

of the publication of the latter's war memoirs by accusing him of having come to terms with the Palestinians. On the Moslem side, the hardships that the people in the zones controlled by the Palestinians were forced to endure, the inability of the Palestinians to ensure basic services and minimum security in their sector, as well as various flagrant abuses of power, have helped to demobilize the Lebanese Moslems and separate them from their Palestinian allies. In short, the war showed that the stakes were not the same for Lebanese Moslems as they were for the Palestinians. It was the awareness of this fact that caused the isolation of the resistance from its allies.

Explosive factor

The seemingly incessant fighting in Southern Lebanon appears to be the most explosive factor in the entire Lebanese situation. Nothing does more to indicate the precarious nature of the Lebanese truce than the constant murderous fighting, and this is perhaps the key to its meaning. While giving rise to a variety of hypotheses - including that put forward by Pierre Gemayel, according to which Israel is seeking to seize Southern Lebanon and use it as a bargaining counter for the west bank of the Jordan in the event of a general Israeli-Arab settlement - the fighting in Southern Lebanon aims primarily at maintaining a high degree of pressure on all the parties involved in the Middle East conflict. From this point of view, paradoxically, the continued fighting serves the interests of all the combatants. It allows the Palestinians to maintain that their military strength has remained intact despite the losses suffered during the civil war, and that their will to fight remains strong notwithstanding the diplomatic concessions that were forced from them. It also allows the Lebanese Christians to argue that peace will not return to Lebanon until their principal demand, the expulsion of the Palestinians, has been met. Finally, it allows Israel to emphasize that neither the status quo as it existed before the war in Lebanon nor the presence of Arab armies along the southern Lebanese border will be tolerated. The principal losers in this sad contest are the people of Southern Lebanon. They are primarily impoverished Moslem Shi'ites, who continue to swell the ranks of the refugees heading towards Beirut.

In Beirut, the war in Southern Lebanon seems to be far away, both because of the censorship that limits access to news from the South and, even more important, the lassitude of the people of Beirut as they try to go about their daily tasks in spite of major economic difficulties. Commercial

and industrial losses amount to \$1.5 billion. The country is experiencing an annual inflation rate of between 30 and 40 per cent, to which must be added an incalculable unemployment rate and a mass exodus of qualified workers. For some Lebanese, particularly those who do not have any exportable skills, peace is perhaps more unbearable than war. During the fighting they at least had the option of enrolling in the combat groups, some of which, moreover, were mainly bands of looters. For those who are able to emigrate - doctors, engineers, skilled workers or contractors - the future in Saudi Arabia, the Persian Gulf states or America is less gloomy. This accounts for the fact that out of a total of 700,000 Lebanese who left the country - almost 25 per cent of the total population - only half have returned. The other half can pride themselves on improving the Lebanese balance of payments through the money they send to their relatives who have remained in the country. Nevertheless, if Lebanon is ever to get back on its feet, it must be able to count on the actual presence of these people.

The reconstruction of Lebanon cannot be achieved overnight. Despite the unveiling of a French plan for rebuilding the downtown area at a cost of \$100 million and the improvements being made to the port of Beirut, the climate of uncertainty is undermining all efforts and dampening all initiatives. After six months of operation, the port reached only half its prewar rate of activity and the level of transit traffic remained at 17 per cent of the volume handled in 1974. At the end of six months of relative peace, there were only six American business firms registered with the American Embassy, compared to 600 before the war. It should come as no surprise that the exodus is continuing and that it includes people who are not even Lebanese. In August, Yasir Arafat called on Arab countries to refuse the requests for visas from 10,000 Palestinians in Lebanon.

The Lebanese crisis is still awaiting the final outcome that will lead to real peace. The causes of this crisis undoubtedly lie in the internal contradictions in the country, but Lebanon will not be able to solve them as long as international circumstances remain unfavourable towards a general settlement in the region. To a large extent, in Lebanon as elsewhere in the Middle East, the most pressing internal questions remain in abeyance until such a settlement can be reached. The main result of the civil war is, therefore, the destruction of the illusion, so difficult to justify even before the war, that Lebanon can remain uninvolved in the conflicts that surround it.

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