

Syrian Army Invades Lebanon; Mideast Explosion Threatened

April 13 (IPS) — As of 1 AM EST today, upwards of 6000 Syrian troops have indiltraded Lebanon, stated Lebanese leftist leader Kamal Jumblatt. According to several press reports, the ten-day ceasefire in Lebanon between the left and the fascist Christian Falange has totally broken down and fighting has broken out throughout the country. A Syrian Army column is reported to have clashed in heavy fighting with units of the Lebanese left in Bekaa valley in central Lebanon.

According to Beirut sources, President Ford has stated that although the situation in the Middle East is serious, "no one side in the fighting is acting rashly." News sources in Western Europe and the U.S. are reporting that the invasion was prearranged with approval from the United States government and that Israel received prior notification of the Syrian invasion. According to the same press sources, the intent of the invasion is to stop the flow of arms to Lebanese leftists.

The Syrian invasion and the outbreak of fighting in Lebanon immediately raises the danger of an Israeli strike which could lead quickly to full-scale nuclear confrontation between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. The Israeli cabinet has been in permanent session since yesterday on the basis of earlier reports that at least 400 regular troops had crossed the Syrian-Lebanon frontier April 9.

Factions in U.S.

The Syrian move April 9 was immediately denounced by the pro-Iraqi and Communist Lebanese left. Both U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and leading Israeli warhawk Moshe Dayan, former Defense Minister, endorsed the April 9 preliminary Syrian invasion. Ignoring the risk of general war, Kissinger told a closed meeting of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that Syria was "keeping the lid on Lebanon," according to the Washington Post, April 11, and acknowledged that 1000 Syrian army forces had entered Lebanon — despite previous "official" State Department warnings against an outside intervention. Dayan, in an interview with the daily Jerusalem Post, bluntly declared that Syria could invade Lebanon to crush the left as long as Israel's security was not threatened.

At the same time, President Ford, the Wall Street faction of Averell Harriman and George Ball, and the French Gaullists moved to defuse the Rockefeller-Rand Corporation scenario for war. Bernard Loth, a leader of the Gaullist youth section, said in a Paris interview that he strongly opposed a Syrian invasion, and said he would arrive in Syria April 12. Twice this week, President Ford said flatly that he would veto a proposed bill to ship an extra \$550 million in mostly military aid to Israel — provoking squawks of protest from Israeli Prime Minister Yitzak Rabin, who said that Kissinger and Sen. Hubert Humphrey had proposed the full amount to Israel. Then two days after Kissinger aide Joseph Sisco refused to rule out direct U.S. intervention into Lebanon, Ford stated unequivocally that under no circumstances would American forces be sent to the Middle East.

The Harriman-Ball forces have stated their willingness to permit a victory of the Lebanese left in Lebanon, opting for a policy of containment. The Harriman forces hope that peace

in Lebanon will provide the basis for a lasting settlement for the Mideast, aided by forced concessions from Israel.

However, the Rockefeller-Kissinger forces have determined to crush the revolutionary Lebanon left at all costs — even nuclear war. The invasion of Syrian troops yesterday is a direct attempt to pre-empt any negotiated settlement. Rockefeller forces have unleashed a "Brown operation" in the Mideast, named for L. D. Brown the special Administration envoy now coordinating the Syrian-Israeli joint command against the Lebanese left.

The strategy of the Rockefeller faction is as follows. Both the Syrian and Israeli armed forces and the U.S. Sixth Fleet have deployed in direct coordination to cut off the Lebanese left from all contact with the outside world, a process of strangulation aimed at preventing arms from Iraw, Libya, and eastern Europe from reaching the left. The Syrian navy has blockaded all three ports in Lebanon controlled by the left, while the Israeli navy this week shelled Saida, a major port city in southern Lebanon. Israeli gunners fired artillery at selected targets in the Lebanese border.

Meanwhile, massive shipments of arms, including 30 tanks and heavy artillery, flowed into the rightist-controlled port of Junieh, north of Beirut, to rearm the CIA-backed Falangists.

Part of the CIA strategy for Lebanon is to hold out the promise of meeting the demands of the left for revolutionary changes in the constitution. The surviving members of the impotent Parliament met outside Beirut today under tight security to take the initial steps to oust Flanagist ally, President Suleiman Frangieh. While Frangieh's ouster — still not assured — has been a chief leftist demand, the left is also demanding structural reforms to eliminate the sectarian religious character of Lebanon. This the U.S. and Syria are unwilling to grant — but are using the time to prepare for another round of fighting.

Across Lebanon, numerous clashes between an estimated 7000 paramilitary Syrian commandos, sent into Lebanon to back the collapsing rightist forces, and the Lebanese left were reported. Palestinian sources charged that the rightists and Syrian troops fought with Popular Front (PFLP) commandos and Lebanese leftists in eastern Lebanon, and Iraqi radio reported that the Syrian army attempted to occupy Lebanon's second largest city, Tripoli, which is also leftist controlled.

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A Syrian invasion is no easy matter, however. Increasing opposition to Assad's policing of Lebanon threatens to catalyze a left-wing military coup in Syria by pro-Iraqi

forces; hundreds of arrests and anti-Assad demonstrations in Syria and Lebanon have been reported in recent weeks. Yesterday, according to the Washington Post, the Syrian military command issued an ultimatum to Assad, fearing a revolt by junior officers if the present instability in Lebanon continues: either invade, said the reported demand, or pull out immediately.

Iraq has setpped up its campaign to topple the Syrian regime, and Kamal Jumblatt, leader of the Lebanese left,

openly appealed to anti-Assad factions in the Syrian military to force a change in Syrian policy toward Lebanon.

It is this weakness of the Assad regime in Syria that threatens to throw the Middle East crisis into an uncontrollable series of escalations. Should the Assad government fall to pro-socialist forces, NATO would consider launching an Arab-Israeli war, using the tightly controlled Israeli military to destroy what could develop into a pro-Soviet axis of Beirut, Damascus, and Baghdad.