

Amal, Syrian Objectives

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[Article by Mustafa Zayn: "The Objectives of the War of the Camps: To Remove Abu 'Ammar from his Support- -To Pave the Way for the Return of the Syrian Army- -To Subjugate the Palestinians to Lebanese Authority- -To Abolish the Gains Made by the Palestinians"]

[Text] The number of Palestinians- -close to 400,000 people- -exceeds the number of people in the medium-sized sects, and by virtue of their presence in Lebanon, the Palestinians have played a fundamental role in the formulation of Lebanese policy, and no Lebanese government has been able to ignore this role or remove its players or draw up Lebanese policy without the Palestinians.

Before the emergence of the Palestinian revolution, there were laws that regulated a Palestinian's relationship to Lebanese authority and that regulated the movement of Palestinians within Lebanon and between the camps. These laws used to limit a Palestinian's freedom on all levels, and by their very nature prevented him from bearing arms or engaging in any military activity. After the emergence of the revolution and the occurrence of numerous clashes with the Lebanese army, the authorities permitted Palestinians to bear personal arms inside the camps to defend themselves, especially after the camps and PLO offices had been the target of Israeli operations before which the Lebanese authorities had been powerless. After that they agreed to a kind of private security for the camps, charge of which was taken by the revolutionary forces coordinating among themselves on the one hand, and in coordination with the concerned Lebanese authority on the other. If we add to this event the Cairo Agreement and its appendices which concern the Palestinian presence in south Lebanon and legally permit the commandos to launch military operations against Israel, the Palestinian has made gains that it has not been able to achieve in any other Arab country. Thus Lebanese territory became the main and virtually the only base for the official, military and informational Palestinian presence.

The PLO was and still is extremely jealous of these gains; it defends them fiercely and tries hard, through its local alliances with national Lebanese parties and through its Arab alliances, to make more gains.

But after the Israeli invasion of 1982, and after the Palestinian fighters left Lebanon, the situation in the country changed greatly and there was no one who could protect the afore-mentioned gains by force of arms. The Palestinian camps in Lebanon became liable to become like the rest of the camps in the other Arab countries, especially if the Lebanese were to try to set up a single strong central authority, because this authority would demand that its influence and rule extend over the entire Lebanese territory, including the camps, and it would run up against those defending private autonomous security. Add to that the fact that the Cairo Agreement and its appendices collapsed after the invasion as an accomplished fact. Even if the Lebanese authorities have not officially abrogated it, Lahd's forces on the one hand, and Amal on the other, will not permit any military activity or

any armed Palestinian presence in the area of land in the south that had been designated in the afore-mentioned agreement, and which at the time Israel had called "Fatah Land."

Within this framework we can understand what Nabih Barri, leader of the Amal movement, said: that there will be "no return to what things were before 1982." This means:

- The abrogation of all Lebanese-Palestinian agreements.
- Abrogation of autonomous security for the camps.
- Forbidding an armed Palestinian presence.
- Dismantling PLO installations within and outside of the camps.

Thus Nabih Birri, in launching his latest attack against the camps, has begun to play his role- -as he sees it- -as minister of the interior (he is now minister of justice), in a strong, central Lebanese government, and the Amal militias have played a strong security role.

This role that Amal is playing fulfills a dream that the Lebanese authorities and those opposed to the Palestinian revolution had, and makes Nabih Birri an essential participant in drawing a picture of the "new" Lebanon!

Regional Dimensions to the War of the Camps

On the level of the regional dimension and the proposed solutions to the Palestinian question, those concerned with the issue realize that whoever controls the camps in Lebanon, they being the single Palestinian arena completely subject to the rules and regulations of the PLO, holds a very strong card, whether with regard to playing a role in the proposed solutions, or with regard to working to foil these solutions. The Palestine Salvation Front, without an effective presence in the camps, has become a leadership without a base, and the PLO has also become just offices and officials in Tunis, and Syria is just an Arab country thousands of miles away despite the intermeshing of Lebanese and Syrian territories; therefore each of these sides is in a race against time to extend its influence over the camps in preparation for what will come after the final phase of the Israeli withdrawal and for the proposal of a new formula according to which authority in Lebanon will be organized, and in preparation to confronting the regional and international solutions that are actively seeking a solution to the Palestinian question. Within this framework we can also understand Syria's total support for the Amal movement in its war against the camps.

For whether the Syrian army returns to Lebanon, which is likely, or whether it does not, the Syrians do not believe, according to what their sources say, that there can be any benefit from the armed presence of any side having weapons on Lebanese territory.

If Lebanon makes a security and defense agreement with Syria, which is what Damascus is working hard for, then the task of collecting the weapons of the various warring factions in Lebanon will fall on the Syrian army.

The Syrians would prefer that somebody else, even if supported by them, take on the task of disarming the camps, so that the matter would not be one of Syria's hostility to the Palestinian revolution.

Therefore the plans for solutions that Amal proposed coincide with the Syrian view. The Salvation Front opposed those solutions, and needless to say, the PLO is against all the proposed solutions, on which they were not consulted to begin with. The Syrians and Amal agree on a solution plan based on the following points:

- 'Arafat is the one responsible for the battles.
- There will be no return to what the Palestinians had prior to 1982.
- The security of the camps is an internal Lebanese issue subject to the laws that are observed and applied in Lebanese territory.

In this respect, the Syrians believe that the matter has gone beyond one of security for the camps and has entered the realm of long-term strategic planning, and as long as Syria guarantees security in Lebanon, the Palestinians have nothing to fear.

This is what the vice president of the Syrian republic, 'Abd-al-Halim Khaddam, told the director of the office of muftis, Husayn al-Quwatli, when the latter contacted him in his capacity as an official in the security committee that was formed right after the Islamic conference that was held in Damascus as a result of the battles between Amal and the Murabitun.

While waiting for a final solution to the Lebanese problem, the Syrians believe that a comprehensive cease-fire should be reached, and that a committee from the Salvation Front should take over responsibility for the security of the camps, aided in that by committees from national Lebanese parties.

Because the question goes beyond camp security, the Syrians say, discussion of the Palestinian question and the liberation of occupied territories is a pan-Arab responsibility and is not limited to one party without another, and it is not limited to one country without another. Syria, as its sources say, is bearing this responsibility, and everyone, including the Palestinians, must concede to Damascus' pan-Arab role.

On the Palestinian level, sources close to the PLO in Tunis believe that Syria is "trying to liquidate that Palestinian question." These same sources say the PLO cannot possibly give up the gains that it achieved for the Palestinian people after a long and bloody struggle, and it will work hard to foil any planned solution that will be at the expense of those gains, even at the cost of continuing endlessly with an exhaustive war against all who are working to pass these solutions.

If any one of the proposed solutions is applied, Syria will have played the major role, and if these plans are passed, Damascus will have basically succeeded in removing Abu 'Ammar from practical participation in reaching a solution to the question of the camps, and it will have removed the PLO from practical participation in the self-determination of these camps. On the other hand it will have sanctioned the authority of the Salvation Front, and put a stop to opposition by any Lebanese side to being disarmed.

From now until the proposed plans are on their way to being implemented, the Palestinians and Lebanese will remain subject to the ugliest kinds of wars and massacres, and in the long run, that will widen the rifts in the disputes among the Lebanese, between the Lebanese and the Palestinians, and the Palestinians and the Syrians.

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