Summer war in the Middle East could escalate

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It seems the Israeli-Lebanon "withdrawal pact," which provided for the temporary withdrawal of Lebanese forces from the area and the resumption of hostilities, is being accompanied by a 24-page master-piece of diplomatic fog that will allow each side to claim, or to obscure, whatever it wants. An aide to US Secretary of State George Shultz added "the language [of the agreement] is in-comprehensible.

Israel must prepare for "the possibility that direct fighting with the Syrian army will develop on all fronts" if Damascus does not accept the Lebanon withdrawal plan, Levy said. "In spite of the agreement with Lebanon, there should not be a feeling that from now on it will be calm. My estimate is that there will continue to be Israeli action against Lebanon," he said. "There have been identical reports quoting unidentified Israeli sources as saying that if Syria re-asserts itself in the Bekaa area, thewives and children of Soviet diplomats in Lebanon were unexpectedly evacuated May 10. A Soviet official said the action was taken because "we were afraid something might happen otherwise."

There has historically been a strong correlation between military conflict in the Middle East and the evacuation of Soviet de- pendents in the area. Soviet dip- lomats and their dependents in Damascus and Cairo suddenly in 1973, just before Syria and Egypt attacked Israel. A similar evacua- tion occurred in April 1981 dur- ing the Syrian invasion of Lebanon fighting in Zable. Immediately after the war of Israel, Lebanon, all Soviet diplomats were evacuated without warning.

The United States did not re- main silent. On May 11, a State Department spokesman said that while "Syria and Israeli forces are being pushed out, the situation, such as exists and has existed since last summer in the Bekaa, is a state of intense threat."

The United States sees the So- viet Union's presence in the Mid- dle East as intolerable, and a suc- cessful war would be the most ef- fective way to remove Soviet in- fluence from the region. Former Ambassador George F. Kennan said May 17 that Soviet-Americ- an relations were in a "dreadful and dangerous state that would lead to a totally in- comprehensible."

That a superpower conflict would arise out of an Israeli-Syr- ian war has been a recognized fact for months. In April, PLO leader Yasser Arafat said "emergence of the present verbal superpower conflict could be a signal for a preemptive and dangerous" state that had developed on Lebanon national- struggle. It is quite likely that Israel does not want to see any signifi- cant Arab military force develop- ing in the Middle East which might challenge its regional hege- mony. Consequently, Israel feels threatened by Syria's new-found military strength. An Israeli pre- emptive strike against the SAM-2 bases in Syria would mitigate this threat, especially now that a third major Soviet missile base might be needed near Damascus. If the Jordanian border. If this is the case, chances are that there could reach virtually all of Israel's terri- tory. If Israel felt it "was facing a mortal threat," Israeli Defense Minister Ami Ayalon Feb. 13, it might "decide to take some pre-emptive actions, as it did in 1974." Such a strike would sure- ly result in the deaths of Soviet military personnel and perhaps an all-out Syrian attack. In response, the Soviet Union might choose to commit its troops in the conflict, which in turn might trigger the US 6th Fleet to prepare for nu- clear strikes against the Soviet Union, as it did in 1972 under far fewer provocative circumstances.

A strategic nuclear war could then result. Hope lies only in the knowl- edge that it is in the interest of both nations to refrain from a nuclear ho- locust upon the world.

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