consolidation has been accompanied to some extent by population exchanges. The result aimed for is *de facto* partition. Fear of this has prompted the latest Palestinian participation in the fighting, to oppose Lebanese army participation on the side of the rightists. The most important enclave to be "purified" (in the rightist terminology) is the "belt of misery," the slums and refugee camps separating the Maronite mountain villages from the Phalangist controlled district in east Beirut. The Tel Zataar camp is in this belt, as are Karantina, Maslakh, Bourg Hamoud, parts of Dekwaneh and Jisr al Pasha. The blockade of Tel Zataar during the New Year's holiday was the first step of



The triumvirate: Chamoun, Gemayel, Kassis

this scheme. The rightists were quite conscious of the dilemma and embarrassment a pitched battle in Beirut would cause the Palestinians during the UN Security Council debate. By January 10 the battle was in full swing. Phalangists had overrun two small enclaves: the Christian Palestinian camp of Dbayy and the Muslim sub-district near Jal al-Deeb, both along the shore in the Maronite area north of Beirut. The attack on Karantina was devastating and savage. The *Kataeb* burnt the slum and evicted its populace. The Lebanese patriotic-Palestinian counter-offensive was strong, but they made no forced evictions. For them the sectarian dismemberment of Lebanon is an ideological and strategic disaster. In the region it benefits only Israel, by reinforcing its sectarian character and weakening the Palestinian base.

The fighting in late January was a rightist attempt at consolidating *de facto* partition and population exchange. If a decisive military victory emerges from this, the victors will determine the political arrangements thereafter. Such a victory is not likely. The right would need the full participation of the security and armed forces, which would require the written acquiescence of a Muslim Prime Minister. As of now the army has provided much arms to the rightists, and several officers, including former commander Iskandar Ghanim have either left or taken leaves of absence to join the *Kataeb* ranks.

A military victory of the patriotic - progressive forces would require the full involvement of their Palestinian allies. This is not likely, as the Palestinians do not want to conquer the populous Maronite strongholds. The PLO leadership is interested primarily in an end to the fighting and in a political settlement between the contending Lebanese not to the disadvantage of the progressives, rather than in an accelerated diversion of their resources and energy from their primary struggle. Some of the Lebanese left, on the other hand, want a decisive victory, and are holding by their political and economic demands, unwilling to make too many compromises with the intransigent right. In spite of this latent contradiction between the Lebanese groups and the Palestinians, the PLO insists it will not desert the Lebanese politically or militarily.

A way out of this dilemma and towards a political solution that the right can live with is the renewal of the long-standing Syrian mediation efforts. As in early December, this initiative is predicated upon some reform in the political sys-

tem, including lesser powers for the Maronite president coupled with increased power for the Muslim Prime Minister, and a 50-50 Christian - Muslim representation in the Parliament in place of the existing 6-5 ratio. It also includes some Lebanese disarmament and some limitation on Palestinian heavy arms, the latter through a stricter interpretation of the 1969 Cairo Accords defining Lebanese - Palestinian relations. Most crucially, the Syrian initiative stresses the return of evicted people to their districts to counter the rightist effort at partition. This initiative has a chance to succeed insofar as Syria can pressure the Lebanese progressives in alliance with the Palestinians who desire to extricate themselves from this secondary battle.

In the absence of a clear military victory, the political impasse will continue until March, when the legal period of the current Parliament ends and new elections must be held. The new Parliament is then to elect a new President in August. The leftists assert that Franjeh desires such a constitutional void in order to extend unilaterally his own tenure. An alternative would be for the present Parliament to extend its term and itself elect the new President. But the current Parliament certainly does not reflect the new political realities and their own strength. The traditional Muslim leadership would thus pluck the fruits of the struggle in which the left has paid with their lives and blood. This dilemma can only be resolved by producing constitutional and other reforms prior to the March date.

The real issue and obstacle to this of course is right-wing intransigence and obvious interest in effecting partition. The late January lull in the fighting and the political bargaining may be only a prelude to another rightist offensive to "purify" the "belt of misery" between the mountains and east Beirut. With the destruction of Karantina already accomplished, a likely target should be either Dekwaneh, thus splitting Bourg Hammoud from Tel Zaatar, or Jisir al-Pasha, the southernmost camp. Another possibility is an all-out final rightist offensive against Tel Zaatar, the strongest settlement. If successful, they could then consolidate a contiguous partitioned Maronite zone. Such an attack would also draw in the Palestinian fighters anew.

This leaves the likelihood of more savage fighting in Lebanon if the right pushes for partition. Perhaps as the Palestinians believe, the only solution to the Lebanese civil war is a solution to outstanding Arab-Israeli territorial questions and the Palestinian problem. Either that or the destruction of the Palestinian movement. In the final analysis this is the essence of the war in Lebanon.

THE LEBANESE RIGHT

The Phalangists—Pierre Gemayel
 The National Liberals—Camille Chamoun
 Zghorta Liberation Army—Suleiman Franjeh
 Maronite Order of Monks—Charbel Kassis
 Zahleh General Union—Joseph Skaff and Elias Al-Hawari
 Cedars Guards—Said Aql
 Front of the Cedars Guards—Fuad Chemali and George Adwan
 The Maronite League—Shaker Abu-Sleiman
 The Cedars Cubs — terrorist gangs
 St. Nahra's Gang
 Several other private militias, best known is Henri Sfeir's
 All are grouped together into *At-Tanzeem* (The Organization)



Phalangist guard protects right-wing newspaper

LEBANESE PATRIOTIC AND PROGRESSIVE PARTIES AND GROUPS (ARMED & ACTIVE)

Several Marxist-Leninist Groups
 Organization of Communist Action—
 Muhsen Ibrahim and Fawaz Trabulsi
 Communist Party of Lebanon CPL—
 George Hawi
 Syrian National Social Party—Inan Raad faction
 Syrian National Social Party—Elias Qnayzeh faction
 Organization of the Arab Baath Socialist Party—Abdel-Amir Abbas, pro-Syrian
 Arab Baath Socialist Party—A. Rifai, pro-Iraqi
 October 24 Movement—Farouk Al-Muqaddam, local to Tripoli
 Socialist Arab Union—Khalil Shehab
Al-Murabitun, Independent Nasserist Organization—Ibrahim Qlaylat
 The Nasserist Organization, Nasser's Forces—Issam Arab
 Nasserist Organization, Union of Forces of Working People—Kamal Chatila
 Progressive Socialist Party—Kamal Jumblatt
 Movement of the Disinherited (*Harakat Al-Mahrumeen*)—Imam Musa Sadr
 Al-Barty Party—Kurdish leftist
 Zarkady Party—Kurdish, Faysal Fakhro
 Several private militias of traditional leaders such as Rashid Karami, Saeb Salam, etc.
 All the above, except the private militias, belong to the front of patriotic and progressive forces headed by Kamal Jumblatt