37. LEBANON

Background

In February 1984, Lebanese President Gemayel abrogated the May 1983 agreement with Israel which had sanctioned an Israeli security presence in Southern Lebanon. Later in the spring, all US, British and Italian contingents of the Multinational Force withdrew from Beirut. The unilateral Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon in early 1985 clearly established a shift in power towards Syria and the Shia community within Lebanon. By mid-1986, however, this had not produced agreement on the reforms necessary to end the war, which has dragged on, at different levels of intensity and with different players, since 1975.

The last phase of the Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon was completed in June 1985. Israeli involvement continued, however, for in response to Israel's transfer of 1,000 Shi'ite prisoners to an Israeli jail in March, members of the Shi'ite al-Jihad al-Islami highjacked a TWA Boeing 727 in June. The highjacking ended on 30 June, and although the Government of Israel denied any connection between the two events, all Shi'ite prisoners were returned to Lebanon by the end of September. With the continuation of Israeli air patrols over Lebanon and allegedly over Syrian territory, and the deployment by Syria of anti-aircraft defences close to the Lebanese border, tensions between Israel and Syria remained acute.

Several attempts to promote inter-communal dialogue leading to political reform were initiated during the year. During a conference of Christian leaders in April, agreement was reached on a commitment to Lebanese unity, the recognition of its Arab identity and its special relationship with Syria. In May an offer for dialogue by the chairman of the Lebanese forces (the Maronite militia) was rejected by the Shi'ite Amal and the Druze Progressive Socialist Party (PSP). In July, Druze and Muslim leaders presented the Christians with a programme which included the establishment