

Lebanon At Turning Point

Will Sarkis's Inauguration Lead To Peace?

Sept. 25 (NSIPS) — The Lebanon crisis entered a turning-point this week with the Sept. 23 accession to the Presidency of Elias Sarkis, replacing extreme right-winger Suleiman Franjeh. Regarded as a relative moderate, Sarkis was welcomed into power with guarded optimism by most of the international press. Nonetheless, with Henry Kissinger at the helm of U.S. policy, the threat remains of a new Syrian invasion-in-force into Lebanon's urban areas and-or a deadly war of attrition against Palestinian and leftist mass-based forces. Either option could detonate a general U.S.-Soviet showdown.

Sarkis' inauguration, which was held in the Syrian-occupied town of Chtaura in eastern Lebanon under heavy Syrian guard, was boycotted by Kamal Jumblatt and Raymond Edde, and other leftists and moderates who have led the fight in Lebanon against the NATO-backed Syrian invasion over the past months. In his speech, Sarkis combined an appeal to "stop the fighting" and to create a "new Lebanon" with a warning to the Palestinians that they must respect the "sovereignty of the state." Syrian forces will stay in Lebanon as long as necessary as part of the "special relation between the two countries," said Sarkis, who also made a lackluster call for the reconstruction of Lebanon and for an "adequate and balanced relationship between capital and labor."

Informed observers have taken Sarkis' speech to signify the immediate implementation of the so-called "Cairo accords" of 1969 by which a disarmed Palestinian cadre force is to return to refugee camps under heavily policed conditions. This interpretation was backed up by the sudden declaration of a unilateral ceasefire by Palestine Liberation Organization chairman Yasser Arafat without corresponding Syrian concessions. Arafat's move reportedly led to widespread grumbling within the Palestinian and leftist camp, which has been dramatically radicalized by Henry Kissinger's stated policy of extermination.

One well-informed Arab diplomatic source predicted the imminent formation of a "triangular axis" of Sarkis, Arafat, and Pierre Gemayel, head of the "moderate" wing of the Lebanese fascist camp, to bring to bear the full brunt of the Lebanese and Syrian security forces against recalcitrant left and Palestinian resistance forces. This arrangement is reportedly receiving the full backing of Kissinger, whose State Department yesterday welcomed Sarkis' accession by ominously calling for a "Lebanon round-table conference" that would be an obvious forum for such a policing operation. Egyptian President Sadat, who fears the destabilizing consequences of a Syrian invasion, is also reported to favor this scheme.

The long-mooted Syrian invasion is not to be discounted at this juncture, however. Yesterday's Financial Times of London speculates that Sarkis and Syria have worked out a "mutual security accord." Earlier in the week, bold threats of an intervention sometime in October were being issued in Damascus. Anti-Palestinian propaganda tracts were being circulated outside Damascus while two of Syria's top superhawks, Maj.-General Nami Jamil, head of the Air Force, and Gen. Hikmat Shehabi, Syrian Chief of Staff, arrived in Lebanon for an inspection of the 20,000 Syrian occupying troops.

Informed Palestinian sources told NSIPS this week that the resistance movement is "digging in" in expectation of a new Syrian invasion, since Assad is too committed internally to the Lebanon intervention to seriously consider a negotiated settlement. A twist on this analysis came from the PLO's second-in-

command, Abu Iyad, who told interviewers from the French Communist Party newspaper, L'Humanité, that he considered a new Syrian invasion imminent, with Syria, however, selectively targetting leftists and Communists and staying clear of the centrist Palestinian tendencies.

Powerful counterweights to the various Kissingeresque war and genocide scenarios are in operation, however. In Damascus, the top Soviet organizer for a Geneva Mideast peace conference, Vladimir Vinogradov, has told Assad and collaborators throughout the past week that the Soviets will not tolerate a new Syrian invasion; Vinogradov arrived days after a stern letter was sent to Assad from Soviet Communist Party chief Leonid Brezhnev, warning against an invasion. This week's London Economist speculates that Assad may not want to lose his "one foot in Moscow," and may therefore draw back from further large-scale intervention.

Italy's governing Christian Democratic Party this week held a conference in Rome and issued strong appeals for the creation of a Mediterranean-wide "security pact," for international support for the PLO, for the withdrawal of both Syrian and Israeli forces from the territories they are illegally occupying, and for the immediate re-convening of a Geneva peace conference. The Italian regional peace and development initiatives are known to have the support of Algeria, Yugoslavia, Libya, Malta, and significant forces in France, Egypt, and in the Aegean region.

Potential support for a Mediterranean zone of détente and peace is also emerging in Israel. Leading Israeli moderate Abba Eban, former Foreign Minister, last weekend called upon Israel's leaders to enunciate a clear "concept of peace" rather than get bogged down in endless "territorial" debates that sabotage talk of peace and that should rather be discussed at a general peace conference. Eban's statements were aimed both at Foreign Minister Yigal Allon, whose article in the current Foreign Affairs quarterly journal of the Council on Foreign Relations advocates Israeli annexation of almost one-half of Israeli occupied territory, and at those warhawks around former Defense Minister Moshe Dayan who have masterminded Israel's continually expanding intervention into Lebanon in collaboration with the fascist Lebanese Falange Party.

Pravda Attacks U.S.—Israeli Collusion

The following are excerpts from an article by Yu. Glukhov in Pravda Sept. 19, entitled "Tel Aviv's Undeclared War":

... At this time there is every basis to assert that the American-Israeli policy of "partial steps," and its fruit — last year's Sinai agreement between Egypt and Israel — was the detonator of the explosion of the Lebanese crisis and the new deterioration of the situation in the Middle East.

After the signing of the Sinai agreement by Egypt, stated the General Secretary of the Popular Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine N. Hawatmeh, the next step of American policy was the ignition of the war in Lebanon, with the goal of subverting the Palestinian resistance movement and its strategic ally — the Lebanese national-patriotic forces. . . .

Pravda On Lebanon Escalation

Sept. 25 (NSIPS) — The following releases by TASS, the Soviet news agency, were published in Pravda on Sept. 20.

BEIRUT, 19 (TASS). There has been an activation of political contacts and negotiations in Lebanon, as well as an escalation of military actions, as the inauguration of the new elected head of state E. Sarkis, set for Sept. 23, draws near.

Intense armed clashes flared up yesterday on all fronts. Battles and artillery exchanges took place along the neutral strip in Beirut, where the city is divided into its western and eastern regions; there was also fighting in the mountains.

Yesterday, there was a mass meeting in the capital, in memory of the fighters of the national-patriotic forces and the Palestinian resistance movement who have fallen in combat against the rightist Christian forces.

The chairman of the progressive Lebanese Socialist Party, K. Jumblatt, spoke at the meeting, and stressed the readiness of the progressive forces of Lebanon to fight with weapon in hand for their rights and for the rights of all workers in the country. K. Jumblatt noted the unbreakable solidarity of the national patriotic forces of Lebanon and the Palestinian resistance movement.

The Palestinian information agency reports that in the rightist Christian "capital," the port of Junieh, approximately 400 mercenaries have arrived on a ship from Cyprus...

CAIRO, 19 (TASS) — The Egyptian press reports a split in the ranks of the rightist Christian forces in Lebanon. Extremist groupings among them are insisting on a continuation of military actions against the national patriotic forces and the Palestinian resistance movement. The extremists, headed by S. Franjeh, have worked out a plan to prevent Sarkis from assuming his duties. They also are announcing that they will not support Sarkis' proposals for a ceasefire in Lebanon.

Unita Denounces Syrian Attacks Demands Withdrawal From Lebanon

Sept. 23 (NSIPS) — The following are excerpts of an article entitled "Towards Another Meeting Among Arabs For Lebanon," which appeared in Unità, the daily paper of the Italian Communist Party, on Sept. 22:

Syrian radio has openly threatened an even stronger armed intervention (in Lebanon). Damascus radio has made extremely violent, perhaps unprecedented, attacks on the Palestinian leader Arafat and the major leader of the left, Jumblatt. "Arafat and Jumblatt," stated the Syrian radio, "are mainly responsible for the failure of the efforts to (bring) peace in Lebanon. Syria will no longer permit them to be obstacles against the Arab interests in the Mideast nor to conspire against the unity and the integrity of Lebanon." These are — as it is almost irrelevant to point out — false charges. It is Syria with its military intervention which has worsened the conflict. And it is Syria which now prevents the return of peace by stubbornly refusing to withdraw its troops.

In this regard, the leader of the Palestinian Popular Front, Hawatmeh, stated: "Only with the withdrawal of the Syrians will Lebanon return to normalcy. If the Syrians make no retreating steps, then a total war will be inevitable." The PLO leader Arafat today received a message from the Soviet leadership; the Palestinian press agency Wafa reports that the message was delivered to Arafat by the (Soviet) chargé d'affaires.

Pravda Stresses Quick Settlement

Sept. 24 (NSIPS) — The following are excerpts of an article entitled "In a Friendly Atmosphere" which appeared in Pravda, the daily paper of the Soviet Communist Party, on Sept. 18:

On Sept. 17... Soviet Politburo member (and Foreign Minister — ed.) A.A. Gromyko received PLO Executive member and head of its Political Department, F. Kaddumi.

In the course of the discussions, which took place in a friendly atmosphere, there was an exchange of opinions on the situation in the Middle East.

Both sides expressed serious concern over the continuing bloodshed in Lebanon and stressed the necessity of a quick ceasefire and the achievement of a political settlement of the Lebanese crisis, without foreign interference, on the basis of maintaining the territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence of Lebanon. It is important for Arab progressive forces, and especially those involved in the Lebanese events, to find a way to cooperate in a joint effort to achieve normalization of the situation in Lebanon, so that their common struggle against Israel is not weakened. No attempt to use the talks on political regulation in Lebanon as a screen to conceal further outrages against the Lebanese national patriotic forces must be permitted.

They (Gromyko and Kaddumi — ed.) again voiced their deep conviction that without a settlement of the Palestinian problem which corresponds to the lawful interests of the Arab people of Palestine, and their inalienable right to the creation of their own state, there can be no peace and tranquility in the Middle East. Without a cardinal and comprehensive solution of the Middle East conflict, the situation will be constantly fraught with the danger of explosion.

Kaddumi spoke highly of the consistent line of the Soviet Union in the Middle East. On behalf of the leadership of the PLO, he expressed his thanks to the Soviet Union and its leadership, to L.I. Brezhnev, for their comprehensive support of the struggles of the Arab people of Palestine for national liberation and of the struggles of all Arab peoples for the elimination of the consequences of Israeli aggression and for the establishment of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East.