

US—Israeli War on Syria?

Besides intending to topple Libya's patriotic leadership, the April 15th US aggression was a threat to all Arab nationalist and progressive forces and regimes. Thus, it is no surprise that the follow-up was an intensified imperialist-Zionist campaign against Syria, whose steadfast position is a main obstacle to imposing Camp David throughout the Arab world.

On May 13th, Israeli Prime Minister Peres stated that the chances of a peace agreement with Syria were "non-existent" as long as President Assad remained in power. Coming after the US air strike on Libya, this could only be meant as an outright threat. Rumors spread about an impending Israeli-Syrian military confrontation in the Golan Heights or Lebanon. Earlier in the month, Israeli War Minister Rabin, visiting Washington, had claimed that Syria organized the attempt to bomb El Al in London's Heathrow airport. At the same time, US President Reagan and Vice-president Bush named Syria as a possible candidate for unilateral US military action (*Guardian*, May 8th).

Clearly emboldened by the apparent "anti-terrorist" consensus achieved at the Tokyo Summit of the seven strongest imperialist powers, the US and Israeli leaderships once again escalated their campaign against Syria, attempting to place this in the framework of "combating terrorism". However, the real reasons are related to the current stalemate of the so-called peace process in the Middle East, and Syria's prominent role in opposing this drive for consolidating imperialist and Zionist hegemony.

OLD—NEW ANTAGONISM

The special animosity of US imperialism and Zionism towards Syria has both an old and recent history. Syria's rejection of imperialist plans and its alliance with the Soviet Union, have been anathema to the imperialist-Zionist plans for divide and rule. The Egyptian regime's definitive move into the enemy camp in 1977 reduced the US's need to contemplate a comprehensive approach to the Middle East conflict. It turned all efforts to marginalizing the Syrians and reducing Soviet influence. This line was further cemented with the advent of the Reagan Administration which views all regional conflicts in the context of its global crusade against the Soviets.

Concurrently, the return of the Golan Heights to Syria has never merited more than diplomatic lip-service from imperialist circles, even when 'Israel' blatantly annexed this territory in 1981 in violation of all international agreements, including UN resolution 242 which the US claims as a basis for its policy whenever this is convenient for excluding the PLO and legitimate Palestinian demands. The concept of "land for peace" is never raised in relation to Syria because the Zionist leadership, whether Likud or Labor, considers the Golan Heights vital for their military plans and interests. When Reagan presented his initiative in the fall of 1982, to capitalize on the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, he did not deem the Golan Heights or Syria worthy of mention.

Nonetheless, the Israeli-Syria disengagement has held on the Golan Heights since it was arranged in 1974, following the October War. By the late seventies, Israeli-Syrian differences were focused on Lebanon. The presence of Syrian troops in the northern and central parts of Lebanon stood in the way of Zionism's expansionist designs. In the spring of 1981, the Israeli military openly intervened to support the Phalangists' drive to expand their influence into the Beqaa Valley, shooting down Syrian helicopters in the process. For the first time, Syria moved SAM-6 missiles into Lebanon, which 'Israel' projected as a crisis for its security. With Philip Habib's shuttle diplomacy of 1981 and early 82, the Israelis seemed to back down on their demand for the missiles' removal, but they settled the issue in their own violent way by bombing them in the initial phase of invading Lebanon. Ensuing events showed, however, that even massive Israeli violence could not subdue Lebanon or Syrian steadfastness. Syrian support to the Lebanese national forces

was pivotal in foiling the May 17th treaty between 'Israel' and the renegade Lebanese government, and in rolling back Israeli occupation in Lebanon. "A segment of Israel's leadership community regards the defeat of Syria and the driving of Syrian forces from Lebanese soil as the great unfinished business of that campaign" (*Christian Science Monitor*, January 8th).

In view of this historical pattern, it cannot be ruled out that aggression will again be directed against Syria. The current campaign dates back to late 1985, when Syria again moved missiles into Lebanon, after Israeli warplanes downed two Syrian aircraft over Syrian territory on November 19th. The similarities of the scenario to the 1981 "missile crisis" make US-Zionist aggression an ever present danger.

ISRAELI ARROGANCE

Throughout December, Israeli officials took turns raising a fuss about Syrian missile deployment in the Beqaa Valley, and inside Syria's own territory. "Israel requires freedom of flight over Lebanon," demanded Chief of Staff Moshe Levy arrogantly on Israeli television. Rabin threatened "massive response" if Israeli population centers were hit by missiles. Certainly the Zionist leadership was irritated by the necessity of rerouting its reconnaissance flights over Lebanon, which afforded them surveillance of Syrian territory as well. Another Zionist concern is that the long-range SAM-2s, which are stationed in Syria close to the Lebanese border, rule out a cost-free Israeli first strike should it decide to wage war on Syria. The Zionists are concerned by any Arab military strength, but the actual background for the Israeli threats was the prevailing political situation. On the one hand, it seemed in December that Syria had succeeded in sponsoring an agreement between the opposing Lebanese militias, that would have drastically curtailed possibilities for Zionist meddling in Lebanon. On the other hand, Hussein of Jordan was visiting Damascus, which the Zionists feared might block the king's path to direct negotiations with them.

The Israeli perception was reflected in Peres' comment on dealing with the Syrian missile deployment: "How we do so is a political decision, not a military one" (*Jerusalem Post*, December 29, 1985). The same article quoted a senior Israeli government source who acknowledged that the Syrians don't want war, but rather to prevent an Israeli-Jordanian "peace": "We have to see Assad's decision to deploy these missiles in that context... Assad had called all the moves until this point. It is clear around the cabinet table here, that the time has come for Israel to take the initiative."

Itamar Rabinovich, director of the Dayan Center for Middle Easter Studies at Tel Aviv University, hinted at a further consideration which may govern the Israeli leadership's decisions concerning Syria: "Yet the crisis could also be turned to account - could provide an opportunity to restore the tacit understanding that once governed the Israeli-Syrian competition in Lebanon... Naturally, we would prefer to reverse roles and keep the Syrians guessing about whether and when Israel will attack." Yet ultimately Rabinovich cautions against a military response, noting that if 'Israel' were to strike the Syrian missiles, the Soviet Union might provide a new, eventually better system, (*New York Times*, January 14th).

While the Israelis are concerned about Syrian military power, they assess that they are still able to contain any projected attack, unless Syria is joined by another country which is unlikely. Clearly, the Zionists' real worry is Syria's political weight in Lebanon and the region. This has not, however, prevented a