



Syrians gather to shout across the occupation lines to relatives in the occupied Golan Heights.

concerted propaganda war all this year, where imperialist and Zionist media have accused Syria of plans to attack the Israelis in the Golan, Lebanon and occupied Palestine. A massive Syrian arms and troop build-up has been repeatedly "reported" to an extent never confirmed by independent sources or even by leading Israeli officials when they are speaking soberly. The intent of this propaganda war is to elicit further imperialist backing for 'Israel' and for whatever way it chooses to resolve its dilemmas.

Moreover, in the light of Israeli expansionism and past behavior, it cannot be ruled out that the Zionist leadership will seize on the military option for resolving what is basically a political problem. In early April, Syrian air defense downed an unmanned Israeli reconnaissance drone over Jebel Qassioun in Damascus, which houses military radar. "There is open discussion in Israel about the possibility of knocking out the Syrian missile sites with pre-emptive strikes. To do so, they need to monitor the radar frequencies that guide the missiles" (*The Observer*, April 10th).

US DUPPLICITY

While the US posed as mediator during the December "missiles crisis", the Reagan Administration turned its wrath directly on Syria at the turn of the year. At a January 9th press conference, Robert Oakley, head of the State Department's "counterterrorist" office, threatened to extend the US economic embargo of Libya to Syria, unless the latter "changes its pattern of support" for Abu Nidal (*New York Times*, January 10th). Such threatening statements have continued throughout the spring from various US officials. In the course of this barrage, two things have become clear: First, by naming Abu Nidal, the Reagan Administration is actually targeting all Palestinian and Lebanese anti-imperialist groups which pose problems to US-Israeli policy. Second, almost every single threat against Syria has been followed immediately by a more conciliatory statement. This does not reflect disagreement in the Reagan Administration, for one sees the same official alternating between threats and compliments to Syria.

There is also an obvious attempt to distinguish between Syria and Libya. CIA Director William Casey's briefing to a congress committee on February 4th was typical. Speaking of the

"radical Arab states of Syria, Libya and Iran (who) oppose nearly all aspects of US policy in the region... want to destroy or weaken the moderate Arab leadership... are in active opposition to the US peace process and... practice and sponsor terrorism," Casey said: "Syria is the most effective of the three. While its goals are more limited than the other two, its leadership is tactically brilliant and generally successful..." (*Mideast Observer*, February 15th).

Besides attempting to divide the nationalist ranks, Casey's remarks illustrate two things: First, after basically ignoring Syria for over five years, the US began about two years ago to gradually and implicitly acknowledge its role, especially in Lebanon. Second, there are formidable, objective obstacles to the US or 'Israel' directly striking Syria.

After its own fiasco in trying to induce reactionary stability in Lebanon, the Reagan Administration has been forced to see that Syria has greater potential than any other single force for stabilizing Lebanon. The US hopes for Syrian help in controlling certain Palestinian and Lebanese forces, and in obtaining the release of hostages. These hopes could be ruled out if the US were to strike Syria directly. President Assad has clearly stated that the Syrian efforts to have some hostages released were progressing, only to be dashed by the US air strike on Libya.

Moreover, any Israeli or US strike on Syria could involve the Soviet Union, in view of the 1980 Friendship and Cooperation Treaty between the two countries. 'Israel' for its part is unwilling to engage in any war it cannot win quickly. This speaks against striking Syria directly. If there is a US-Israeli decision to hit Syria militarily, this would most likely occur via Lebanon. Even then, 'Israel' will consider its past experience in Lebanon, and the massive domestic dissent this evoked, before enacting a large, new intervention. Still, the Phalangists' sabotage of the Syrian-sponsored tripartite agreement keeps the door open to this possibility. Encouraged by the imperialist-Zionist campaign against Syria, the Lebanese fascists assembled an entourage of right-wing "Christian leaders" in early May. They agreed on a "Christian project" directly opposed to the tripartite agreement. Vague phrases, such as "securing Lebanon's military neutrality" are designed to quell the resistance to Zionist occupation and allow for collaboration with it. Other phrases are not so vague, such as "cancelling the Cairo agreement". This is designed to end the Palestinians' political