

War threat looms over Syria

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There are rumours that this time Israel may launch an war with Syria in this summer. These rumours began to spread soon after Israels disastrous July-August 2006 war with Hizbollah in Lebanon.

As the 40th anniversary of the June 67' war approaches, Israel is once again mobilising troops in the north near the ceasefire lines with Syria.

There are rumours that this time Israel may launch an war with Syria in this summer. These rumours began to spread soon after Israel's disastrous July-August 2006 war with Hizbollah in Lebanon. Soon after that conflict, Damascus once again proposed negotiations with Israel over the Golan Heights, occupied by the Jewish state in June, 1967.

Damascus made such a move because it thought Israel's humiliation in Lebanon would prompt the Jewish state to negotiate with Syria on its terms.

But Israel promptly rejected the proposal, by Syrian Presi- dent Bashar al-Assad, and dismissed reports that Israelis had been discussing a Golan-for-peace deal with Syrians for several months. There have also been reports in the Israeli press that Washington had put pressure on Israel to keep its distance from Syria in order to put pressure on Assad to cut ties with Palestinian res0istance groups and Hizbollah and also seal its borders with Iraq to halt the entry of jihadi fighters.

Israel would, however, have a great deal to gain if it were to win a war with Syria. The deeply unpopular government headed by Ehud Olmert and the Israeli armed forces, will regain the lost credibility when Hizbollah defeated Israel in last summer's war. Olmert can give his Kadima party a new lease of life for a new round of parliamentary elections. His Labour party partner would appoint a new defence minister to replace Amir Peretz, who failed to defeat the Hizbollahs.

Israel would also regain military dominance as well as the political initiative. They would recoup their rapport with the US and, once again, demonstrate that Israel is its most valuable strategic asset in strife-torn West Asia.

By waging a successful war with Syria, Israel could also expect to impose on Damascus its terms for peace. These terms would include a demand for the Syrians to halt their support for Palestinian militants - particularly Hamas and Islamic Jihad - and cut their ties with Iran, which Israel sees as its most serious adversary in the region.

Israel would also argue that it could withdraw from the Golan Heights, which it occupied in

1967, only by stages and in return demand that they could continue to use Golan water and the region would be demilitarised, said an analyst.

If Israel were to return the Golan, it would gain peace on the two remaining Arab frontiers, the Syrian and Lebanese as the Shebaa farms area demanded by Lebanon would also return to Lebanese control along with the Golan. Once these frontiers are stabilised, Israel would have drawn its borders with all the neighbouring Arab states. Egypt and Jordan defined their frontiers with Israel in 1979 and 1994 peace agreements.

If Israel were to reach accommodations with the Arab states, it would have a free hand to deal with the Palestinians as it wishes. Israel could then go ahead with its plan to isolate Gaza and parcel out small parcels of West Bank land to Palestinians, leaving them with contained and impoverished bantustans rather than the state to which they aspire.

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