

NEAR EAST REPORT

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EDITORIAL

If It's Not Broken— Don't Fix It

"If it's not broken, don't fix it." That adage should apply to the Reagan Administration's recent approach to Syria. Two weeks ago—after a series of demonstrations of American resolve—the Syrians backed down and accepted a cease-fire in Lebanon. The authoritative *Middle East Policy Survey* put it this way: "In recent days the willingness of the U.S. to employ increased firepower came to be symbolized by the arrival of the battleship *New Jersey*. Despite the fact that the U.S. moves were reactive and incremental, State Department and Pentagon officials concluded that the Syrians were unsure how far the U.S. was willing to go militarily."

Newsweek agreed. It quotes one Administration official as saying: "The Syrians saw a concrete symbol of U.S. resolve in the arrival of the *New Jersey*. There was a huge difference in their attitudes within a few hours of its arrival."

The Administration deserves credit for its show of resolve. The Congress—which backed up the Administration with an 18-month authorization of the Marine presence in Lebanon—also deserves credit. The Administration and the Congress spoke to Syria and its agents with one voice—and it paid off. But then, as so often in the past, the Administration made a move to appease the Syrians and their friends. According to a report in *The Washington Post*, the Reagan Administration is now seeking "a political accommodation with Syria. . . ." It has told the Lebanese that they will have to accept some "Syrian influence over their affairs. . . ." or face partition. The report even claims that President Reagan himself has come to the view that "Syria has legitimate historic and security interests in Lebanon."

The *Post* report may not be totally accurate. There may well be "pro-Syrian" voices within the Administration who seek to accommodate President Assad. But there is also, perhaps for the first time, a vocal segment of the Administration which understands that Syria's role in the Middle East is that of a troublemaker, a saboteur of the peace process, and an ally—if not agent—of the Soviet Union.

Still it is nothing short of amazing that any U.S. policy maker would seek accommodation with the Syrian regime. This week's *Near East Report* carries an article from the Egyptian weekly *October* which describes Syria's efforts to destroy the 1977 Sadat peace initiative. Syria is the leading "rejectionist" state; the arsenal of those radical forces which would destroy the State of Israel. It has been a consistent opponent of U.S. policies in the Middle East. On Oct. 1 President Assad told Damascus television that the United States has "the indomitable desire to control the Arab homeland and the Arab nation." On the same day, Syrian Defense Minister Mustafa Tlas told a Kuwaiti newspaper that Syria is unafraid of the American "warmongers." He added that Syria is aided by its "friends in the socialist camp, foremost of whom is the Soviet Union which sides with us and supports our defensive capabilities. . . . The United States knows that we are not afraid of threats."

Tlas is right. Syria does not buckle under to threats. But it has always yielded when it is faced with a show of strength. That is why it accepted a cease-fire in Lebanon (one that it will likely violate when it suits its interests).

The Administration had it right when it tightened the screws on Syria. That policy worked, at least in part. A policy of "accommodation" now—an acceptance of Syria's imperial designs in Lebanon as "legitimate"—will only encourage Syria to finish the job it began when it invaded Lebanon in 1976. American resolve has shown it can produce results. Let's not switch signals when they're working.

VIEWING THE NEWS

Greece Refuses U.S. Aircraft Passage

Greece, a NATO ally, refused to allow U.S. aircraft to use American facilities in Greece to resupply U.S. and Lebanese forces in Lebanon. Italy was also denied use of the facilities when it sought to resupply its troops in Beirut.

However, Greece did allow six Czech planes to use Thessaloniki airport on their way to Syria on Sept. 20. At first the Greeks classified the four L-39 training planes and the two YAK-40 transports as military aircraft. They later changed their minds and classified them as civilian—

even though the Czech-built L-39's can carry 2,400 pound bombloads. The Czech aircraft departed for Syria on Sept. 21.

Israel Deals With Druze

Yediot Achronot reports that "the Druze were a major factor in checking a series of attacks by Palestinian terrorists on Lebanese army positions in Suq al Gharb, near Beirut." According to the evening daily, Druze opened fire "with cannons, artillery, and light weapons" on terrorists under the command of renegade PLO leader Abu Musa. At least "eleven terrorists were killed." *Yediot* also reported that "there is

some truth to the Druze claim that no Palestinians are fighting with them." Israeli Druze leaders had called on their brethren not to countenance any PLO presence among their forces.

Meanwhile Druze leader Walid Jumblatt has pledged to remove the PLO from the Shouf mountains. Other Druze figures have issued statements that the expulsion of PLO forces from Druze-controlled areas would allow Jumblatt to gain more acceptance from the Israeli public.

The *Jerusalem Post* reports that there are high-level contacts between Israel and Jumblatt's people and that this led to

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Peace as Aggression

Critics of Israel will often go to great lengths to justify their antipathy toward the Jewish state. One example comes in a recent (Sept. 16) *op-ed* column by Mark Bruzonsky in the *Los Angeles Times*.

Predictably, Bruzonsky condemns Israel's move into Lebanon last year. He says that it "altered the character of Lebanon's misery" by injecting "Israeli brutality" into what had merely been "an inter-Arab battle." (Apparently seven years of inter-Arab misery is less objectionable than misery supposedly inflicted by Israel.)

Also predictably, Bruzonsky deprecates the value of Israel to the United States. The Reagan Administration "has been unable to assert American national interests ahead of Israel's imperial designs."

But the unique part of the Bruzonsky thesis is that he objects as strenuously to Israeli peacemaking as to Israeli warmaking. Bruzonsky condemns the Lebanon-Israel agreement as 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." He also calls it a "farce."

It is, accordingly, useful to take a look at the agreement that offends Bruzonsky so terribly. What would it do? It would end the state of war between Israel and Lebanon and provide that neither will resort to force to resolve differences between them. It would establish security zones between the two countries. Its purpose is rather simple: it is to protect Israel from attacks coming from terrorists operating out of Lebanon and to protect Lebanon from further embroilment in the Arab war against Israel. If implemented, it would help guarantee the future peace of Lebanon.

But there is a part of the Lebanon-Israel treaty that enrages those who oppose ultimate Arab-Israeli peace. The Lebanon-Israel agreement provides for Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon, but only if the Syrians go too. It is this part of the agreement that is objectionable to Syria—and to Bruzonsky.

He writes: "The United States must appreciate the legitimate historical and security interests that Syria has always had in Lebanon." Bruzonsky doesn't enumerate those interests although Damascus does. Syria considers Lebanon to be a "sister" nation, a nation which is not permitted to install a government unfriendly to Syria, a nation in which no Syrian ambassador has ever sat because one does not send ambassadors to provinces of one's own country. Is it possible that Bruzonsky, too, considers Lebanon to be nothing but southern Syria? If not, how can he object to a Lebanon-Israel agreement which would empty Lebanon of all foreign forces and, yes, pro-

vide Israel with a modicum of recognition by Lebanon.

One can only conclude that Bruzonsky does not believe that any form of Lebanese recognition of Israel should be countenanced. Otherwise why would he deprecate the agreement as an "illusory peace" and a "pseudo-peace?"

There is, however, one clue to Bruzonsky's thinking. He does not object *only* to any Lebanese-Israel agreement. He also objects to the Camp David peace treaty. He refers to the Hosni Mubarak government as "the Camp David-trapped government." This is not the first time that Bruzonsky has suggested that the Israel-Egypt peace is not to his liking. Back in 1979, he interviewed Egypt's Foreign Minister, Boutros Ghali, for *Worldview*.

Bruzonsky then made it clear that he considered Ghali naive for believing in the possibility of peace with Israel. His questions were hostile. "If Egypt has given up the military option, it has already given Israel normalization . . . how can it have more power over Israel than before?" Bruzonsky told Ghali that Israelis "will never allow the Palestinians to have a homeland. Never."

When Ghali expressed faith in Israel's good intentions, noting that Israel was leaving Yamit, the supposedly neutral interviewer reminded Ghali of "Herut ideology. . . . For Herut *Eretz Yisrael* includes Judea and Samaria and the present day Israel and actually Jordan too."

To his credit, Ghali did not rise to Bruzonsky's bait. Instead, he expressed his faith in the peace process. An exasperated Bruzonsky said that Ghali's belief in an Arab-Israeli peace seemed "to be based only on hope." It is a hope Bruzonsky appears not to share. □

—M.J.R.

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