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U.S. at the Service of Imperial Israel

By MARK A. BRUZONSKY

So long as the primary role of U.S. Marines in Lebanon is to support the minority government of President Amin Gemayel, and American policy makers continue to defer to Israeli imperial ambitions, American diplomats, "peacekeepers" and interests will be under continuing threat. And if we attempt to escalate our military involvement in today's Lebanon—thereby intervening in a treacherous civil war on the side of the Falange and the Maronites—we will find ourselves dragged further into an endless escalation of violence.

Last year's Israeli invasion of Lebanon has altered the very character of Lebanon's misery. Israeli brutality, coupled to American acquiescence, transformed what had been an inter-Arab battle. And there can be no doubt that it was, at the least, an American wink that preceded the Israeli invasion. It is American involvement which today masks and legitimizes Israel's hold on southern Lebanon—even after Israel's protestations last year that it would withdraw quickly from all Lebanese territory. The American-inspired "peace treaty" in Lebanon has revealed itself as hardly more than a transient public relations fix through which the current players in Washington had hoped to buy time, and maybe even sneak by next year's election.

The treaty could be termed a farce but for the magnitude of the dangers it harbors. Having at first conspired in Israel's asser-

tion of terrorizing force, and then having no effective policy to stand up against Israel's relentless absorption of the West Bank (in complete violation of the Camp David accords), the Reagan Administration has acted meekly at best; some would say contemptuously, others duplicitously.

Facing the choice of confronting Israel or manufacturing a false diplomatic success, Secretary of State George P. Shultz chose an illusory peace to real diplomacy. While Israel badgered Gemayel's frail government-under-occupation, Shultz sweet-talked the Lebanese and soothed the already-willing Israelis into a peace of allies, totally neglecting Israel's actual enemies: the Palestine Liberation Organization and Syria. He made peace between those who had conspired in war (Washington, Jerusalem and the Falange) while attempting to belittle those against whom the war had been fought (the Palestinians and Syria).

Shultz sold this pseudo-peace as a significant American accomplishment, but all the while Lebanon suffers *de facto* partition, the West Bank heads toward the point of no return, and a Syrian-Israeli arms race threatens a wider war. The Reagan Administration has failed its responsibility to push for full implementation of the Camp David accords, especially the "legitimate rights of the Palestinian people." It has been unable to assert American national interests ahead of Israeli imperial designs. And it has seriously eroded American credibility

throughout the Middle East, weakening in still indeterminate ways a number of key client regimes.

There will be no peace for the Marines until two basic, inescapable tensions are squarely addressed. First, Amin Gemayel's Maronite-Falange government will have to be "encouraged" to finally reach an accommodation with Lebanon's predominant Muslim and Druze population. The historical causes of the civil war can no longer be avoided. Second, the United States must appreciate the legitimate historical and security interests that Syria has always had in Lebanon. Syria should not simply be threatened by an increasingly tense White House; like Israel, it has legitimate concerns that deserve consideration.

There is now a desperate race between American electoral politics and a Middle East explosion that could topple one of our major allies, or pit American-backed Israel, the Falange-Maronite forces and a hostage Marine detachment against Soviet-backed Syria and its Druze/Muslim allies.

President Reagan and Secretary Shultz have brought us to this diplomatic fool's paradise. Why? Presumably, Shultz has concluded that he cannot afford an adversarial relationship with Israel because it would drain too much energy. Israel originally dragged our Marines into Lebanon for a 30-day period while the PLO withdrew. Now, refusing to coordinate with the Lebanese and against American pleading, Israel has abandoned its positions and the Leba-

nese government is asking for an increased Marine presence and deeper commitment to their side in the civil war.

In truth, we are in the eye of the hurricane, and we are impotent in our pretense that the worst is over. Lebanon is a quagmire into which we must refuse to be further drawn. While a war of unpredictable magnitude might be, in preparation, while the Camp David-trapped government of Hosni Mubarak quakes in Cairo, while King Fahd writes letters of warning from Riyadh, while Likud Israel has so overextended itself that it is stuck in Lebanon and heading toward financial default of its massive foreign debt—in the face of all this, the Reagan Administration has begun courting electoral success through diplomatic sleights-of-hand.

In the Middle East, the American dinosaur (large body, small brain) has deferred to the revisionist government in Jerusalem that is implementing its scheme for a greater Israel—oblivious to the costs to Israel's soul, to the totality of the Jewish people and to American and Western interests in the Arab Middle East.

In a recent stay in Cairo, I found the mood a mixture of depression, bitterness, anxiety and ugliness toward American impotence and Israeli belligerence. Sooner or later, it is the United States which will pay. And the price may make the "loss" of Iran seem insignificant.

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