

Middle East Report by Judith Wyer

The Gulf war and Lebanon

Iran's drive against Iraq is meant to strengthen Khomeini's bid to take over Lebanon.

Behind the escalating military drive of the Iranian dictatorship against Iraq is a design which goes far beyond Khomeini's determination to overthrow Iraqi President Saddam Hussein.

Along with the Iranian human-wave offensive against southern and central Iraq—in which up to 1 million brainwashed and drugged Iranian youths are being thrown against the Iraqi army—there are reports that Iranian fighters have renewed an offensive in the extreme north and are approaching two dams that hold Baghdad's water supply. U.S.-based Iraqi sources say that Khomeini is determined to wreak serious infrastructural damage in Iraq to provoke the downfall of Saddam Hussein.

The offensive will strengthen Khomeini's growing support among Shi'ite Muslims beyond the Gulf region, most emphatically in Lebanon. Over the past year the majority Shi'ite population in Lebanon has increasingly been won over to Khomeini.

Khomeini has stated that he will transform Lebanon into the second Islamic Republic in the Mideast; Iran's offensive was timed with the withdrawal of American Marines from Lebanese territory.

The spread of pro-Khomeini militancy in Lebanon has finally sparked concern in Israel, whose defense minister at the time, Ariel Sharon, ordered the invasion of Lebanon in 1982; ostensibly in order to clean out Palestinian cells which were shelling Israel's Galilee; but chiefly to foil moves by

the Reagan administration to secure a comprehensive Mideast settlement.

Though the Palestinians are gone, the shelling has resumed, this time by pro-Khomeini Shi'ites who pledge to destroy both Israel and the U.S. presence in the region. Former Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin stated accurately on Feb. 23 that the rising Khomeini-allied Shi'ite extremism in southern Lebanon now represents a serious threat to Israel.

Ironically, after the United States announced the pullback of the Marines, all the major Arab parties to the Lebanon crisis reportedly came closer than ever before to an agreement that could prop up the presidency of Amin Gemayel, as a figurehead in a Syrian- and Saudi-approved government. But with the intensification of the Gulf war, and a related activation of Shi'ite fundamentalist extremism in Lebanon, it is feared that the latest Saudi Arabian efforts to reconcile Gemayel and the coalition of Syrian-backed militias which have been challenging him may have come too late.

As the Marines are being removed from the Beirut airport, Khomeini and Khomeini-allied Palestinian terrorist forces associated with the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command (PFLP-GC) are rapidly moving into the Greater Beirut area. The PFLP-GC is commanded by Ahmed Gebril, whose forces guard Khomeini's residence north of Teheran.

Last year the commander of the

Pasdaran, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard, declared that by the end of 1984 Iran would have 100,000 fighters in Lebanon for the purpose of establishing an Islamic Republic. Over the past six months, during the heat of the fighting in and around Beirut, Iran has quietly deployed what some experts say is up to 10,000 fighters into Lebanon, many concentrated in the Shi'ite-dominated slums of south Beirut.

Signs have mounted that Syrian President Hafez al-Assad, along with his allies, Druze Muslim chieftain Walid Jumblatt and Nabih Berri, the head of the Shi'ite mainstream Al Amal grouping, are worried that their own power will be threatened by the growing sympathy for the Ayatollah Khomeini.

Over the past three months, the Iranian press and members of Khomeini's regime, including Speaker of the Iranian Parliament Hashemi-Rafsanjani, have attacked Assad's regime in Syria as "un-Islamic" and the Druzes in Lebanon for not "upholding the true tenets of Islam."

Late last year an emissary of Iran's foreign ministry made an unusual visit to the northern Lebanese town of Tripoli to make contact with certain Muslim Brotherhood leaders of the opposition to Assad, a visit which did not go unnoticed in Damascus.

Timed with Iran's latest offensive, there has been a series of demonstrations by pro-Khomeini zealots in south Lebanon protesting what is claimed to be the murder by Israelis of the Shi'ite mullah Al-Harb. In January, a powerful Shi'ite mullah, Mohammed Fadlallah, visited Teheran and conferred with Khomeini. Fadlallah, who lives in south Beirut, reportedly helped train the suicide bombers who blew up the U.S. Marines headquarters. Fadlallah, like Al-Harb, is Khomeini's agent in the bid to take over Lebanon.