

Why the Middle East is about to explode again

by Judith Wyer

Secretary of State George Shultz's pact with Israel for withdrawal of Israeli forces from Lebanon—which includes the secret proviso that Israel could march back in at any time it believes its security is jeopardized—has handed the Soviets a wide-open opportunity to play the Kissingeresque game of nuclear brinkmanship against the Reagan administration.

Moscow is using its Middle Eastern client Syria to block the Shultz agreement, and thereby spark, among other things, civil war in Lebanon. Without Syria's agreement to withdraw its 40,000 heavily Soviet-armed troops from Lebanon, the Shultz agreement is a farce. Israel has vowed that it will keep its forces in Lebanon until Syria and allied Palestinian guerrillas withdraw. Because of the flagrant advantage Israel would gain from the accord, Syria's rejection of the Shultz accord was predetermined.

The Syrian government of President Hafez al-Assad has issued a series of denunciations of the accord, pledging "retaliation" against all parties to the agreement. Less than a week after Shultz's May 8 departure from the Middle East, Syria had put together a coalition of Lebanese leaders, including the warlord Suleiman Franjeh; Walid Jumblatt, a Druze spokesman; and the Lebanese Communist Party's chief, to challenge the agreement and the government of Lebanese President Amin Gemayel.

In mid-May, Gemayel warned in a meeting with Soviet ambassador Soldotov that the Soviets should not turn Lebanon into a barter card in their conflict with Washington. Gemayel reportedly made it clear that if Moscow pursued a

brinkmanship course using Lebanese territory as the launching point, the traditionally friendly relations between Lebanon and the Soviet Union would cease.

On May 18, the day after Israel and Lebanon signed the agreement, Syria for the first time sealed off the enclave in Lebanon under its military control, thereby cutting off all communications with about two-thirds of Lebanon—the strongest signal yet that Damascus is resolved not to withdraw. The same day, Syrian Foreign Minister Abdul Halim declared: "This agreement will not pass, and will not be implemented, because we will not allow it to be passed irrespective of how matters in the region develop."

While Damascus flatly rejected a bid by the White House to send U.S. Special Envoy to the Middle East Philip Habib there, Lebanese President Amin Gemayel issued an urgent plea to Shultz that he go immediately to Syria to confer with President Assad to attempt to win Syrian cooperation before it was too late.

By refusing to deal face-to-face with Assad, who is known to be willing to talk to the United States, Shultz has allowed Syria to fall deeper than ever under Soviet influence. Having accepted \$2 billion worth of highly sophisticated arms and upward of 5,000 Soviet advisers to Syria, it is doubtful now whether Assad has the freedom to maneuver with the United States that he might have had even when Shultz was in the Middle East.

At the current moment, any trigger, such as another killing like that of five demonstrating Shi'ites in Beirut on

May 18, could set off an Israeli-Syrian war that would quickly escalate into thermonuclear confrontation.

Eastern Mediterranean military buildup

Reliable sources in Lebanon report that the Soviet aircraft carrier *Novosibirsk*, carrying combat helicopters, has made its way, accompanied by two destroyers, through the Bosphorus into the Aegean to augment an already substantial Soviet naval presence in the eastern Mediterranean. American intelligence sources estimate that there are now at least 5,000, and possibly 10,000, Soviet military advisers stationed in Syria. The Syrian SAM missiles ringing the Lebanese border are all manned by Soviet personnel.

On the U.S. side, the U.S. Navy is reported to have gone on a state-of-readiness alert about May 17, in expectation of a deployment of at least 30,000 U.S. troops to Lebanon if a war between Israel and Syria gets out of hand.

Washington policymakers and intelligence officers are beginning to realize that if the United States does not prevent a partitioning of Lebanon, the United States will quickly lose its closest Arab allies, starting with Saudi Arabia and then Egypt. "Lebanon is a test," said a well-placed Washington source. "If the United States fails to uphold its pledge in defending Lebanese unity, then there is no way U.S. allies like Saudi King Fahd can continue to maintain the special relationship."

The same source said that plans to deploy thousands of U.S. troops to Lebanon are aimed at preserving the country's unity. Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Arens and Israel's agents within the Pentagon—including Mossad agent Stephen Bryen and Assistant Secretary of Defense Richard Perle—are arguing that U.S. troops should be deployed into Lebanon to separate Syrian and Israeli forces. But if the White House makes such a move without first securing an immediate Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon backed up by the threat of a total U.S. economic and arms embargo, then the United States will be walking into a military quagmire worse than Vietnam. As *EIR* founder Lyndon LaRouche stated May 10, it is urgent that the United States demonstrate forcefully its determination to rein in Israel (see *EIR*, May 24).

Israeli Defense Minister Arens is leading a faction within the Begin cabinet advocating a unilateral Israeli troop pull-back before June 6, the first anniversary of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon. Arens is justifying a pull-back to behind the Awali River, about 30 kilometers north of the Israeli border, by arguing that radical Moslems will spark violence against Israel on June 6, especially in the Chouf Mountain area southeast of Beirut. A Washington-based agent of Israeli intelligence recently admitted to *EIR* that such a pull-back would trigger an explosion of warring factions within the Druze-populated Chouf mountains. Israeli troops have been separating warring factions in the Chouf, and a pull-back would leave a dangerous vacuum. Arens and his predecessor Ariel

Sharon have been orchestrating British-style counterinsurgency operations among the Druze Muslims there.

Israel "has done its job, now it is up to the United States to solve the problems in Lebanon," the source said. "Granted, it is a losing battle since the U.S. has no military cards it can play, but that is not Israel's problem. The Soviets and the Syrians clearly have the strategic advantage. . . ."

The Israelis, for their part, have been goading the Soviet Union, even by making known through European and U.S. political circles that the Israelis possess intermediate-range ballistic missiles that can reach the Soviet Union.

Contrary to the fantasies of Shultz, Kissinger, and their British backers, this will not be a set-piece "limited war" in the British "great game" tradition.

Rather, as the Soviets have made clear in major statements (see Special Report), the Kremlin is determined to crush the United States, forcing a devastating reversal of President Reagan's decision to develop a U.S. beam weapon defense system for the strategic doctrine of Mutually Assured Survival. If they force that reversal, the Soviets believe that they will have acquired the political and military margin of superiority to ensure their geopolitical dominance throughout the world.

Reports are circulating through intelligence channels and New York financial circles that George Shultz has come under heavy attack within the Reagan administration for his handling of the Lebanese crisis, and the secret agreements he made with Israel. These agreements, concealed in a series of side letters, reportedly give Israel not only promises to renew the U.S.-Israeli military treaty known as the Memorandum of Understanding, but also promises transfer of sensitive U.S. technology for Israel to build the high-performance Lavie jet.

Production of the Lavie jet will provide Israel with sophisticated technologies to upgrade its existing intermediate range ballistic missiles. Israel plans to use the increasingly military-oriented Israeli economy to gain control over Africa, in collaboration with South Africa. The two countries share a commitment to put a hostile nuclear missile umbrella over the continent and its rich resources required for military and other high-technology production. The plan includes making Israel the third largest military hardware exporter by the coming decade.

Shultz worked to ensure that the Israelis would get U.S. approval for the Lavie plan, telling the reluctant White House that it was the only way that the Israelis could be induced to withdraw from Lebanon—thereby setting up the step-by-step negotiations that have so often defeated U.S. interests. Now, reportedly, Shultz has an offer for the Soviet Union: the United States will back down on its autumn deployment of the Pershing II missiles—whose placement could otherwise be negotiated reasonably under an agreed-upon doctrine of Mutually Assured Survival—if the Soviets will permit the Israelis to proceed unimpeded with the Lavie plan.