

Muhammad Shamsul Huq

THE TRAGEDY IN LEBANON : ITS REGIO-POLITICAL AND GEO-STRATEGIC CONTEXT AND THE OUTLOOK FOR PEACE

1. Introductory

The entire world stood shocked and dismayed at the invasion of Lebanon by Israel and the massive and horrifying destruction of life and property that came in its wake. Much of the beautiful city of Beirut was reduced to rubble. Civilians in thousands, mostly women and children, were killed or maimed and many more rendered homeless. For long spells of time the survivors were denied food, water and medicine with electric power shut down, and, the Red Cross and other humanitarian organizations with the urgently needed relief materials were not permitted to enter the besieged city. These atrocities assumed even a more gruesome form when, soon after the evacuation of the Palestinian guerrillas, Israel in gross violation of the Tripartite Agreement moved her troops, supported by tanks and planes, into West Beirut after the withdrawal of the Multinational Force. Unarmed Palestinian refugees and Lebanese civilian population including women and children were mercilessly butchered. Such savagery has no parallel in peace-time history, and, has naturally been condemned by the world community as a dastardly crime against humanity.

The paper is organized in four parts: (i) Part one is an analysis of the events leading to the invasion of Lebanon. (ii) Part two is a study of the political developments within the state of Lebanon including the settlement of the Palestinian refugees and the presence of the Syrian force (ADF) in Lebanon and the outlook for peace and stability in Lebanon after the withdrawal of the Syrian force and PLO commandos (iii) Part three deals with the concerns of the great powers

as reflected in their foreign policies in the region vis-a-vis the perception by the states in the region, of their own security interests. (iv) Part four examines against the backdrop of these complex factors the prospect for a durable peace in the region.

2. The course of events preceding the invasion of Lebanon

The Israeli invasion of Lebanon did not come as a surprise. That such an invasion was imminent was known to all the principal actors on the Lebanese political scene, such as, the Syrians, the PLO, the United States of America, the EEC countries, and the Arab States. Israel had already infiltrated into Lebanon with impunity and commanded its southern region with its eye on the precious waters of the river 'Litani' and the potential market of Lebanon.

Israel was clearly not contented with its success in creating in southern Lebanon what was known as the "Haddad Land".¹ Its intention was to have a military solution to the problem presented by the Syrian (Arab Deterrant Force) and the Palestinian commandos in Lebanon by throwing them out of Lebanon. Despite the grave injury inflicted upon the Palestinians by their eviction from their own homeland, Israel continued to look upon them as its mortal enemy and their struggle for a state of their own as terrorist activity.

Israel's desire for such military invasion of Lebanon appeared to have been fuelled by several factors :

- (a) The most important among them was the supply of American military aid in massive doses (\$ 14.9 billion since 1948)² which enabled it to build up a formidable fighting machine, and, made it increasingly more militant, aggressive and arrogant.
- (b) Its spectacular success in destroying the nuclear plant in Iraq without drawing any retaliatory action added to its arrogance and adventurism.

1. Peter Mansfield, "Lebanon," in *Arabia: The Islamic World Review*, No. 11, July, 1982, p. 6

2. *Time*, August 16, 1982, p. 8.

- (c) With Egypt neutralized by the Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty, the combined military strength of the remaining Arab nations was no match for the military might of Israel.
- (d) The fratricidal combat in which two major Middle-Eastern states, Iraq and Iran, were locked added to the divisive forces at work in the region, further to the military advantage of Israel.
- (e) Foreign policy of the present United States administration showed very little perception of the security concerns of the Arab states and laid its emphasis on building up a strategic consensus against the "larger threat of Soviet expansion".³ Israel could see in this policy a convergence of United States and Israeli objectives in regard to the ejection of pro-Soviet Syrian and Palestinian guerrilla forces from Lebanon and the setting up of a pro-Israel and pro-United States Government in Lebanon.
- (f) Though a low-profile generally characterized the Saudi foreign-policy, Prince Fahd (now King Fahd) took a rather bold initiative in presenting his "8-Point Plan"⁴ for a peaceful political solution of the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Palestinian problem. The initial response of the PLO leader Yassir Arafat and President Reagan to this plan was encouraging. But, this initiative was not followed up for lack of a consensus within the Arab leadership. Thus, the prospect for resumption of serious negotiations outside the Camp David Plan for a comprehensive peace in the Middle-East was allowed to recede, a situation evidently favouring the militant leaders of Israel in their design for renewed acts of aggression.
- (g) Israel started escalating the use of force since April, 1982. She appeared to have used the peace negotiations of

3. Christopher Van Hollen, "Don't Engulf the Gulf," *Foreign Affairs*, Summer, 1981, P. 1068 (58 East 68th Street, New York, N.Y. 10021)

4. 8-Point Fahd Plan

American Special Envoy Philip Habib as a smoke-screen for deployment of a massive force for the planned invasion.

- (h) With Soviet Russia preoccupied in Afghanistan and Poland, the Arab nations in disarray, Iraq and Iran still locked in an armed conflict, conscious of her vast military superiority and confident of United States support at the United Nations, the circumstances could not be more favourable and the time more opportune for Israel to launch finally a large-scale invasion of Lebanon.

The invasion of Lebanon commenced on June 6 (preceded by heavy aerial bombing on June 4) on the pretext of creating a 25-mile buffer-zone for reasons of its security. Actually, it penetrated much deeper. Besides, the commitment of a huge force of 100,000 men, 800 tanks, and 100 F-16 jets against a small force of 20,000 men, the combined strength of the Palestinians and their allies, Israel showed no scruple in unleashing death and destruction on civilian population by repeated violation of the cease-fire. It was, thus evident that Israel's aim was clearly the physical liquidation of the PLO guerrillas regardless of the cost in terms of the non-combatant civilian casualties and destruction of property. By holding out against the massive Israeli attack from land, sea and air for as long as 2 months, the PLO displayed great valour and by agreeing to move out of W. Beirut (Lebanon), commendable political acumen which earned them international goodwill. Beirut already in ruins was, also, spared further destruction and the besieged civilian population further misery and suffering. (The massacre to follow was not foreseen.)

According to an American press report, repeated cease-fire violations causing heavy civilian casualties posed a serious threat to the Philip Habib Mission in its most crucial stage. President Reagan was "shocked" and "expressed his outrage" to Begin. White House aides "released a photograph of a grim-faced Reagan on the telephone". "Thirty minutes later Begin called back to assure Reagan that the cease-fire was in place and holding". An unanswered question raised in this context by a Lebanese columnist was: "Reagan

has shown he can stop Israel destroying Beirut. So, why didn't he stop Begin before it came to this"?⁵

3. The historical background and political scenario of Lebanon

It would, however, be extremely simplistic to believe that the evacuation of the Palestinian commandos and the Syrian force from Lebanon would bring peace to Lebanon and it would be free of all threats to its sovereignty and territorial integrity. The political scenario in Lebanon is extremely complex and placed in perspective only when viewed against its historical backdrop.

Lebanon considers itself an Arab state inspite of the deep imprint of European influence on its culture. Three thousand four hundred sq. miles in area with a population of about 3 million, Lebanon was until the end of the First World War part of the Ottoman empire and emerged as a sovereign state in 1945⁶ following the termination of the French mandate. (French troops finally pulled out in 1946). The territorial area of the new state of Lebanon was enlarged at the expense of Syria by adding to Lebanon the ports of Tripoli, Beirut and Sidon along with the Bekka plain and the land to the south upto the border of the former Palestine.

Religion in Lebanon appeared to have a more important political significance than in any other Arab state. Religion of a citizen of Lebanon is in effect an essential element of his/her political identity and also an important determinant in political power sharing by the various religious communities. As such, the population figures are a matter of considerable dispute. The major communities are (i) Christians - Maronite, Orthodox (Greek and Armenian), Catholics, (Greek, Armenian and Roman) and Protestants; (ii) Muslims - Sunni and Shi'ite and the Druze. According to the covenant provisions the representation in the Chamber of Deputies is shared by the Christians and Muslims in the ratio

5. *Newsweek*, August 23, 1982, P. 9.

6. Edgar O'Ballance, "Lebanon: Still A Flash Point", *Army Quarterly and Defence Journal*, Vol. 110, No.1, Jan. 1980, p. 16.

[of 6:5, the high offices of the state also shared in the same ratio. The President is a maronite Christian, the Prime Minister a Sunni Muslim, the Army commander and the Head of Surete General are maronite Christians, the Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies, a Shi'ite Muslim, and the Deputy Speaker a Greek orthodox Christian.⁷

An important change in the demographic structure of Lebanon took place in 1948 when after their eviction from their homeland, about 90,000 Palestinian refugees were settled in Lebanon in refugee camps. After the "6-day war of 1967", hundreds of Palestinian guerrillas moved into Lebanon.⁸ This led to a conflict between them and the Lebanese Army, which was, however, ended with the signing of the Cairo Agreement through the intervention of the late President Nasser. A large part of to-day's Palestinian population in Lebanon (estimated at about 400,000) were born in Lebanon.

The religious and ethnic differences in Lebanon compounded by political factiousness have proved to be veritable sources of tension and conflict. Initially starting as a conflict between the Christian militia and the armed Palestinian guerrillas, it soon turned into a complex and multi-dimensional civil war in April, 1975.⁹

In the first phase, the conflict was between Christians and Muslims. This struggle between the Muslims and Christians came to be labelled as an encounter between the "Left" and the "Right". Muslims demanding the changes in the status quo were characterized as the radicals or the "leftists", and the Christians opposing change as the conservatives or the "rightists". This political scenario was complicated by the support received by the Muslims from such radical and left-wing groups as the local communists as well as the

7. Abbas Khalidar and Micheal Burrell, "LEBANON: The collapse of a State." *Conflict Studies*, No. 74, August, 1976 (Eastern Press Ltd. London & Reading); pp. 1-3; *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Vol. 10. Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc. Chicago, 1973-74 pp. 764-5. *Encyclopaedia of the Third World*, Vol. II (Mansell, London, 1979), P. 834.

8. Edgar O'Ballance, *op cit*, p. 16.

9. Abbas Khalidar *et al.*, *op cit*.

Pan-Arabist group, the leaders of which were curiously enough, by and large, Christians.

The emergence of the Phalange (the "Kataeb") emulating the Fascist example of the 1930's in Europe was a militant Christian response to the demands of the Muslims by opposing any compromise. At the other extreme was the Syrian National Social Party advocating unity with Syria and the creation of a Syrian nation.¹⁰ (As earlier mentioned, during the period of the French mandate some important areas were taken out of Syria and added to Lebanon).

The intrusion of Palestinian guerrillas into internal Lebanese politics, using the dynamics of local politics to their advantage in order to further their group interest added another dimension to the conflict and the already complicated political scene of Lebanon. The guerrillas were divided into "Fatah", the largest group led by Yassir Arafat of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) and the "Rejectionist Front" led by Dr. George Habash of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). Another dimension to the conflict can be seen in the support lent to the Arab guerrillas by the Arab states, especially Syria. Syrian objective was to assist the guerrillas, to check the "Rejectionists" and prevent the partition of Lebanon as threatened by the Christians.¹¹

The Syrians in their attempt to pacify and conciliate the Christians alienated the leftist front and the guerrillas went out of their control. Curiously enough, Damascus Pact of 1976 was not acceptable to the Muslims because Arafat declined to accept it with a view not to offend the "Rejectionists". As the struggle continued, the Christian elements severed their connection with the armed groups like the "Baathists", "Communists" and "Nasse-rites". The Sunnis joined hands with the Shi'ites under the leadership of Kamal Jumblatt, a Druze. It turned into a war between

10. *Ibid.*

11. *Ibid.*

Christians and Muslims with a strange deviation that the Lebanese Muslims fought against the Palestinian Muslims.

Syria despatched to Lebanon three brigades of the "Palestine Liberation Army" (already conscripted into Syrian Army) under Syrian officers. Regular units of Syrian troops entered Lebanon in June 1976. After a long and fierce fighting with the Palestinian guerrillas they were able to enter Beirut. But, the Christians (who were saved twice by the Syrians) eventually fell out with the Syrians, and, with arms from Israel successfully resisted the Syrians. In October 1976, the Syrian Army of 25,000 was designated as the Arab Deterrant Force (ADF).¹² The city of Beirut became divided into two parts, Muslim and Christian.

The picture of Lebanon emerging from its chequered history till the Israeli invasion in June is that of a country riddled with numerous parties and factions, divided by their divergent religious, political and ideological beliefs. Involved in a power-struggle, most of them maintained their own militia, and in some cases, their own territorial strongholds.

Politically and militarily the most powerful group is the Maronite Christian "Phalange Party" founded by Pierre Gemayel, president of the party. His 34-year old son Bashir Gemayel was the commander of the Phalange dominated Lebanese Forces Militia that linked up with Israel's invading force around Beirut to trap the Palestinian guerrillas and the PLO leader Yassir Arafat.¹³ Following the tragic death of Bashir Gemayel soon after his election as the new President of Lebanon, his elder brother Amin Gemayel was elected as the new President.

The Lebanese forces with a political coalition known as the Lebanese Front, headed nominally by Camille Chamoun, a former President and head of the National Liberal Party, virtually ran a state within a state in East Beirut and surrounding mountains. The Leba-

12. Edgar O'Ballance, *op cit.*, p. 18.

13. *Emirate News*, June 18, 1982, p. 5.

The second most important Muslim group is the "Amal", a Shi'ite Muslim Party founded by Moussa Sadr (who disappeared reportedly during a visit to Lybia) in 1978. The "Amal" subscribes to the Islamic teachings of Iran's Imam Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. Before the Israeli invasion, "Amal" militia-men were found fighting the Palestinian guerrillas, the National Movement groups in Beirut, South Lebanon, and Bekka valley point. During the Israeli invasion, they sank their differences with other Muslim groups and fought against Israel. The Shi'ites, economically backward, estimated to number 950,000, is to-day considered to be the largest single group in Lebanon. The Muslim and the leftist parties were also united in their opposition to the election of Beshir Gemayel as the new President since he was regarded as an Israeli protege.

It will appear from the above analysis of the political scenario in Lebanon and the course of historical events shaping it that peace and stability in Lebanon and its territorial integrity depend on a complex set of factors governed by interacting forces within and outside the country. Even if the Palestinian guerrillas and the Syrian Force (ADF) were removed from all of Lebanon, other powerful groups contending for power constituted a force to reckon with. All of these parties including "Amal" were united by the Israeli invasion. Following the tragic death of Beshir Gemayel the crisis in Lebanon has been deepened by Israel's penetration into West Beirut in violation of the peace treaty and the brutal massacre of the unarmed Palestinians refugees and Lebanese civilian population (reportedly, with the help of some members of the right wing Christian militia). Amin Gemayel, elder brother of Beshir Gemayel elected as the new President of Lebanon faces a formidable challenge. Will he be able to ensure Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon and demonstrate the statesmanlike leadership needed to bring about national reconciliation and unity and win the confidence of the dissident groups which also include Christians? (It may be noted that some dissidents within the Phalangists were arrested on a charge of murdering Beshir Gemayel and others killed by the bomb-blast). If he fails to do so, and takes

nese Front also includes Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholic, Armenian Christians and a small number of right wing Muslims.

In the south, Sa'ad Haddad, the Greek Catholic renegade Major from the Lebanese Army has with Israel's assistance created what he calls "The Republic of Free Lebanon", commonly known as "Haddad Land". The Lebanese Front disavows any connection with him. Haddad's militia-men are heavily dependent on Israel for practically everything. During Israel's invasion of Lebanon, Israel's Prime Minister reportedly handed over to Haddad the "Beaufort Castle", formerly a stronghold of the Palestinian guerrillas.¹⁴

Notable among other Christian leaders are former President Suleiman Franjeh who had sided with the Phalange leader Gemayel against the Muslim dominated leftists in 1975-76 Civil War, but afterwards joined the Syrians in 1976 under the Arab League Mandate. Camille Chamoun, a former President, as earlier mentioned, is the leader of the National Liberal Party which virtually merged with the Phalange under the name of the Lebanese Front.

Among the Muslims, the most important party is the "National Movement" founded in 1976, originally with 16 groups since reduced to 13. The coalition leader is Walid Jumlatt (of the Druze), who is also the leader of the Socialist Progressive Party. The members of the National Movement stood by the side of the PLO and fought Israel. But, until the invasion in June, they mostly battled among themselves instead of planning a joint political and military strategy. Jumlatt's own militia consists of a group of tough fighters and their first priority is to defend their own home and hearth. The largest militia in the National Movement belongs to a Nasserite group known as "Murabitoun (ambushers)". The coalition also includes two communist parties, one of them headed by a maronite Christian, and two Baathist parties affiliated to the two rival socialist regimes of Syria and Iraq.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

recourse to the use of force with assistance from Israel to subdue the dissident groups (comprising over 50 per cent of the nation's population to whom Israel is an anathema), and if he is unable to rehabilitate the homeless Palestinian refugees, it will inevitably lead to an extended Arab-Israeli conflict, with its serious repercussions on peace not only in Lebanon but in the entire region. Peace in Lebanon is, thus, clearly indivisible from peace in the Middle-East and can not be secured merely by removal of the Palestinian guerrillas and the Syrian force from Beirut or even Lebanon.

4. The regio-political and geo-strategic factors

The region, currently known as the Middle-East, has been a cradle of human civilization. It passed through many historical phases and witnessed the rise and fall of many powers. The vicissitudes of time and history have naturally left their deep imprint on the social, economic and political structure of the region.¹⁵

The period commencing with the out-break of World War I was one of significant political and economic transformation for the region. The most notable among the developments during this period was the end of the colonial rule and the emergence of several new states varying in size, population and resources.

All of the states in the region except Iran speak Arabic. However, Pan-Arabism failed to strike any deep roots among the Arab states. Despite their common language, the Arab World presents the picture of a very complex universe, characterized by a continuing struggle between centripetal and centrifugal forces. Each of these

15. P.K.H. Hitti, *History of the Arabs*, 8th ed. (1964). *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, *op. cit.* Syed Ameer Ali, *The Spirit of Islam*. (Christophers, London, Reprint Rev. 1961). Peter Mansfield, *The Arabs* (Allen Lane, Penguin Books Ltd. London, 1976). Philip Hitti, *Syria: A short History* (London, 1961). Maxime Rodinson, *Mohammad* (Allen Lane, London, 1971). H. A. R. Gibb, *Mohammedanism* (London, 1953). W. C. Smith, *Islam in Modern History*, (Princeton, 1957).

states in the region has developed its own social, economic and political system according to its own traditions and prevailing objective conditions. The internal and external policies of these states are profoundly influenced by the respective perspective of the individual state, an outcome of the interaction of many forces, such as, the political power structure, and the religious, ethnic and other sub-national forces. They are all, however, proud of their Islamic heritage which they share with other Islamic countries.¹⁶

Apart from the divisive forces rooted in the long and turbulent history of the region, the seed of a new discord was sown in the creation of Israel after World War II, which in course of time took the shape of a major Arab-Israeli conflict.¹⁷ While the "Wandering Jews" from many lands found a new homeland, the Palestinians evicted by force from their own homes in Palestine were turned literally into stateless and homeless "Wandering Palestinians". To the great shock of the entire Islamic World and the international community Israel used its superior military might for new acts of aggression and illegal occupation of other Arab lands including the holy city of Jerusalem. The desecration of the Al-Aqsa mosque, the judaization and colonization of the illegally occupied territories, establishment of Jewish settlements and alteration of the Islamic character of the historic monuments sent a wave of shock and resentment throughout the Islamic World. The Arab-Israeli conflict and the Palestinian problem thus form inseparable parts of what is now regarded as the central problem of the Middle-East. The Organisation of the Islamic Conference was set up at the Islamic Summit at Rabat in 1969 and the Jerusalem Committee upgraded to the Ministerial level in 1979 to mobilize the united efforts of the Islamic World in dealing with this problem.

The centrality of this problem for the countries in the region is clearly reflected in their geo-political concerns and their perception of the strategic imperatives to secure and safeguard their national and

16. *Ibid.*

17. *Ibid.*

regional security interests. Their deep-seated political sensitivity to this problem was demonstrated by the severance of relations with Egypt which historically, culturally and politically had played a key-role in the Arab World. This sensitivity was never blunted by the differences and divisions among the Arab nations or by the discords that marked the relations between some Arab nations and the Palestinians from time to time. The commonality and intensity of this sensitivity had been further demonstrated by the denunciation of Israel's invasion of Lebanon and by the demands by all Arab countries including Egypt and also by all members of Organisation of the Islamic Conference for the immediate withdrawal of Israel from Lebanon and other illegally occupied Arab territories and the creation of a state for the Palestinians in their own homeland.

A second dimension in their perception of the security interests of the region is linked to the great power rivalry. Considering the strategic importance of this region, they firmly believe that their security in the region can be best ensured by a "hands-off" policy on the part of the superpowers and making the countries in the region responsible for their security without any external intervention. The formation of the Gulf Co-operation Council is a reflection of this perception.

Great power concern over this region is a reality that cannot, however, be overlooked. One of the causes lies in the great strategic importance of its location, and, another in the rich oil-deposits in the region, which have both economic and strategic importance. Though currently Soviet Russia does not need the oil of this region, the situation may alter with the depletion of her oil-reserves in the next few decades. Her presence in South Yemen, the Horn of Africa and Afghanistan is clearly an indicator of the geo-political importance attached by her to this region.

To the Western countries the region is, of course, of vital importance and of great strategic concern. West European countries and Japan are dependent heavily and United States in a significant degree on the supply of oil from this region. This dependence has not been

changed by the present glut in the oil-market. (EEC countries 60%; United States 11%; and Japan 70%). The security of the Gulf region is, therefore, a matter of paramount interest to them. For the same reason Soviet penetration into this area in any form is unwelcome to them.

The high stakes of the United States and the western countries in this region were demonstrated by the military support readily extended to President Chamoun in 1958 in the wake of an armed insurrection in Lebanon after the Suez crisis. The present United States administration has also entered into arrangements with a number of countries in the region for military co-operation in various forms as a part of her defence strategy for this region. A further example was the stationing and restationing of the multinational (American, French and Italian) force in Beirut during the recent Lebanese crisis.

Outside the Camp David Plan rejected by the Arab states (except Egypt), United States did not in the past show any other initiative for the resolution of the Arab-Israel conflict. Besides a general endorsement of the Camp David Plan, it does not appear that the Reagan Administration had (until the Lebanese crisis) evolved any definite policy with a realistic and long-term perspective to guide her relations with the countries in the Middle-East in coping with the problems that beset this region.

However, the foreign policy statements made from time to time in the past by President Reagan, the former Secretary of the State Haig and other aides indicated that United States policy towards the Middle-East were guided mainly by the following factors :

(i) Her central concern for deterring what was perceived by her as the Soviet threats globally; (ii) following as a corollary from this concern, Soviet Union was seen by her as the main threat to this region of great strategic and economic importance to the western countries; hence, co-operation with the friendly countries in the region aimed at creating a "strategic entity" to serve as a shield from

Pakistan to Turkey to thwart Moscow, (iii) for the same reason, her policy would be to assist efforts directed to neutralize the pro-Soviet countries in the region, thus, lending an added importance to military, economic and moral support to Israel in containing Syria and PLO regarded by her as Soviet proteges. (iv) In this scenario Arab-Israeli conflict and the Palestinian problem were viewed as peripheral to her central concern of neutralizing pro-Soviet Syria and PLO. (v) However, Egypt-Israel Peace-treaty brought about a major change in the political scenario and the military power balance in the region. The United States as well as Israel were fully aware that after the signing of the Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty, the other Arab States in the region were incapable of posing any serious threat to Israel, despite their rejection of the Camp David Plan. Yet the United States continued to assist Israel in her arms build-up without any regard to the consternation expressed by the Arab countries over the security-threat posed by Israel in this region.

The West European countries with their longer and closer association with this region showed a more insightful perception of the developing strategic and political situation in the region as reflected in their support to the rights of the Palestinians. Their understanding of the explosive repercussions of continuing Middle-East crisis and Israel's renewed acts of aggression accounted for the position taken by them against Israel's invasion of Lebanon. But, unfortunately, these countries could do very little to hold Israel in leash. However, the value of their comprehension of the nature and implications of the problem and of their moral and political support to its speedy solution in terms of its impact on the United States and world conscience can hardly be over-stressed.

5. The Prospect for Durable Peace

Events in the region have been moving so fast as to render an objective assessment of the outlook for peace in the region extremely hazardous. At the same time, these events have unleashed certain forces which are bound to have a profound influence on the future of peace and stability in the region.

In the peace process the importance of a speedy solution of the Lebanese crisis by restoring the authority of the lawful Government of Lebanon throughout the Lebanese territory and a national reconciliation among the contending political parties can hardly be overstressed. This immediate objective should not, however, obscure the long-term objective of a just, comprehensive and durable peace in the Middle-East, with which it is interlocked. It will appear from the analyses in the foregoing sections that the eruptions of violence in the region were an inevitable outcome of causes embedded in a complex set of geo-political and strategic factors.

One of these important factors was the great power concern over this region as reflected in their foreign policies. In this context, the United States' foreign policy was evidently of the greatest relevance and import. The analysis of the United States foreign policy in a foregoing section indicated that the present administration did not, strictly speaking, have any well-defined policy for the Middle-East. The measures adopted from time to time in dealing with the smouldering Middle-East situation, as noted earlier, emanated from the central concern of the Reagan Administration to counter Soviet expansionism.

The administration's perspective in respect of the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Palestinian problem seemed to be shaped by three major concerns:

- (i) International (Geo-political) : United States' global concerns, "power imbalance" and the "Soviet threat" as perceived by her and the measures to contain this threat.
- (ii) National (internal) : Internal compulsions stemming from commitments, economic and political, of the present administration, and public opinion (including a strong Zionist lobby) within the United States.

- (iii) Regional (Middle-East) : Security perception and political sensitivities of the countries in the Middle-East in which a speedy resolution of Arab-Israeli conflict and the Palestinian problem was viewed as central to the strategic interests of the region.

The last appears to have received the least consideration and the lowest priority in United States foreign policy planning. As a result, a wide gap was created between United States and Middle-East countries in their perception of the security needs of the region.

It is imperative even from the United States foreign policy point of view that the new realities and objective conditions in the Middle-East are properly grasped. The region has, in recent times, gone through a geo-political transformation. The impact of the following events in particular on the geo-political and geo-strategic situation in the region is likely to be far-reaching:

(i) The Israeli invasion of Lebanon, the brutal massacre in Beirut and the miserable plight of the Palestinian refugees have clearly exacerbated the feelings of the Arabs and Palestinians and are bound to deepen the hostility towards Israel and strengthen the hands of the radical elements who advocate the use of force in meeting force.

(ii) The sense of added frustration and indignation created by the tragedy in Lebanon may also be used as a new fuel in inflaming the existing inter-Arab differences and dissension, thus, jeopardizing the security and stability of the region. This is a major concern of the governments of the region and reflected in the following observation of King Fahd on the invasion of Lebanon: "The plot hatched by the enemies of Islam against us do not stop at that (massacre). They are not confined to invasion and occupation. What is more dangerous is to fight us from within by two of their most deadly weapons: sowing the seeds of dissension among our nations and driving our young men to extremes by exploiting the

indignation prevailing among our masses as a result of the many injustices committed by East and West".¹⁸

(iii) According to many analysts, the dispersal of the Palestinian guerrillas to several Arab States may prove counterproductive. It may have the effect of weakening the power base of the PLO leader Chairman Yassir Arafat. On the other hand, it will provide the militant Palestinians with an opportunity to operate over a wider field, (a large segment of the population in the Gulf states is of the Palestinian origin.) acting on the intensely bitter resentment and hatred against Israel, thus, rendering an already volatile region more volatile.

(iv) The continuing war between Iraq and Iran has the potential of flaring up into an Arab-Iran conflict in view of the economic and military aid received by Iraq from some Arab countries, and, the known political and ideological differences between Iran and several Arab countries. The Iranian Revolutionary forces now commanding strategic positions on the Gulf have also a new political weapon provided by Israel through her brutal atrocities in Lebanon, Palestinian guerrillas evicted from West Beirut and the state of terror and distress in which the surviving members of their families and other Palestinians found themselves after their withdrawal. The Iran-Iraq conflict, unless immediately halted, can, therefore, add a serious new dimension to the already existing threats to peace and stability in the entire gulf-region.

In view of the highly volatile situation in the region, aggravated manifold by the brutal massacre in West Beirut, the peace-efforts need to be intensified and accelerated. Time is of the very essence. In this process, the United States appears to have both a moral responsibility and a unique opportunity.

The moral responsibility stems from the following facts :

(i) The United States stood singled out as the only western democracy not only acquiescing in Israeli aggression in Lebanon but also acting to frustrate the various moves initiated at the United

18. King Fahd's address.



***Please
send me
biiss
journal***

[*block letters Please*]

I am willing to subscribe to **biiss journal**

For 1 Year 2 Years 3 Years.

Name

Address.....

Country

Enclosed my Cheque/Money Order/Draft/
Unesco Coupons for :

.....
Date..... Signature.....

BISS
BY AIR MAIL
PAR AVION

STAMP
HERE

TO
PUBLICATION OFFICER
BANGLADESH INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL
AND STRATEGIC STUDIES
1/46, ELEPHANT ROAD (FORMER AIR HOUSE),
DHAKA, BANGLADESH

Nations by other countries, to condemn and halt Israeli aggression in Lebanon (from the launching of the invasion till the siege of Beirut).

(ii) Despite the United States' overt disapproval of the invasion of Lebanon, Israeli action to oust the pro-Russian, Palestinian guerrillas and the Syrian force from Lebanon appeared to fall neatly into the American foreign policy plan to create a "strategic consensus against Soviet expansion in the Middle-East", United States posture on the Lebanese crisis was, thus, seen as an outright contradiction of her position on the Falklands, Poland, Afghanistan and Kampuchea.

(iii) Subsequent events appeared to confirm the charge levelled against Israel that her real objective was the physical extermination of the Palestinians. The massive bombardment of West Beirut under siege resulting in reckless destruction of life and property could not be explained in any other way. Israel used American arms and her political support in perpetrating this carnage and was halted only when President Reagan expressed his outrage. It was also to be noted that the massive flow of military and economic aid (US \$ 24 billion since 1948) and the continuing arms build-up even after the neutralization of Egypt radically changed the military balance in favour of Israel and emboldened her to embark on new acts of aggression and violence against her Arab neighbours.

(iv) What followed the withdrawal of the multinational force after the evacuation of the Palestinian guerrillas and the Syrian force from West Beirut was, indeed, most horrifying. In gross violation of the Tripartite Agreement the Israeli troops moved into West Beirut and there was a holocaust when unarmed men, women and children, most of them huddled in refugee camps, were mercilessly butchered. While Israel blamed this brutal massacre on the right wing Christian militia of the Phalangist and the renegade Sa'ad Haddad, both Amin Gemayel, a leader of the Phalangist and the newly-elected President of Lebanon and Sa'ad Haddad disowned any part in this brutal massacre. The responsibility for this unprecedented and barbarous butchery, of course, rested squarely on Israel, since West Beirut was sealed up by Israeli forces and the two refugee camps, Shatila and

Sabra, the scenes of the ghastly massacre, were found surrounded by Israeli tanks. Israel's former Foreign Minister Abba Eban described the invasion of Beirut "as the most deadly failure in Israel's modern history".¹⁹

(v) According to an American press report,²⁰ "United States officials were furious with the Israelis". "They were sitting up there in tanks on the ridges surrounding the area and looking down", complained one United States diplomat. To some American officials, "the killing appeared deliberate". "No body was crushed under falling buildings", said one. "They were murdered". President Reagan also denounced Israel. "All people must share our outrage and revulsion (at) the murders, which, included women and children." He said, "We strongly opposed Israel's move into West Beirut.....both because it was wrong in principle and for fear that it would provoke further fighting". "Israel", said the President, "claimed that its moves would prevent the kind of tragedy which has now occurred". President Reagan reportedly observed at a National Security Council Meeting that "Israel is no longer David. It is Goliath".²¹ It appears, Americans felt betrayed. "We quickly found out", said a senior United States official, "that Begin had lied to us again". Some of Reagan's key advisers were convinced that the Israelis meant to sabotage the President's new peace plan for the Middle East".²²

(vi) Even if it is accepted that the United States was an unwitting victim of Israeli trap and betrayal, the fact remained that the United States was the principal actor in the negotiations leading to the Tripartite Agreement. Besides, the brutal atrocities committed by Israel during the siege of West Beirut served as an unmistakable warning of Israel's intentions. Yet, the Tripartite Agreement curiously enough did not provide for the withdrawal of the Israeli force from Beirut simultaneously with the evacuation of the Palestinian guerrillas,

19. *Time*, October 4, 1982, p. 12.

20. *Time*, September 27, 1982, p. 9.

21. *Newsweek*, October 4, 1982, p. 10.

22. *Time*, September 27, 1982, pp. 9-10.

or include other safeguards, for example, through the continued presence of the multinational force (which had to return after the massacre) for the protection of the unarmed civilian population. If this was due to the trust reposed in Israel by United States, the Israeli betrayal does not absolve the United States from its share of the responsibility as the guarantor of the agreement. A symbolic admission of this responsibility was the United States support to the United Nations Security Council Resolution No. 520 condemning Israel for the brutal massacre in West Beirut and demanding her immediate withdrawal from there.

The United States has, however, a unique opportunity to rehabilitate her position morally and politically by following up President Reagan's peace-initiative with renewed efforts for a just, comprehensive and durable peace. She can now act from a "vantage point" which never existed before.

(i) Firstly, the Arab leaders (including the PLO Chairman Yassir Arafat) for the first time reached a consensus at the FEZ summit in September in adopting a conciliatory attitude in Israel-Arab conflict by committing them to the principle of the peaceful coexistence of all states in the region. This historic gesture should pave the way to an early end of Israel-Arab conflict and the Palestinian problem if the United States acts with speed, firmness and a sense of fair-play.

(ii) Secondly, the brutal massacre in West Beirut has sent a wave of shock and resentment throughout the world including Israel. The weight of public opinion against Begin within Israel was reflected in the reluctant agreement of Begin to an enquiry into Beirut massacre. According to one press report,²³ "In Israel people complained that Begin was leading them deeper, and deeper into the swamp", said Yossi Sodrid, (a prominent member of the Israeli Knesset). Some analysts also think that "horrifying scenes of slaughter in Beirut may yet constitute another, more effective form of pressure on Israel". Israel's newspapers reflected the mood. In the opinion of the *Jerusalem Post*, "This year's Rosh Hashanah (the Jewish New Year)

23. *Time*, October 4, 1982, p. 8.

would be remembered as Rosh Hashanah of shame. We have all been made accomplices to the horrible massacre in West Beirut".²⁴ As the independent newspaper "Haaretz" put it, many Israelis believed that "the stain of Sabra and Shatila has stuck to us and we shall not be able to erase it".²⁵

(iii) If the United States feels betrayed by the ghastly massacre in Beirut, a most tragic and shameful event in human history, she is, on a moral ground stronger than ever before to make Israel realize that her hunger for security can not be satisfied through the use of brute force. *The time is now to press home to Israel the imperative need for reaching a peaceful settlement with her Arab neighbours based on justice and honour.*

(iv) Last, but not least, the United States has the further advantage that, in carrying forward her peace efforts, she does not currently face any geo-political impediment in the form of a confrontation with the Soviet Russia. Throughout the Lebanese crisis, except for some strongly worded letters addressed by Brezhnev to Reagan, Soviet Russia adopted what may be characterized as a "hands off" policy unlike in 1973 October War.

While stressing the special responsibility and opportunity of the United States in the peace efforts through a dynamic, creative and realistic Middle-East policy with a moral content, the important roles of the other actors on the scene, namely, Israel, the Arab States, the Palestinians, the new government of Lebanon and the United Nations cannot be underrated. It is also imperative for the Organization of the Islamic Conference to reactivate the Peace Committee set up at the Taif Islamic Summit with a view to ending the Iran-Iraq conflict which has seriously eroded the strength and unity of the countries in the region, thus, helping Israel in her aggressive designs.

The question uppermost in the minds of the peoples of the world rudely shaken by the ghastly tragedy in Lebanon is : Will peace

24. *Ibid.*

25. *Newsweek*, October 4, 1982, p. 10.

emerge at last 'phoenix-like' from the ashes of Beirut ? While the future will unfold the answer to this question, the world is watching in great anguish the future developments. This region has been long bedevilled by violence. The birth-place of three great religions with their messages of peace, compassion and brotherhood of mankind, the Middle-East needs and deserves to have peace, and the homeless and stateless Palestinians, a homeland and state of their own.