

## U.S. lets Assad slaughter Christians in Lebanon

by Nora Hamerman and Thierry Lalevée

The danger of war in the Middle East has continued to escalate in the last weeks of October, with the open complicity of the British, American, and Israeli governments.

Although the showdown between Iraq and the huge Anglo-American military deployment in the Persian Gulf appears stalemated, there are ominous rumors that the U.S. Bush administration might be readying a preemptive strike against Iraq in the near term. The Israeli government has heightened tensions by barring all Palestinians from Jerusalem, as a wave of retaliatory violence between Jews and Arabs escalates in Israel and the Occupied Territories.

But as we write on Oct. 26, the spotlight is on the massacre of Christians in Beirut, which has been suppressed by the same U.S. media that are dominated by daily accounts of supposed outrages committed by Iraqi troops under President Saddam Hussein.

Since on Oct. 13 the Syrian armies in Lebanon began to smash the Christian resistance there, led by the constitutionally elected head of government, Gen. Michel Aoun, the troops of Syrian dictator Hafez al-Assad have killed at least 700 Christians with the blessings of President Bush, whose new-found friend and anti-Iraq ally Assad is.

For the first time, the Syrian Air Force was allowed to bomb Aoun's headquarters. This proves that the U.S. and Israel gave Assad the nod; previously, the Israelis had demanded the Syrians be prevented from deploying their air power in the area.

Aoun remains at the French embassy, where the Syrian blitzkrieg forced him to seek refuge. The embassy is ringed by Syrian troops, demanding Aoun's release to the puppet Lebanese government they have installed. In a replay of the U.S. invasion of Panama, Syria would like to place Aoun on trial, supposedly for misappropriating Lebanese funds.

On Oct. 21, Lebanese Christian leader Dany Chamoun, his wife, and two small sons, were shot dead in their home in

East Beirut, murdered by a professional hit squad in military uniform.

### Evil logic of Syria

The massacre of the Chamoun family fit in with the Syrian logic pursued since the military onslaught against East Beirut on Oct. 13. In the hours following Gen. Michel Aoun's decision to seek refuge at the French embassy, while calling on his troops to cease fighting, the Syrian troops lined up hundreds of Lebanese army officers against the wall and shot them. In the next days, hundreds more Lebanese army officers and civilian supporters of Aoun were executed or massacred, some beheaded with axes. Dozens of high-ranking officers, known to have been close to Aoun, such as Gen. Amer Shehab, former head of Aoun's military intelligence bureau, were kidnaped and sent to interrogation centers.

In a series of actions best described by former President Amin Gemayel, as being comparable to the Soviet massacre of the Polish Army at Katyn in 1939, the Syrian leadership made it clear that their policy was to eliminate not only the leadership of the former national resistance against their occupation, but also preemptively to kill anyone who could in the near future represent a pole of opposition.

After the elimination of the military leadership, Dany Chamoun was unfortunately a perfect target for the Syrians. In killing him and his family, they were not only killing one of the leading Lebanese politicians who had, from the outset, supported the military resistance led by Aoun, but they were also annihilating a family which had become one of Lebanon's leading institutions.

Indeed, Dany's father, Camille Chamoun, who died in 1987, had dominated Lebanon's political life for many decades, and had been President in the late 1950s. In 1958, Camille Chamoun had called on the U.S. administration of Dwight Eisenhower to send troops into Lebanon to prevent

a Nasserite takeover of the country. In a sinister turn of history, Chamoun's own son was murdered by Syrian forces which, today, are America's allies.

### **American complicity**

On many such occasions, it would be customary to report that Washington's silence on Syrian actions has been deafening. This time, though, Washington has not remained silent, but has come out actively apologizing for the Syrians. Interviewed in Paris on Oct. 21, Defense Secretary Richard Cheney stressed that most reports he had heard so far, had been "unconfirmed. I would want to have confirmation before making any comment." On Oct. 24, the official spokesman of the State Department commented lamely that "if" reports of Syrian massacres "were true, we would condemn them"!

The cynicism of such a posture is only too visible when compared to George Bush's announcement only the night before, that he would try Saddam Hussein for crimes against humanity. The policy is widening the divide between Europe, especially France, and the United States. There is a general uproar in France both at the Oct. 13 military onslaught, and at Chamoun's assassination. By Oct. 16, more than 150 parliamentarians from all parties were in the streets of Paris, demonstrating against Syria. The European Community refused on Oct. 23 to lift the economic embargo imposed in 1986 against Syria.

On Oct. 19, France officially called on the U.N. secretary general to open an investigation into the massacres. By Oct. 22, it was calling for a special meeting of the Security Council which Washington has been trying to stalemate. During a parliamentary debate on Oct. 24, French Foreign Minister Roland Dumas revealed that he had asked James Baker whether Washington had given Syria a green light to intervene. The U.S. secretary of state denied having given such a green light. However, the mere fact that Dumas had felt obliged to ask such a question, and then to make it public, underscores the suspicion between Paris and Washington.

In the Washingtonian world of doubletalk, Baker may even have told the truth. As indicated by a *New York Times* article on Oct. 19, the Syrian puppet regime of Lebanese "President" Elias Hrawi allegedly sent a message to Washington at the beginning of the month, requesting clarification as to America's reaction, should he call on the Syrians to wipe Aoun out. The answer was simple enough: You are the legitimate government; if you call on Syria and succeed, we will approve; if you fail, we will deplore! A few days later, Hrawi was in Damascus.

### **French policy on the line**

Although France has protested the murder of Dany Chamoun, the Mitterrand government has failed to draw the consequences of the Lebanese events for its overall policy in the Mideast, where French troops have been sent to back up the Anglo-American military adventure. This point was

forcefully made in a commentary published in the Paris daily *Libération*, and written by former French Chief of Staff General Lacaze, where he charged that no one is telling the truth about the Gulf and Lebanon crisis:

"Telling the truth would be to explain why we, rightly, did not accept the violation of our residence in Kuwait, but accepted Israeli artillery bombardment of our embassy in Beirut in 1982, with three wounded, without any protest or retaliation. . . . Telling the truth would be also to acknowledge to the French population that, while being hostile to a terrorist Syria which has massacred our soldiers, killed our ambassador and occupies friendly Lebanon, [Syria] is our ally in Saudi Arabia. . . . Telling the truth, would be also not to hide from the French population that the United States does not give a damn about Lebanon, which does not have any oil. . . .

"If these truths were told, then the French people could understand that, in the name of a complacent *raison d'état*, we have sent into the desert of Arabia, for nothing, without any clear mission and without real support, the cream of our army; that we are supporting the dubious legality of a Lebanese President elected under the protection of Syrian bayonets, and that we would fight alongside a Syrian state which, in three days, razed to the ground its city of Hama and killed 20,000 of its inhabitants. . . . But the government won't dare explain these truths. I do not think that there is in France, a government with a clearly defined policy—hence how can it be expected to tell the truth?"

### **The imperial dreams**

Meanwhile, Washington is making no secret that it considers the Syrian actions a "step forward in the peace process." Indeed, as discussed during the meeting of James Baker with Hafez al-Assad in September, the move into Lebanon is integral to the plans for a separate peace treaty between Israel and Syria, a peace treaty based on both countries' redrawing the map of the region to their advantage, and at the expense of Lebanon, Jordan, and the Palestinians. For Syria, there could even be a special prize in case of a Gulf war: integration of a good chunk of Iraq into "Greater Syria."

After the Christians, Syria's next target will be the Palestinian refugee camps in Tyre and Sidon, where Syria will use one of the local militias, Amal or Hezbollah, depending on the allegiances of the times, to do its dirty work.

The convergence with the ongoing showdown between the Israeli government and the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories is no coincidence. Inside Israel a "popular" momentum is being built on the need to expel all of the Palestinians, obviously to Jordan. Faced with total economic collapse, still cut off from any international economic assistance, and at the mercy of Syria as its only outlet for international trade, Jordan has no capacity to resist such schemes.