

Lebanon

Nick Medvecky

1969

The news of the fighting in Lebanon fills the headlines of the newspapers across the US. "Fall of Tripoli Looms," "Guerrillas Gain in Lebanon," and on and on. Why is there fighting? What are they fighting for?

Reading the mass media, watching one's TV, and listening to the news on the radio, quickly confirms the media's "confusion" on the dynamics raging all around them. There is not any understanding manifested beyond the "cowboys and Indians" mentality.

While I was in Lebanon, on and off from August 14th to September 16th, it was clearly apparent that an explosion was on the way. Wherever I went throughout the country, I could see the affinity that the people have for the Palestinian struggle and its leading organization, Al Fatah.

Almost daily clashes between the Lebanese military and Al Fatah took place. The people more and more took the side of Al Fatah and participated directly in these struggles.

Whereas in Jordan and Syria the commandos have fought for and won the ability to travel and operate freely, this is not the case in Lebanon. In Lebanon the government and military actively try to suppress and destroy these groups. Over the past several years many Fedayin have been killed and imprisoned. Al Fatah has had to rely directly on the support of the Lebanese masses for the ability to operate even underground.

Al Fatah's stated position towards the various Arab countries that border on Palestine (Israel) and have great numbers of Palestinian refugees in their states, has been and is, "Al Fatah is committed to the principle of non-intervention in the internal affairs of the Arab countries. Simultaneously, Al Fatah expects no interference in its own affairs and considers the independence of its revolution as a basic condition for its success."

In speaking with the leadership of Al Fatah I was told that the Fedayin's specific attitude towards the Lebanese military was one of "fighting only in self-defense."

In interviews with the rank-and-file commandos the Al Fatah policy was explained as "We hope for no struggle with the Arab soldiers... they are brothers to us... but if forced to, we will fight."

Often the newspapers were full of stories on clashes between the Lebanese military and the Fedayin forces. Although no Palestinian military bases or training exist in Lebanon, many Fedayin operate from the towns and villages near the Israeli border. The local populations in the areas overwhelmingly appear to support the guerrilla forces.

Fedayin fighters helping the farmers in their fields is not an uncommon sight.

Visits through these quickly verify the material help that Al Fatah provides for the people; hospitals, medical clinics, schools, as well as defense, supply a firm bond between the people and these forces.

Israel's presence in Lebanon has been real and direct. Israel, faced now and since June '67 with fighting the Palestinians directly, has continued to refuse to face the fact that Al Fatah is Palestinian and not controlled by the Arab Governments.

Their policy has been one of mounting pressure on the Arab regimes for the actions of the independent Palestinians. Israel stated that the destruction of the Ghor Canal in Jordan, which supplies the water for the fertile Jordan Valley, was done to "warn" Hussein to put checks on the guerrillas and to stop supporting them.

The fact of the matter was that Hussein could no more control the Fedayin than he could his own rank-and-file army forces who were supporting the Fedayin. When he tried, in February and March of 1969, by attacking the guerrillas in several towns and refugee camps, his Bedouin Army refused to fight, and his personal Royal Guard were fought to a standstill by the overwhelming public support to the Fedayin, and Hussein was forced to give in.

A major turning point in the Lebanese situation came about in December, 1968. Two members of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) attacked an El Al airliner in the Athens airport. Israel accused Lebanon of supporting these guerrilla operations by providing them with arms, training bases, and free movement within the country.

Lebanon denied this allegation and said that the PFLP members came from Jordan and merely flew from the Beirut International Airport to Athens. To teach the Lebanese their "responsibility," the Israelis mounted a commando raid on the Beirut airport.

Traveling across about 60 miles of Lebanese territory in helicopters, the Israeli commandos destroyed nearly all of the commercial airliners there. They then traveled back to their home base and met no opposition during the entire operation.

Rebellions swept Lebanon. Many people were shot and imprisoned, and government after government in Lebanon fell before the onslaught. While I was there, the country was being run without an official government. Soldiers in red berets (the Lebanese "riot" troops) patrolled all areas with rifles and machine guns. "Democracy" was enforced with the bullet.

Israel, continuing with her "pressure policy," would send her jets screaming across the mountains every so often to pound real or suspected "terror bases." If there were people in those areas who did not support the government position, they quickly changed.

The support to Al Fatah continued to grow, and the Lebanese government (i.e. the administrative decree-rule of President Charles Helou) became faced more and more with the direct opposition of its own citizens. Israel had guaranteed that.

Massive demonstrations continued to mount. While I was there I witnessed and participated in one of these demonstrations. Two Fedayin had been killed in Jordan by an Israeli air attack.

The commandos' families lived in refugee camps around Beirut and Saida in Lebanon. The comrades of the fallen Fedayin attempted to bring the bodies across the border and were met with a stiff refusal by the border officials.

Calling up Army and Air Force reinforcements, the border officials refused throughout the day to allow the Fedayin into the country. The local people in the area, upon hearing of the plight of the guerrillas, came out in great numbers, surrounded the Fedayin and their vehicles, and physically pushed their way across the border.

The Army and Air Force, not wishing to shoot the civilians, stood aside. The next day tens of thousands of citizens poured into the streets of Beirut in a massive funeral demonstration for the Palestinian martyrs.

On another occasion, the Saturday after the Al Aksa Mosque fire, a general strike was proclaimed throughout the Arab world. The citizens of Beirut demonstrated their concern in Arab-Israeli problems by closing down virtually every shop and office in the city and freezing all commerce for the day.

The West, primarily America, has a very direct concern in all of these affairs. Lebanon, often called the "Paris of the Middle East," is the commerce and banking center for the Arab world. French, English, and Arabic are the languages and money is the medium.

In 1958 the Lebanese regime, faced then as now with massive rebellion, called for and received U.S. troops. Then, as now, the regime claimed "external invasion" for their troubles.

A spokesman for the Lebanese position states: "It is really the Syrian Army doing the fighting."

The Lebanese government, in charging the Syrians with the cause of their internal problems, might well be preparing the road for asking America for U.S. troops. Spokesmen for Al Fatah and the Lebanese people claim that the fighting being done today, as was the case back in 1958, is by the Lebanese masses.

Resistance forces in Lebanon opposed to the "pro-Western" views and actions of the regime are actively engaging the Lebanese' military. Supported by Al Fatah, the Lebanese resistance forces are bringing the people out into the streets of towns and villages across the country, and fighting fire with fire. Commandos from Syria have provided an additional front for these forces. Attacking border stations and occupying military bases along with the

civilians of these areas, the Fedayin have responded with the people to the government attacks. Whereas before the actions primarily involved the Fedayin and the Lebanese military with the masses providing support to the Fedayin, it is now the masses who are developing a more independent entity and are supported by the Palestinian guerrilla forces.

Where is Israel in all of this? Geographically and politically she is in the same place she's always been. "What you don't get with military force is because you haven't applied ENOUGH military force."

First, Israel refuses to deal with the crux of her problems, the Palestinian refugees. The refugees and the guerrilla organization, Al Fatah, call for the creation of "a democratic Palestinian State in which Jews, Christians and Moslems can live in peace and justice equally."

Israel refuses to accept, believe in, or consider any form of a bi-national State. "Separate, perhaps; together, never."

Second, Israel believes that somehow the Arab governments are responsible for, and can control, the Palestinians and their organizations. The Israeli military continues to pound away with daily raids on Egyptian, Jordanian, Syrian and Lebanese positions.

In the present dispute Israeli spokesmen emphatically state that should Lebanon appear that it's moving towards a more pro-Arab position, the Israeli military will take the necessary steps to prevent it. I presume that means that Israel will step up her attacks on Lebanon, perhaps even occupy it.

Strategically this would be disastrous for Israel. She would meet with the same resistance that Germany found in France (no, I'm not calling the Israelis Nazis). However, if one compares what Israel did to Lebanon because two undercover commandos bought a ticket at the Beirut Airport, one wonders what the Israelis would do if a pro-Palestinian regime came to power.

Which way the revolution in Lebanon will go now is anyone's guess. The people will win and a revolutionary leadership will emerge or they will be defeated (class and capital interests have used a surprising number of ways to accomplish the latter).

The real threat of "external invasions" is from Israel and/or the U.S.

Syria could no more mount an invasion of Lebanon than they can control the Palestinians in their own country. The next couple of weeks will tell the outcome.

fifth Estate

Nick Medvecky
Lebanon
1969

<https://www.fifthestate.org/archive/91-october-30-november-12-1969/lebanon>
Fifth Estate #91, October 30-November 12, 1969

fifthestate.anarchistlibraries.net