

Middle East Report by Robert Dreyfuss

Mossad and Iran at work in Lebanon

Assassinations and warfare are geared to prevent formation of a new, potentially stabilizing, government in Beirut.

The newest round of unrest in Lebanon has to a significant extent been the product of an unusual new alliance in that country.

For the past weeks, the Lebanese Shiite Al-Amal paramilitary organization, which maintains close ties to and receives funding from the Khomeini regime in Iran, has been collaborating with Israel's Mossad intelligence service to sabotage efforts to stabilize Lebanon.

The Amal-Israeli cooperation first surfaced in early June, when reports began to flow from southern Lebanon that the Shiite group had made a policy turn *against* the Palestine Liberation Organization and *toward* the Israeli-backed breakaway Falangist leader Col. Saad Haddad.

More than once during that period, Israeli reconnaissance and bombing raids into Lebanon were accompanied by Amal-led Shiite demonstrations against Palestinian population concentrations.

The fruits of that earlier collaboration have been manifest in developments in Lebanon over the past week.

On July 25, Lebanese Press Association head Riad Taha was assassinated. Prior to his assassination, rumors had spread throughout Lebanon that Taha, a Shiite himself, had drawn the ire of the Amal group by refusing to endorse their policies.

At his funeral, Amal-provoked fighting broke out between the

Shiite militias and militia groups close to the Iraqi Ba'ath Socialist Party. Fourteen people were killed in the bloody encounters, and the reverberations of the fighting made most Lebanese observers very pessimistic about the chances of putting together a new government.

Three days later, a leader of the pro-Iraq Ba'ath Party in Lebanon, Moussa Sahib, was murdered in Beirut. All signs pointed to Al-Amal responsibility for the shooting. Within moments after the incident, a shooting war broke out in Beirut between Al-Amal units and Ba'athists.

Again, the victim of this chaos was the negotiations to form a new government.

Recently, President Elias Sarkis had named Takhieddine Solh, a former prime minister, as premier-designate, and talks had been initiated with Lebanon's many rival factions to fill the vacuum left by the earlier resignation of Prime Minister Selim el-Hoss.

Solh had been considered a viable choice; aside from being a veteran politician with ties to both Muslim and Christian political camps, he is on good terms with the powerful Arab countries to Lebanon's east, Syria and Iraq.

Potentially hopeful as the selection of Solh may have been, chances that a new government will be formed now look bleak.

Israel's actions over the past days have contributed to making

these chances even bleaker.

Reports have been filtering from southern Lebanon that Israeli armed forces units have been substantially stepping up their activities in that region.

Beirut sources are apprehensive that these activities presage a new major Israeli invasion of Lebanon, and point to the growing adventurism of Israel's Begin government as a sign that something portentous is in the works.

The spreading rumor of imminent Israeli action have fed the expansionist appetites of a powerful wing of the Lebanese Falange Party. This faction wants to consolidate the hegemony over areas of Lebanon accomplished by the bloody July 7 military conquest of the rival National Liberal Party. This faction's next goal is direct military showdown with the Palestine Liberation Organization militias in Lebanon. It is known to be seeking military and logistical support from Israel.

The Israeli-Falange connection has drawn a response from PLO leader Yasser Arafat, who has ordered PLO units to be put on alert.

Fearful of unrest in Lebanon, Syria has put its peacekeeping units in Lebanon on special alert status, too. The rightist Lebanese press is reporting that Syria is in the process of concretizing a broad-ranging defense alliance.

Chaos in Lebanon could engulf Syria and Iraq into the maelstrom. Notably, these are the two countries hit by Iran-backed Muslim Brotherhood destabilizations and assassinations. Israel and Iran's Amal puppets may seem like strange bedfellows, but they are certainly working for the same end.